

STORY OF REDEMPTION – DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE TO OBEY AND WORSHIP GOD

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF EXODUS

GOD SOVEREIGNLY REDEEMS HIS PEOPLE FROM BONDAGE TO LEAD THEM TO OBEY AND WORSHIP HIM TO MANIFEST HIS GLORY

Paul Apple (November 2020)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Exodus 20:2 *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

Chuck Swindoll:

Who Wrote the Book?

As with Genesis, early Jewish traditions name Moses as the most likely and best qualified person to have authored Exodus. This theory is supported by a number of factors. Moses's unique education in the royal courts of Egypt certainly provided him the opportunity and ability to pen these works (**Acts 7:22**). Internal evidence (material found within the text of Exodus itself) adds support for Moses's authorship. Many conversations, events, and geographical details could be known only by an eyewitness or participant. For example, the text reads: "*Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said,*" (**Exodus 24:4** NIV). Additionally, other biblical books refer to "the law of Moses" (**Joshua 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3**), indicating that Exodus, which includes rules and regulations, was written by Moses. Jesus Himself introduced a quote from **Exodus 20:12** and **21:17** with the words, "*For Moses said*" (**Mark 7:10**), confirming His own understanding of the book's author.

What's the Big Idea?

The overall theme of Exodus is redemption—how God delivered the Israelites and made them His special people. After He rescued them from slavery, God provided the Law, which gave instructions on how the people could be consecrated or made holy. He established a system of sacrifice, which guided them in appropriate worship behavior. Just as significantly, God provided detailed directions on the building of His tabernacle, or tent. He intended to live among the Israelites and manifest His Shekinah glory (Exodus 40:34–35)—another proof that they were indeed His people.

MacArthur: At some time during his 40 year tenure as Israel's leader, beginning at 80 years of age and ending at 120 (**7:7; Deut. 34:7**), Moses wrote down this second of his 5 books. More specifically, it would have been after the Exodus and obviously before his death on Mt. Nebo in the plains of Moab. The date of the Exodus (ca. 1445 B.C.) dictates the date of the writing in the 15th century B.C.

Scripture dates Solomon's fourth year of reign, when he began to build the temple (ca. 966/65 B.C.), as being 480 years after the Exodus (**1 Kin. 6:1**), establishing the early date of 1445 B.C. Jephthah noted that, by his day, Israel had possessed Heshbon for 300 years (**Judg. 11:26**). Calculating backward and forward from Jephthah, and taking into account different periods of foreign oppression, judgeships and kingships, the wilderness wanderings, and the initial entry and conquest of Canaan under Joshua, this early date is confirmed and amounts to 480 years. . .

Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, the setting for Israel's dramatic departure, was not a politically or economically weak and obscure period of Egyptian history. Thutmose III, for example, the Pharaoh of the Oppression has been called the "Napoleon of Ancient Egypt," the sovereign who expanded the boundaries of Egyptian influence far beyond natural borders. This was the dynasty which over a century before, under the leadership of Amose I, had expelled the Hyksos kings from the country and redirected the country's economic, military, and diplomatic growth. At the time of the Exodus, Egypt was strong, not weak.

John Davis: Dominating studies of the book of Exodus are two basic views of the date of the exodus. The one date, espoused predominantly by liberal, critical scholars (although not exclusively so) is that the exodus occurred sometime in the early thirteenth century B.C. presumably during the reign of Rameses II. The other alternative strongly suggested by biblical chronology is that the oppression of Israel occurred during the period of the Hyksos into the reign of Thutmose III who perhaps was Israel's most severe oppressor. The exodus would have occurred shortly after his death in the reign of Amenhotep II. The latter view seems more desirable in the light of the fact that it is more faithful to Scripture and provides a credible background for integrating the events of the exodus and conquest with Egyptian history and culture.

Myer Pearlman: **The central thought of the Book is redemption by blood.** Around this thought gathers the story of a people saved by the Blood, sheltered by the Blood and having access unto GOD by the Blood. This redemption is shown to meet every need of the nation. Oppressed by the Egyptians, Israel needs deliverance. GOD supplies this deliverance. Having been saved, the nation needs a revelation from GOD to guide them in conduct and worship in their new life. GOD gives them the Law. Convicted of sin by the holiness of the law, the Israelites find their need of cleansing. GOD provides sacrifices. Having a revelation of GOD, the people feel their need of worship. GOD gives them the tabernacle and appoints a priesthood.

W. H. Gispen: Exodus proclaims Christ as the Suffering One in the life of Moses, in his birth and persecution; his being taunted, not least of all by his own people. It encourages God's people in oppression and deprivation; it warns them against a sinful lack of trust in His guidance; it points to their calling to be a royal priesthood, a holy and purchased nation, and it points out what is theirs: God Himself has made His dwelling with His people in the pillar of cloud and fire, in the tabernacle of the Sinaitic covenant.

Thomas Constable: The purpose of the Book of Exodus is to celebrate God's gracious deliverance of His chosen people Israel from Egyptian slavery to the freedom of covenant relationship and fellowship with Him. . . The major teaching of Exodus is primarily threefold: the sovereignty of God, the salvation of man, and the methods by which the sovereign God effects man's salvation. . . Two activities become prominent as major expressions of faith in Exodus: worship and obedience. Worship and obedience are the God-ward and the man-ward expressions of faith, respectively. They are the opposite of idolatry and self-assertiveness—two characteristics that are prominent in Genesis. God's instruction for Israel's obedience was the Mosaic Law. His instruction for her worship was the tabernacle. Much of Exodus deals with the Mosaic Law and the tabernacle.

J. Vernon McGee: The word which opens Exodus is a conjunction that is better translated *and* rather than *now*. Exodus has been called the sequel to Genesis. **Dr. G. Campbell Morgan** wrote, "In the Book of Exodus nothing is commenced, nothing is finished."

In the Book of Exodus, Moses' life is divided into three forty-year periods:

1. Forty years in Pharaoh's palace in Egypt
2. Forty years in the desert in Midian
3. Forty years in the wilderness as leader of Israel

Paul Tripp: What you learn in Exodus is God is willing to unleash His mighty power for the rescue of His people. That predicts what God is going to do through all the rest of the redemptive story because here's how the story goes. God will harness the forces of nature; He will control the events of human history; He will actually control the rise and fall of kings and princes; He will move the story by His power, so that at just the right moment, the Redeemer will come and will deliver us from the ultimate slavery, not a national slavery to a cruel nation, but slavery to sin--the one slavery that politics or education or government can't break. . .

Remember, the Law is given after God has redeemed His people from Egypt, now that's important. You see, the Law was never ever meant as a means of those people achieving God's acceptance. They were now liberated from their slavery because they were already the objects of His love. They're objects of His rescuing grace. Now He gives them His Law, the Law that has the power to do two very important things.

One, it has the power to expose their need of the grace that that God would offer them. The Law exposes sin. We would not know wrong if it were not for God's Law. And the Law is a beautiful guide for your everyday living. These poor people didn't know how to live. They had been under the bondage of slavery; they didn't have choices. Now that they would have freedom, they needed to know how to live properly in light of that freedom. God gives them His Law.

J. Sidlow Baxter: Is there in all history a more amazing spectacle than the Exodus? - a more august and solemn revelation of God than at Sinai? - a more significant piece of architecture than the Israelite Tabernacle? - a greater human figure than the man Moses? a more influential national epoch than the founding of the Israel theocracy? All these are found in this second book of Scripture. It is the *fons et origo* - the very fount and origin of the national life, law, and organized religion of Israel. The title "*Exodus*," which means "*outgoing*," accurately conveys the main subject of the book; but two other subjects are associated with the Exodus, as being the direct outcome of it, and complimentary to it, namely, the Law, and the Tabernacle....

Think what the Exodus meant in relation to Egypt. It meant three things specially. First, it was the first big-scale exposure of the falsity of idolatry. The primal revelation of Himself, and of Divine truth, which God had given to the early fathers of the race, had been more and more obscured or perverted as time had elapsed, through the perverted mind and will of fallen man; and systems of idolatry had grown up (**Josh 24:2,14,15**), man having made all manner of gods for himself. Egypt at the time of the Exodus was probably the greatest kingdom on earth, and its gods were considered correspondingly great. When God would call out the people of Israel to their new life and their intended national mission of restoring the knowledge of the one true God, He would, at the same time, expose the falsity of all man-concocted deities. Thus we find God saying: "*Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord*" (**Ex 12:12**) (see also **Nu 33:4**). This smash-up of Egypt's gods not only compelled even the magicians of Egypt to confess: "*This is the finger of God* (i.e., of the true God)," . . . It duly impressed, also, the minds of the Israelites; and we hear them singing, from the farther bank of the Red Sea: "*Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods?* "

Second, the overthrow of Egypt demonstrates the uselessness, sin, and folly of attempting to resist Jehovah, the God of Israel, the one true God. At the beginning of the contest Pharaoh contemptuously asked: "*Who is Jehovah, that I should obey Him?*" the Exodus was designed to answer that question in a way which should be a lesson to all men for all time. Indeed, God announced to Pharaoh, through Moses: "*In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power, and that My Name may be declared throughout the earth*" **Ex 9:16** () .

Third, it is to be remembered that all the principal features of the Exodus possess a typical import, and that in line with this, Egypt, the scene of the Exodus, is a type of "*the world*," in the morally evil sense. Egypt is a type of the world

- (1) in its material wealth and power (**Heb 11:26**);
- (2) in its fleshly wisdom and false religion (**Ex 8:7**, etc.; **1 Kings 4:30**);
- (3) in its despotic prince, Pharaoh, who himself is a figure of Satan;
- (4) in its organization on the principles of force, human aggrandizement, ambition, and pleasure;
- (5) in its persecution of the people of God (**Deut 4:20**);
- (6) in its overthrow by Divine judgment (**Ex 12:29; 15:4-7**). In the plagues, the smiting of the firstborn, and the drowning of the Egyptian host, we see the final tribulation, judgment and destruction of the present world system.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan: The Divine intention was the creation of a people who under His government should reveal in the world the breadth and beauty and beneficence of that government; a people who, gathered in their national life about His throne and His altar, obeying His commands and worshipping Him, should reveal to outside nations the meaning of the Kingship of God. . .

This rapid survey helps us to see that while all the details, such as the technicalities of the legal code, and the minutiae of the instructions concerning the construction of the tabernacle, are important, the supreme method of God in dealing with the instrument through which He should reveal Himself among the nations was that of unveiling the truth concerning Himself to them, ever leading them a little deeper into the mystery, giving them some new gleam of its light, offering them fresh unveilings, and so conducting them into higher realms of spiritual apprehension. . .

As to the saving of man, Exodus teaches that faith expresses itself in worship and obedience.

Ray Stedman: Design for Deliverance

Coming back to the structure of Exodus, you can understand the story of the book if you remember four things. The whole book centers around four great events. The first one is the Passover. Chapters one through fourteen lead up to it and climax in that great event. The second event is the crossing of the Red Sea, which is described for us in chapter fourteen. The third great event is the giving of the law at Sinai and the fourth is the construction of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp of Israel. These four events sum up the book of Exodus.

The first two events relate closely to each other, as do the last two. The Passover and Red Sea are but two aspects of one great truth -- the deliverance of God's people from the bondage of Egypt.

They portray in the Christian experience one great thing, that which we call conversion or regeneration, the deliverance of an individual from the bondage of the world; and if you want to know what God did with you when you became a Christian, study the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea.

The other two events also tie together. The giving of the law and the construction of the tabernacle are absolutely inseparable. Remember that the pattern of the tabernacle was given to Moses when he was on the mountain with God, at the same time that the law was given. We must understand why these two are inextricably linked together -- the law and the tabernacle. . .

Each of us is a walking tabernacle. This whole book of Exodus is to impress upon us, as we read it through, that great New Testament truth -- the glory of living with God himself in the midst of our life and the demands that truth makes upon us, the responsibilities it brings upon us and the privileges it gives us. The great need is for a walk resting upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, making this all possible for us.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: In the Pentateuch as a whole, there are six major themes:

- 1) God's blessing on all nature and humanity;
- 2) God's promise to the patriarchs;
- 3) God's deliverance in the exodus from Egypt;
- 4) God's revelation of himself in covenant, law, and tabernacling presence at Sinai;
- 5) the wandering in the wilderness;
- 6) preparation for entrance into Canaan.

Three of these six major themes (3, 4, 5) are given extensive treatment in the second book of the Pentateuch, and thus Exodus forms the heart of the Torah. . .

Exodus also tells us how we should live. The foundation of biblical ethics and morality is laid out for us first in the gracious character of God as revealed in the Exodus and then in the Ten Commandments and the ordinances of the Book of the Covenant. From the illustrations of the cases in **chapters 21-23**, we learn how to practically apply the principles of the ten words that in turn have their grounding in the permanency of the character of God.

The book concludes with an elaborate discussion on the theology of worship. The tabernacle was very costly in time, effort, and monetary value; yet in its significance and function it pointed to the chief end of man: to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Above every other consideration was the fact that the omnipotent, unchanging, and transcendent God of all the universe had, by means of the tabernacle, graciously come to " *dwell* " or " *tabernacle* " with his people, thereby revealing his immanence as well. Therefore, not only was God mighty in their midst, but he was the God who had been, was, and would be present in their midst as well.

Alan Cole:

It is very difficult to say which book stands at the heart of the Old Testament: but certainly the claims of Exodus are hard to match. To those who see theology as essentially the recital of the saving acts of God, **Exodus 1-15** gives the supreme example, around which the rest of the biblical narrative can be assembled. To those who see the Old Testament as the product of the

worshipping life of the community, at the heart of the book of Exodus lies the account of the institution of the passover, greatest and most characteristic of Israel's festivals. Indeed, the Exodus narrative may be seen as the explanation of the origin of that festival, recited or read aloud (as today) during its celebration. To those who see God's *tôrâ*, his law, as central to the life and thinking of later Israel, Exodus enshrines the law giving and contains the very kernel of the law in the form of the ten commandments. To later Jewish writers of priestly interests, who saw the maintenance of worship in the temple as one of the pillars of the universe, Exodus contained the account of the building of the tabernacle, forerunner of the temple. Yet, at the same time, it was not the priestly stream alone that looked back with veneration to Moses and Aaron. Moses stands also as the prototype of all prophets in Israel (**Deut. 18:18**), and the later prophets, while they may well search the mind of God more deeply, are best seen as essentially reformers, returning to the spirit of the Mosaic revelation, and to Israel's experience of salvation from Egypt.

The Theology of Exodus:

- The God who controls history
- I am YHWH
- The God who is holy
- The God who remembers
- The God who acts in salvation
- The God who acts in judgment
- The God whose anger may be averted
- The God who speaks
- The God who is transcendent
- The God who lives among his people

John Mackay:

Exodus is about a **man**, Moses. He is central to the narrative in a way in which no single character, not even Abraham, dominates Genesis. Though the book is not an autobiography, we learn much about Moses as an individual. He makes no secret of his own hesitation and sense of inadequacy, of how he could get things wrong, of how he had to face the intense pressures of leading his people in the way God required. Though Moses is very much at the centre of Exodus, he is not its hero; he does not seek to win acclaim for himself. He is the man of God, who sets all against the reality of divine sovereignty and measures all in terms of God's requirements.

Exodus is about a **nation**, Israel, moving from slavery in Egypt into freedom. But it is not essentially a story of political rebellion. It is the spiritual story of a people finding their way towards God, people who were still experiencing the tension of being torn in two directions by the religious forces of their day. They had to unlearn the ways and attitudes of their past; they had to learn not just that they were God's people, but also how to live true to that calling. But they did not succeed in living up to the great privileges that the Lord had given to them, and so Exodus is not only written about them, but also for them, so that they might grasp the status that had been accorded to them, learn from their past mistakes, and find from God the strength they needed for the future.

But ultimately Exodus is about **God**, about the God of the covenant who has instituted a new relationship between himself and those whom he has called to be his people. It is about how he teaches them—the times of silence and the times of action; about how he introduces himself to them, about how he acts on their behalf and shows them the real difference it makes that the Lord is their God, and about the patience he shows as he leads them out of their grumbling, even outright rebellion, until he comes to dwell in their midst.

Philip Ryken:

Exodus is an epic tale of fire, sand, wind, and water. The adventure takes place under the hot desert sun, just beyond the shadow of the Great Pyramids. There are two mighty nations—Israel and Egypt—led by two great men—Moses the liberating hero and Pharaoh the enslaving villain. Almost every scene is a masterpiece: the baby in the basket; the burning bush; the river of blood and the other plagues; the angel of death; the crossing of the Red Sea; the manna in the wilderness; the water from the rock; the thunder and lightning on the mountain; the Ten Commandments; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; the golden calf; the glory in the tabernacle.

Once heard, the story is never forgotten. For Jews it is the story that defines their very existence, the rescue that made them God's people. For Christians it is the gospel of the Old Testament, God's first great act of redemption. We return to the exodus again and again, sensing that somehow it holds significance for the entire human race. It is the story that gives every captive the hope of freedom. Thus it was only natural for African-American slaves—many of whom were Christians—to understand their captivity as a bondage in Egypt and to long for the day when they would be "free at last." The exodus shows that there is a God who saves, who delivers his people from bondage. . .

Beyond the Pentateuch, the book of Exodus has wider connections with the rest of the Old Testament. The exodus was the great miracle of the old covenant. Thus many passages in the Psalms and the Prophets look back to it as the paradigm of salvation. The people of Israel always praised God as the One who had brought them out of Egypt. The New Testament writers worshiped the same God, and thus they often used the exodus to explain salvation in Christ. Indeed, a complete understanding of the gospel requires a knowledge of the exodus. As we study the book of Exodus, therefore, we must follow the Reformation principle of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture. In some ways the whole Bible is an extended interpretation of the exodus. Thus the way to understand Exodus is to study the book itself, in the context of the entire Bible. .

To read Exodus, therefore, is to encounter God. The book is about the mercy, justice, holiness, and glory of almighty God, who rules history by his sovereign power and who saves the people of his covenant. When the Biblical writers recall the exodus, they rarely mention Moses at all; instead, they speak of the wonders of God. This gives us a hint that the proper way to study Exodus is to pay constant attention to what the book is showing and telling about the character of God. Exodus is an exercise in theology, which is simply the study of God. . .

From beginning to end, the exodus was for the glory of God. The whole glorious adventure shows that the God of Israel is the God who saves. Anyone who wants to be saved may call on his name and on the name of his divine Son, the Savior, Jesus Christ. This is what the psalmist

did at the end of **Psalm 106**, the “*Exodus Psalm*.” After recounting the entire epic—explaining how God saved his people out of Egypt in spite of their sin—the psalmist invites us to call on God for our own salvation: “*Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations*” (v. **47a**). We do not deserve to be saved from sin any more than the Israelites deserved to be brought out of Egypt. But God saves us for his glory, so “*that we may give thanks to [his] holy name and glory in [his] praise,*” saying, “*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting*” (vv. **47b, 48a**).

Douglas Stuart: Theology of Exodus

In **Exod 6:6–8** God lays before the Israelites an outline of what he is doing for them and a definition of how they are to think of themselves in relation to him:

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.’”

These three verses can be understood to more or less sum up the theological message that Moses was required to relay to the Israelites, and, we submit, that the reader is expected to recognize as the principal statement of the theology of the book.

(1) Salvation, Freedom from Bondage

“I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment” (Exod 6:6).

(2) Real Knowledge of God

“Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.... I am the Lord” (Exod 6:7–8).

The repetition of the statement “*I am the Lord*” is unmistakably a way of God’s repeatedly emphasizing his self-disclosure to his people. How can they obey and be benefited by a God whom they only vaguely understand, whose characteristics and will for them are clouded by ignorance on their part? But if his people can actually understand him, that is, be fully aware of his covenant stipulations and therefore know what to do to please him and receive his favor, they can actually live in relationship with him so that their own lives are influenced directly and constantly by his. A whole new order of existence beckons from this divine promise.

(3) A Covenant People

“I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exod 6:7).

When God first demanded that the Egyptian Pharaoh let Israel leave Egypt, he referred to Israel as “*my ... people.*” Again and again he said those famous words to Pharaoh, Let my people go.

Pharaoh may not have known who Yahweh was, but Yahweh certainly knew Israel. He knew them not just as a nation needing rescue but as his own people needing to be closely bound to him by the beneficent covenant he had in store for them once they reached the place he was taking them to himself, out of harm’s way, and into his sacred space.

(4) A Promised Land

“I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord” (Exod 6:8).

Since the time of the Patriarchs it had been the hope of Israel to occupy a land of its own—not because the idea had occurred to Abraham and his family and then had taken on a life of its own but because God revealed it as his intention and reiterated it to each successive generation. In Exodus that divine promise becomes the basis for an expectation of deliverance from Egypt, which constitutes the beginning of a great journey undertaken by a whole people with all their possessions, including their livestock, to relocate to that new land, one described metaphorically as “*flowing with milk and honey,*” so right and proper would it be for them.

(5) The Limited Presence of God in Israel’s Midst

“ ‘Do not come any closer,’ God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground’ ” (Exod 3:5).

“Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death’ ” (Exod 19:12).

“Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants” (Exod 28:43).

Almost all commentaries, Bible dictionary articles, and study Bibles speak at least generally of the theme of the presence of God as a hallmark of Exodus. But the idea of God’s presence is often articulated at least somewhat inaccurately in such sources. What most of them fail to note adequately, if at all, is that Exodus carefully presents not so much the concept of the presence of God as that of the limited presence of God.

The situation may be summarized this way: God shows himself to his covenant people by symbols behind barriers. He does not fully disclose himself in the manner that New Covenant believers look forward to as one of the great joys of heaven. Rather, he puts symbols of himself (a visible brilliance associated with his glory; the gold-surfaced ark of the covenant) behind barriers that keep his people from direct access even to those symbols, let alone to the very God of gods that they symbolize. These barriers include such things as distance (God

normally comes to the top of Mount Sinai while the people are strictly forbidden to go anywhere above the base of the mountain), darkness (God usually “*appears*” within a thick, dark cloud that conceals most of his glory and through which no human eyes can penetrate), and the tabernacle itself (with its layers of thick curtains and hide covers, its special floor-to-ceiling curtain shielding the ark from view by everyone, even priests). When the tabernacle was disassembled and its component parts carried, the ark was elaborately wrapped in its shielding curtain so that it could not be seen by anyone. What this means is that, with the exception of the high priest annually, no Israelite saw the ark once it had been constructed and placed in the tabernacle. The Israelites believed there was an ark on faith: what they saw carried as they traveled was something wrapped in layers of curtain and hide out of which poles protruded; they never saw the ark or its contents under any conditions. God symbolized his presence by that most holy object, the ark, but he kept it hidden from his people by barriers at all times.

(6) Representing an Invisible God by Visible Symbols

“Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites” (Exod 25:21–22).

“Seeing is believing,” we say. But how can you see an invisible God? Idolatry tried to solve this challenge by means of the creation of statues and other depictions that were thought to represent a god or goddess. Even the Israelites tried it, though to their great dismay. The limitations of idolatry are evident in the fact that as soon as worshipers reduce God to association with/depiction by/inhabitation of a manufactured object, they have limited his greatness. Part of the genius of invisibility is that it does not place limits on God’s greatness. Indeed, it prohibits even the depiction of limitation of him by forbidding any likeness at all.

If God is omnipresent, he should not be given a shape that can be thought to confine him or concentrate him somewhere. Thus, for example, the ark of the covenant is introduced in Exodus as a place above which God may be met, but it is never said to be God’s footstool or throne or any such thing. That would place a kind of limitation on God that would be false and misleading theologically.

Moreover, if God is omnipotent, he should not be depicted as smaller than any part of his creation. There is obviously no way that an idol can be as large as God is, and therefore any idol must automatically suggest something of a smallness in God—a limitation of some sort to his stature.

If God is omniscient, he is obviously aware of all events by being able to observe all events and should not be portrayed as having only one set of humanlike eyes or one pair of ears or one mouth to speak in one direction to one group of people.

If God is the only wise God, he should not be shown in the same manner as the whole panoply of other gods and goddesses are shown in pagan idolatry. Idolatry as practiced by ancient people failed, at any rate, to understand how God was properly to be represented on earth, that is,

represented by humans. Exodus begins the biblical process of helping us to understand how it might be that God could be symbolized, though never properly idolized.

(7) The Necessity of Law

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.... Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning” (Exod 19:5; 20:20).

God is a guide, and his Law gives guidance. Human law gives guidance for living peacefully and productively within a community. Divine law does this as well but goes far beyond it, to give guidance as to how to be holy within a covenant (kinship) relationship with a holy God. The fruit of this guidance—if it is kept—is far more than a happy life on earth. It is nothing short of an eternal relationship that begins to take a person out of the limits of temporal living for temporal pleasures and leads that person to eternal life in a setting where all the highest and noblest desires of life are actually provided instead of merely dreamed about. It makes that person, and his or her community (to the extent that community also truly obeys God’s covenant) into a part of the family of God.

(8) The Necessity of Following God

“In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels” (Exod 40:36–38).

These are the final words of the book of Exodus. They cap a long story of following God. The book begins with a brief review of the way the Israelites got into Egypt in the first place, the result of God’s provision through Joseph, who had issued the invitation to follow him into residency in Egypt as the result of God’s giving him the inclination to make such an invitation.

But that journey involved a few dozen people. Four centuries later, the greatly expanded nation of Israel listened to another call to migrate from where they were to a new land. First, Moses had to follow God’s call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and then the Israelite elders had to follow that call as well, difficult as it proved for them to do in light of the oppression they had been placed under by the Egyptians.

Nevertheless, as Moses followed God’s commands, the people followed Moses. They followed God directly too as he led them via the special manifestation of his presence, the glory cloud that appeared dark in the day and fiery at night. More specifically with regard to their covenant relationship with him, they also followed him by following his instructions (16:4). Once they had broken his covenant by a reversion to the idolatry of their past life in Egypt (chap. 32), they feared they could no longer follow him. His willingness (offered rhetorically to test them rather than as a final offer) to do less than actually go with them, leading them through the wilderness personally, was, fortunately, something they understood as not enough. Wisely, they respectfully insisted through Moses that if God himself would not go with them they would not go at all.

(9 Only One God Has Any Real Power

“I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord” (Exod 12:12).

The Egyptians, like virtually all ancients, were polytheists, pantheists, and syncretists.⁹⁰ That is, they believed in many different gods, that all aspects of nature partook of the divine and were in some sense coterminous with it, and that exclusivism in religion was foolish—the wise person tried to understand and benefit from all the worship he could manage of as many gods as he could get to know.

The Israelites in Egypt at the time of the exodus had lived in this sort of cultural milieu for more than four centuries. From a human point of view it would seem virtually impossible that they could fully break free of such a powerful, long-term enculturation and come to believe in and serve only one true God, and certainly it would seem impossible that such a conversion could be accomplished quickly. Yet that is exactly what the only God had in mind for his chosen people: to show them that all other gods were false and that he alone was true and held in himself all the power they had been attributing to the various gods and goddesses of their mythopoeic belief system. It was his plan that they should see his absolute sovereignty so visibly that they would be able to convert to the truth, leave Egypt, and become his covenant people at Sinai—all in the space of a few months. He planned to show them that the gods of Egypt were empty nothings. By definition, gods are supposed to be powerful. Gods are worshiped precisely because they have power. A powerless god would be, in fact, no god at all. Why would anyone even bother to learn about, tell about, pray to, or otherwise honor a being who had no effect on anything? Among the ancients, certainly, there was no interest in ineffective gods, no theoretical interest in the doings of feckless existences. Therefore, if a believed-in god, a supposed deity, could be shown powerless not just in some area tangential to his or her reputed main strength but in the very realm where he or she was considered the power among all the powers of the universe, it would swiftly undermine belief in that god or goddess.

That is exactly what the only true God, Yahweh, does in the book of Exodus. Easily, comprehensively, impressively, dramatically, publicly, decisively—he demonstrates his total control over all aspects of the physical world that were thought by the Egyptians to be the province of “the gods of Egypt.” He shows that the supposed gods of the Nile, or the sun, or the wind, or of various other parts or players in the world have no strength, no will, no effectiveness of any kind. Their power was illusory. They couldn’t even help the Egyptians prevail against well-subjugated slaves; they couldn’t control the phenomena of nature that they were supposed to be coterminous with and supposed to inhabit uniquely through their pantheistic divinity.

MacArthur: Outline

I. Israel in Egypt (1:1–12:36) – Preparation for Redemption

- A. The Population Explosion (1:1–7)
- B. The Oppression Under the Pharaohs (1:8–22)
- C. The Maturation of a Deliverer (2:1–4:31)
- D. The Confrontation with Pharaoh (5:1–11:10)
- E. The Preparation for Departure (12:1–36)

II. Israel on the Road to Sinai (12:37–18:27) -- Redemption

- A. Exiting Egypt and Panicking (12:37–14:14)
- B. Crossing the Red Sea and Rejoicing (14:15–15:21)
- C. Traveling to Sinai and Grumbling (15:22–17:16)
- D. Meeting with Jethro and Learning (18:1–27)

III. Israel Encamped at Sinai (19:1–40:38) – Law and Worship

- A. The Law of God Prescribed (19:1–24:18)
- B. The Tabernacle of God Described (25:1–31:18)
- C. The Worship of God Defiled (32:1–35)
- D. The Presence of God Confirmed (33:1–34:35)
- E. The Tabernacle of God Constructed (35:1–40:38)

Motyer: Outline

Part 1 Israel in Egypt: the Saviour (1:1–13:16)

- a. The Lord's hidden providence (1:1–2:22)
- b. Yahweh revealed (2:22–6:13)
- c. The saving Lord (6:14–13:16)

Part 2 Israel at Sinai: the Companion (13:17–24:11)

- a. The Lord's public providences (13:17–17:16)
- b. Yahweh revealed (18:1–23:33)
- c. The covenant Lord (24:1–11)

Part 3 Israel around the tabernacle: the Indweller (24:12–40:38)

- a. The Lord's provision (24:12–31:18)
- b. Yahweh revealed (32:1–34:35)
- c. The indwelling Lord (35:1–40:38)

John Hannah: Outline

I. The Redemption of God's People from Egypt (chaps. 1-18)

- A. The oppression of Israel in Egypt (chap. 1)
- B. The deliverer of Israel from Egypt (chaps. 2-4)
- C. The struggle of Moses with Pharaoh in Egypt (5:1 – 12:36)
- D. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt (12:37 – 18:27)

II. The Revelation to God's People at Sinai (chaps. 19-40)

- A. The covenant of God with His people (chaps. 19-31)
- B. The failure and restoration of God's people (chaps. 32-34)
- C. The construction of the tabernacle (chaps. 35-40)

David Malick: Outline

I. LIBERATION--THE ACQUISITION OF A PEOPLE OUT OF EGYPT:

Although the descendants of Jacob multiplied in Egypt and were under the oppression of the King of Egypt, the Lord delivered them out of their bondage by raising up a deliverer, Moses, demonstrating His power upon the Egyptians to such an extent that they hurried them to flee the

land, delivering them from the Egyptians through the Reed Sea and providing for them through their wilderness wanderings until they arrived at Mount Horeb -- **1:1--18:27**

II. COVENANT--THE CONSTITUTION OF A PEOPLE TO BE A NATION:

When at Mount Sinai all of the people agreed to obey the Lord, He promised to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nations, stated through Moses the stipulations of the covenant, and the people ratified the covenant with blood sacrifices whereupon the Lord displayed the peace which existed between Him and the leaders of the nation and called Moses to receive stone tablets of the law on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights -- **19:1--24:18**

III. THE PREPARATION OF A PEOPLE FOR THEIR GOD-KING:

Although the initial directions for the tabernacle were postponed because Israel's rebellion threatened their existence as well as the Lord's willingness to enter the land of promise among this people, Moses interceded on their behalf reminding God of the risk to His reputation by abandoning His people, whereupon the Lord agreed to dwell among His people, the tabernacle was built and erected and the Lord came down upon it and dwelt among His people guiding them towards the Promise Land -- **25:1--40:38**

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Outline

I. Divine Redemption (1:1 – 18:27)

- A. Fulfilled Multiplication and Forced Eradication (**1:1-22**)
- B. Preparations for Deliverance (**2:1 – 4:26**)
- C. First Steps in Leadership (**4:27 – 7:5**)
- D. Judgment and Salvation Through the Plagues (**7:6 – 11:10**)
- E. The Passover (**12:1-28**)
- F. The Exodus From Egypt (**12:29-32**)
- G. The Consecration of the Firstborn (**13:1-16**)
- H. Journey to the Red Sea (**13:17 – 15:21**)
- I. Journey to Sinai (15:22 – 18:27)

II. Divine Morality (19:1 – 24:18)

- A. The Eagles' Wings Speech (**19:1-8**)
- B. The Advent of God on Sinai (**19:9-25**)
- C. The Decalogue (**20:1-17**)
- D. The Reaction of the People to the Theophany (20:18-21)
- E. The Book of the Covenant (**20:22 – 23:33**)
- F. Ratification of the Covenant (**24:1-18**)

III. Divine Worship (25:1 – 40:38)

- A. The Tabernacle (**25:1 – 31:18**)
- B. False Worship of the Golden Calf (**32:1 – 34:35**)
- C. Building the Tabernacle (**35:1 – 40:38**)

Wiersbe: Outline

I. Redemption: The Lord Delivers His People – 1-18

"I will bring you out" (6:6)

II. Covenant: The Lord Claims His People – **19-24**

“I will take you to Me for a people” (6:7)

III. Worship: The Lord Dwells with His People – **25-40**

“I will be to you a God” (6:7)

Note the balance in the spiritual experience of the Jewish people: God delivered them from bondage (**1-18**), but freedom should lead to obedience (**19-24**), and obedience results in worship to the glory of God (**25-40**). Apart from worship, freedom becomes lawlessness and obedience becomes oppression.

John Oswalt: Outline

I. **Deliverance**: A Revelation of Yahweh’s Power (**1:1–15:21**)

A. Preparation for Deliverance (**1:1–7:7**)

B. The Events of Deliverance (**7:8–15:21**)

II. **Wilderness**: A Revelation of Yahweh’s Providential Care (**15:22–18:27**)

A. Water at Marah (**15:22–27**)

B. Manna and Quail from Heaven (**16:1–36**)

C. Water from the Rock (**17:1–7**)

D. Protection from the Amalekites (**17:8–16**)

E. Jethro’s Visit to Moses (**18:1–27**)

III. **Covenant**: A Revelation of Yahweh’s Character (**19:1–24:18**)

A. Motivation to Accept the Covenant (**19:1–25**)

B. Presentation of the Covenant (**20:1–23:33**)

C. Acceptance of the Covenant (**24:1–18**)

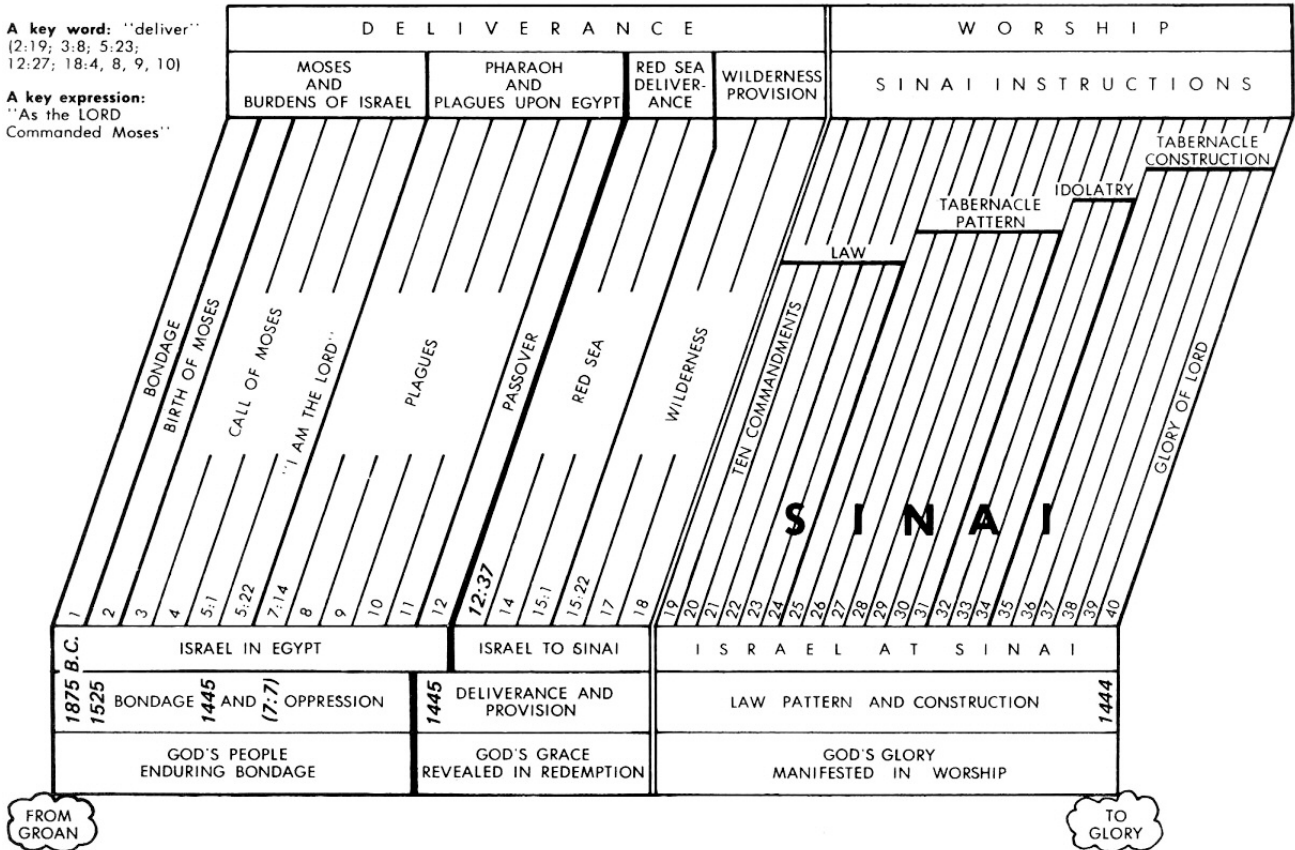
IV. **The Tabernacle**: A Revelation of Yahweh’s Purpose (**25:1–40:38**)

A. Instructions for the Tabernacle and Its Service: The Right Way to God’s Presence (**25:1–31:18**)

B. The Gold Calf: The Wrong Way to Secure God’s Presence (**32:1–34:35**)

C. Report of Building the Tabernacle: Securing Yahweh’s Presence in Yahweh’s Way (**35:1–40:38**)

Irving Jensen: Outline



Bruce Hurt: Summary Chart

[illegible]

OUTLINE OF EXODUS

STORY OF REDEMPTION – DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE TO OBEY AND WORSHIP GOD

GOD SOVEREIGNLY REDEEMS HIS PEOPLE FROM BONDAGE TO LEAD THEM TO OBEY AND WORSHIP HIM TO MANIFEST HIS GLORY

I. (1:1 – 15:21) DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT: A REVELATION OF YAHWEH'S POWER – BIRTH OF A SPECIAL NATION

A. (1:1 – 4:31) PREPARATION FOR DELIVERANCE

1. (1:1-22) Desperate Times in Egypt for God's People – Blessing and Protection – The Backdrop for Divine Deliverance and the Fulfilment of Covenant Promises Showcases God's Blessing and Protection Despite Satan's Efforts to Thwart God's Purposes

a. (:1-7) Initial Explosive Growth of the Sons of Israel in Egypt = Indication of God's Blessing

1) (:1-5) Reminder of God's Covenant Promises – Names of the Sons of Jacob / Israel

2) (:6-7) Record of God's Abundant Blessing

b. (:8-22) Subsequent Explosive Growth Despite Oppression and Government Attempts at Population Control = Indication of God's Protection

1) (:8-10) Israel Viewed as a Major Threat by the New King of Egypt

2) (:11-14) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Increasing Oppression by Slave Labor

(Satanic Strategy #1)

a) (:11) Work Them to Death

b) (:12) Watch Them Multiply

c) (:13-14) Work Them Harder

3) (:15-21) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Government Attempts at Population Control via Infanticide and Genocide

(Satanic Strategy #2)

a) (:15-16) Cruel Command of Pharaoh to the Hebrew Midwives

b) (:17) Commendation for the Midwives

c) (:18-19) Confrontation between Pharaoh and the Midwives

d) (:20-21) Corresponding Divine Blessing to the Midwives

4) (:22) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Intensified Government Attempts at Population Control via Infanticide and Genocide

(Satanic Strategy #3)

2. (2:1-25) Preparation of Moses

a. (2:1-10) Preservation of Moses – Erasing Pharaoh's Edict –

The Providence of God Protected Moses after His Birth, Plucked Him from the Nile and Prepared Him for His Future Leadership Role

1) (:1-4) Moses Hidden to Protect Him from Pharaoh's Infanticide –

Protected by the Providence of God

a) (:1-2a) Birth of Moses

b) (:2b) Faith of Moses' Mother

c) (:3-4) Resignation to Providence of God

2) (:5-6) Moses Rescued by Pharaoh's Daughter –

Plucked from the Nile by the Providence of God

a) (:5) Appealing to Motherly Instincts

b) (:6) Awakening Compassion

3) (:7-10) Moses Nurtured Both by His Hebrew Mother and as a Member of the Royal Egyptian Family –

Prepared by the Providence of God for Future Rule as Deliverer

a) (:7-9) Nursed by His Own Mother for Profit

b) (:10a) Nurtured with Royal Privileges

c) (:10b) Named as a Miracle Son

b. (2:11-25) Training Ground for God's Deliverer –

Developing Leaders First Experience Fleshly Failure before Learning to Submit to God's Timetable and Trust in God's Empowerment –

3 Key Lessons for Leadership Development

1) (:11-15a) Fleeing Egypt Because Deliverance Can't Come from the Hand of Man –

Learning the Limitations of Fleshly Power and Resources

a) (:11-12) Presumptuous Moses -- Moses the Murderer –
Heroic Intervention – Killing the Egyptian Oppressor

1)) (:11) Examination

2)) (:12) Execution

b) (:13-14) Rejected Moses -- Moses the Meddler –
Hebrew Inquiry – Fearing Egyptian Reprisal

1)) (:13) Critical Confrontation

2)) (:14a) Rebellious Rejection

3)) (:14b) Petrified Panic

c) (:15a) Fugitive Moses -- Moses the Meanderer –
Homicidal Intimidation -- Fleeing Pharaoh

2) (:15b-22) Serving God Patiently in Obscurity Because Family Faithfulness is the Foundation for Effective Leadership –
Learning to Patiently Submit to God's Training Process and Timetable

a) (:15b) New Location for Moses in Midian

b) (:16-17) New Opportunity to Combat Oppression

- c) (:18-20) New Invitation to Integrate into a Prominent Household
 - 1)) (:18) Investigation of Fortuitous Circumstances
 - 2)) (:19) Testimony to Egyptian Assistance
 - 3)) (:20) Invitation Extended to Moses
 - d) (:21-22) New Family Unit
 - 1)) (:21a) Acquiring a Household
 - 2)) (:21b) Acquiring a Wife
 - 3)) (:22) Acquiring a Son
 - 3) (:23-25) Crying Out to God Based on Covenant Relationship for Relief from Suffering and Bondage – Learning to Cry Out to God for Deliverance
 - a) (:23a) Change in Circumstances in Egyptian Government
 - b) (:23b) Cry for Help by the Sons of Israel Because of Their Bondage
 - c) (:24-25) Compassion of Covenant-Keeping God
- 3. (3:1 – 4:31) Call of Moses to Lead God's People Out of Egypt
 - a. (3:1-12) Call Delivered -- God's Dramatic Call to Moses Details His Commitment to Deliver Flowing Out of His Compassion for Israel's Bondage
 - 1) (:1-6) The Dramatic Call of God is Unusual and Impactful
 - a) (:1-3) Natural Observation -- God Intervened in Moses' Life and Got Moses' Attention
 - 1)) (:1) Serving Faithfully in Normal Daily Activities
 - 2)) (:2) Startling Theophany (Christophany)
 - 3)) (:3) Seeing But Having Difficulty Believing
 - b) (:4-6) Divine Revelation – Understanding God's Holiness and His Covenant Connection Essential to Responding to God's Call
 - 1)) (:4) Repeated Call – for Emphasis
 - 2)) (:5) Revelation of Holiness – Transcendence of God
 - 3)) (:6a) Reminder of Covenant Connection and Purposes – Immanence of God
 - 4)) (:6b) Response of Fear
 - 2) (:7-12) The Detailed Call of God – Commitment to Deliver Flows Out of Compassion for Bondage
 - a) (:7-9) Deliverance by the Personal Involvement of God
 - 1)) (:7) Compassion for the Bondage of the Hebrews
 - 2)) (:8) Commitment to Deliver Them – Personal Involvement
 - b) (:9-10) Deliverance by the Agency of the Leadership of Moses
 - 1)) (:9) Compassion for the Bondage of the Hebrews
 - 2)) (:10) Commitment to Deliver Them – Sending Moses to Pharaoh
 - c) (:11-12) Hesitation on the Part of Moses Addressed --

Hesitation #1 – I Lack Confidence / Significance

- 1)) (:11) Hesitation Expressed –
Based on Moses' Insignificance
- 2.)) (:12) Hesitation Answered –
Based on the Significance of God
- b. (3:13-22) Call Assured by the Authority of God
 - 1) (:13-15) Message to Moses – “I AM WHO I AM” –

Hesitation #2 – I Lack Clout / Authority

- a) (:13) Hesitation of Moses:
 - Validation Needed for the Authority of the Divine Call
 - 1)) Claim of Authority by Moses for His Divine Call
 - 2)) Clarification of Authority Needed for His Divine Call
- b) (:14-15) Validation Provided by the Name of God –
the Self-Existent God of Unchanging Covenant Relationship
to the Hebrew People
 - 1)) (:14) Name of God = I AM
 - 2)) (:15) Name of God = the LORD -- Jehovah/YHWH
- 2) (:16-18a) Message to Elders of Israel –
God Cares for His Covenant Nation and He Will Deliver
 - a) (:16a) Target Audience = Elders of Israel
 - b) (:16b) Assurance of God's Compassion –
Covenant-Keeping and Concerned God
 - c) (:17) Assurance of God's Deliverance –
Promise-Keeping God
 - 1)) Deliverance from Affliction in Egypt
 - 2)) Deliverance to the Promised Land of Challenges
and Prosperity
 - d) (:18a) Assurance of Successful Mission –
Sovereign God Who Controls the Future
- 3) (:18b-22) Message to King of Egypt – “Let My People Go”
 - a) (:18b) Target Audience = King of Egypt
 - b) (:18c) Request
 - c) (:19-20) Retribution / Pressure / Compulsion
 - 1)) (:19) Stubbornness of King of Egypt
 - 2)) (:20) Sovereign Intervention of All-Powerful
God
 - d) (:21-22) Reparations
 - 1)) (:21a) Granting of Favor
 - 2)) (:21b-22a) Gifting with Valuables
 - 3)) (:22b) Plundering the Egyptians
- c. (4:-1-17) Call Questioned Angers God –
Persistent Hesitation and Objections Regarding Obeying God's Call (Despite
Divine Assurances) End Up Angering God
 - 1) (:1-9) **Hesitation #3 – I Lack Credibility**
 - a) (:1) Credibility Smokescreen
 - b) (:2-9) Confirming Signs

- 1)) (:2-5) First Sign –
Turning Staff into Serpent
- 2)) (:6-8) Second Sign –
Turning Healthy Hand into Leprous Hand
- 3)) (:9) Third Sign –
Turning Water from Nile into Blood
- 2) (:10-17) **Hesitation #4 – I Lack Capability**
 - a) (:10-12) Pushing the Envelope of God’s Patience
 - 1)) (:10) Protestation of Moses
 - 2)) (:11-12) Response of God
 - b) (:13-17) Provoking God Finally to Anger
 - 1)) (:13) Anybody but Me
 - 2)) (:14-17) Introducing Role of Aaron
- d. (4:18-31) Call Fulfilled –
Final Preparation for Successfully Fulfilling God’s Mission for Your Life
Involves 4 Keys:
 - 1) (:18-20) Commitment to Obey the Call of God –
Return of Moses to Egypt
 - a) (:18) Obtaining the Blessing of Jethro to “Go in Peace” –
Appropriate Transition
 - b) (:19) Opportunity to Return to Egypt in Peace –
Appropriate Encouragement
 - c) (:20) Obeying the Divine Call to Return to Egypt –
Appropriate Support
 - 2) (:21-23) Confidence in the Lord’s Covenant Love for His People –
Resistance of Pharaoh Will Be Dealt with Decisively
 - a) (:21) Objective of Freedom Will Meet with Resistance
 - b) (:22-23) Objective of Freedom Will be Achieved by God
Liberating His First-Born at the Expense of Egypt’s
First-Born
 - 3) (:24-26) Consecration Including Dealing with Any Known Sin –
Repentance Regarding Observing the Sign of Circumcision
 - a) (:24) Sin Has Serious Consequences and Must be
Addressed
 - b) (:25) Severing the Foreskin (with attitude on the part of
Zipporah)
 - c) (:26) Saving Moses so that He Could Fulfil the Divine
Mission = a Higher Priority than Zipporah’s Distaste of
Practicing Circumcision
 - 4) (:27-31) Collaboration with Other Leaders and with God’s People –
Reunion with Aaron to Rally the Elders of Israel
 - a) (:27-28) Reunion with Aaron
 - b) (:29-30) Rallying the Elders of Israel and All the People
 - c) (:31) Response of the People

B. (5:1 – 11:10) RESISTANCE FROM PHARAOH

1. (5:1 – 6:1) Increased Level of Oppression –
Despite Opposition and Frustration, the Servant of God Must Continue to Look to the Lord for Ultimate Success

a. (:1-14) Oppression (by Pharaoh and His Taskmasters) Intensifies as Initial Requests to Leave Egypt are Denied

1) (:1-5) Two Requests of Pharaoh: “Let My People Go” –
Issue = Ultimate Authority

2) (:6-9) Increased Workload = Response of Pharaoh

3) (:10-14) Increased Oppression = Role of the Taskmasters

b. (:15-21) Frustration Builds as the Jewish Foremen Raise Complaints

1) (:15-19) Complaint to Pharaoh

2) (:20-21) Complaint to Moses and Aaron

c. (5:22 – 6:1) Lament of Moses Answered by the Lord

1) (:22-23) Lament of Moses

2) (6:1) Response of the Lord

2. (6:2-27) Renewed Commission –

Additional Covenant Assurances Support the Renewed Commission to Fortify the Leadership of Moses and Aaron in Their Confrontation with Pharaoh

a. (:2-9) Renewed Covenant Promises

1) (:2-5) Identity and Immanence of God Support His
Covenant Commitment

a) (:2-3) Identity and Immanence of God

b) (:4) Covenant Commitment

c) (:5) Covenant Faithfulness

2) (:6-9) Immutability of the Covenant Promises

a) (:6a) Credibility for the Covenant Promises

b) (:6b-8) Covenant Promises Detailed =
Seven “I Will” Statements

c) (:9) Communication of the Mission Rejected Again
by the Israelites

b. (:10-13) Renewed Charge to Fulfil His Mission as Deliverer

1) (:10-11) Clear Charge Repeated to Moses

2) (:12) Recalcitrant Reluctance Expressed -- Two Excuses

3) (:13) Forceful Charge Issued to Moses and Aaron

c. (:14-25) Genealogy Establishing Moses as Authentic Leader of the Jews

1) (:14-19) Sons of Reuben, Simeon and Levi

2) (:20-22) Sons of Amram, Izhar and Uzziel

3) (:23-25) Sons of Aaron, Korah and Eleazar

d. (:26-27) Highlighting Leadership Role of Moses and Aaron

3. (6:28 - 7:7) Renewed Call to Obedience Despite Opposition

Resetting the Narrative – Because God is Sovereign and Sufficient,
Obedience to God’s Call is the Only Option that Makes Sense

- a. (6:28-30) God Calls Us to Perform Missions Beyond Our Capability
 - 1) (:28) Resumption of the Dramatic Narrative –
Based in the Unique Role of Moses
 - 2) (:29) Repetition of the Lord's Overwhelming Charge –
Based in His Kingdom Agenda
 - 3) (:30) Repetition of Moses' Understandable Objection –
Based in Inadequacy
- b. (:1-7) Obedience to God's Call is the Only Option that Makes Sense –
In Light of:
 - 1) (:1-2) The Sufficiency of God's Enablement
 - 2) (:3) The Sovereignty of God's Control Over Pharaoh's Heart
 - 3) (:4-5) The Severity of God's Judgments to Accomplish His Purposes
 - a) (:4) Promise of Plagues
 - b) (:5) Purpose of the Plagues
 - 4) (:6-7) The Simplicity of Obedience
 - a) (:6) Actions Must Conform to the Lord's Commands
 - b) (:7) Age Grants No Exemption
4. (7:8 – 11:10) Divine Plagues Address the Resistance of Pharaoh
 - a. (7:8-25) The Beginning of the Plagues –
The Sovereign God Provides Sufficient Evidence to Confirm His Mission of
Redemption and to Justify His Judgment against Stubborn Rebellion
 - 1) (7:8-13) Main Sign of God's Sovereign Power to Confirm the
Mission of Moses and Aaron in Delivering the Jews from Egypt
 - a) (:8-10) Miraculous Sign of the Staff Becoming a Serpent
 - b) (:11-12) Magical Imitation Exposed as Powerless
 - c) (:13) Miraculous Sign Rejected by Hard Hearted Pharaoh
 - 2) (:14-25) Plague #1 – Turning Water Into Blood
 - a) (:14) The Reason for the Judgment –
Stubborn Refusal to Submit to God's Sovereignty
 - b) (:15-18) The Proclamation of the Judgment to Pharaoh
 - c) (:19-21) The Performance of the Judgment
 - d) (:22-25) The Response to the Judgment
 - b. (8:1 – 10:29) Series of Plagues –
Demonstration of God's Sovereign Power and Control
 - 1) (7:14-25) Plague #1 – Turning Water Into Blood
 - 2) (8:1-15) Plague #2 -- Frogs
 - 3) (8:16-19) Plague #3 -- Gnats
 - 4) (8:20-32) Plague #4 -- Flies
 - 5) (9:1-7) Plague #5 – Egyptian Livestock
 - 6) (9:8-12) Plague #6 - Boils
 - 7) (9:13-35) Plague #7 - Hail
 - 8) (10:1-20) Plague #8 - Locusts
 - 9) (10:21-27) Plague #9 - Darkness
 - (10:28-29) Epilogue – Final Confrontation

- c. (11:1-10) Introduction of the Final Plague to Deliver Israel –
 Hardened Hearts Fail to Respond to the Wonders of God:
 - Experiencing Defeat and Humiliation Instead of Victory and Joy
 - Experiencing Death and Devastation Instead of Life and Protection
- 1) (:1-3) Announcement of the Final 10th Plague to Moses by God --
 Victory Enriches God's People and Humiliates God's Enemies
 - a) (:1) Promising Victory
 - 1)) Certainty of the Victory
 - 2)) Completeness of the Victory
 - b) (:2) Plundering the Egyptians
 - c) (:3) Promoting the Jews and Moses in the Sight of the Egyptians
- 2) (:4-8) Announcement of the Final 10th Plague to Pharaoh by Moses -
 Judgment Devastates God's Enemies but Leaves God's People Protected and Unharmed
 - a) (:4-6) Death Decreed for All the First Born in Egypt –
 Including of the Cattle
 - 1)) (:4-5) Very Specific Judgment
 - 2)) (:6) Very Sad Outcry of Grief
 - b) (:7) Distinction Between Egypt and Israel
 - c) (:8a) Demand from the Egyptians that Moses and the Jews Depart
 - d) (:8b) Departure in Anger of Moses from before Pharaoh
- 3) (:9-10) Review (Summary Explanation) of the Previous 9 Plagues –
 Hardened Hearts Fail to Respond to the Wonders of God
 - a) (:9) Purpose of the Multiple Plagues
 - b) (:10a) Performance of the Multiple Plagues
 - c) (:10b) Pharaoh's Stubborn Response

C. (12:1 – 15:21) STORY OF DELIVERANCE

- 1. (12:1 – 13:16) Getting Out of Egypt
 - a. (12:1-13) Instructions Regarding the Lord's Passover –
 Only the Personal Application of the Blood of the Passover Lamb Brings
 Deliverance from Bondage and Destruction
 - (:1-2) Prologue – Marker for New Beginnings as a Delivered Nation
 - 1) (:3-6) Instructions for Observing the Passover Sacrifice
 - a) (:3-4) Logistics for the Passover Sacrifice
 - b) (:5) Criteria for an Acceptable Passover Sacrifice
 - c) (:6) Preparation and Execution of the Passover Sacrifice
 - 2) (:7-10) Instructions for Applying the Blood of the Passover Sacrifice
 and Consuming the Flesh
 - a) (:7) Applying the Blood
 - b) (:8-9) Consuming the Flesh
 - c) (:10) Burning Anything Left Over
 - 3) (:11-13) Instructions for Readiness for the Passover Event of

Exodus, Destruction and Deliverance

- a) (:11) Readiness for the Exodus from Egypt – Freedom from Bondage
- b) (:12) Readiness for the Dramatic Event of Destruction
- c) (:13) Readiness for the Merciful Event of Deliverance
- b. (12:14-36) Observance of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - 1) (:14-20) Observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - a) (:14-16) Instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - 1)) (:14) Permanent Memorial
 - 2)) (:15) Purifying Seven Day Festival
 - 3)) (:16) Prescribed Days for Holy Assembly instead of Work
 - b) (:17-20) Importance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - 1)) (:17) Purpose of the Observance
 - 2)) (:18-19a) Duration of the Observance
 - 3)) (:19b-20) Penalty for Violating the Observance
 - 2) (:21-28) Observance of the Feast of Passover
 - a) (:21-23) Instructions for the Passover
 - 1)) (:21) Central Focus = Slaying of the Passover Lamb
 - 2)) (:22a) Critical Feature = Application of the Blood
 - 3)) (:22b) Careful Forewarning
 - 4)) (:23) Contrasting Fulfillments
 - b) (:24-27a) Importance of the Passover
 - 1)) (:24-25) Permanent Memorial
 - 2)) (:26-27a) Perpetuated by Instructing Future Generations
 - c) (:27b-28) Response of the People
 - 1)) (:27b) Worship
 - 2)) (:28) Obedience
 - 3) (:29-36) Observance of How the Passover Played Out
 - a) (:29) Role of the Lord = Killing the First-Born as Promised – No Exceptions
 - b) (:30-33) Role of Pharaoh and the Egyptians = Giving Up Their Resistance
 - 1)) (:30) Distress
 - 2)) (:31-32) Dismissal
 - 3)) (:33) Dread
 - c) (:34-36) Role of the Israelites = Plundering the Egyptians
- c. (12:37-51) More Passover Instructions -- Celebrating God's Faithfulness – The Citizens of God's Kingdom (Which is Open to All Who Believe) Must Celebrate God's Faithfulness According to His Instructions
 - (:37-38) Prologue – Faithful to Deliver His People
 - a) (:37) Beginning of the Exodus
 - b) (:38) Breakdown of the Entourage

- 1) (:39-42) Faithfulness of God to Deliver His People Memorialized
 - a) (:39) Diet of Unleavened Bread – Urgency of Departure
 - b) (:40-41) Duration of the Bondage in Egypt
 - 1)) (:40) Marked by the Time Spent in Egypt
 - 2)) (:41) Marked by the Day of Deliverance
 - c) (:42) Dedication to This Memorial of God's Faithfulness
- 2) (:43-49) Faithfulness of God to Deliver His People Celebrated According to Specific Instructions
 - a) (:43-45) Instructions Regarding Participation
 - 1)) (:43) No Foreigner
 - 2)) (:44) Circumcised Slaves
 - 3)) (:45) No Sojourner or Hired Servant
 - b) (:46) Instructions Regarding Partaking
 - 1)) Keep it In a Single House
 - 2)) Keep it Inside
 - 3)) Keep it Intact
 - c) (:47-49) Instructions Regarding Participation
 - 1)) (:47) Entire Congregation of Israel
 - 2)) (:48-49) Extended to Circumcised Strangers
- (:50-51) Epilogue – Faithful to Deliver His People
 - a) (:50) Response of Obedience
 - b) (:51) Reminder of Deliverance
- d. (13:1-16) Appreciating Our Deliverance and Redemption – Symbolic Acts of Commemoration Help God's People Appreciate Their Deliverance and Redemption
 - (:1-2) Superscription – Sovereign Rights of the Covenant King
 - a) Command: Setting Apart the Firstborn
 - b) Reason: Divine Ownership
 - 1) (:3-10) Feast of Unleavened Bread – Appreciating Our Deliverance from Bondage
 - a) (:3) Remember Deliverance from Bondage
 - b) (:4-8) Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - 1)) (:4-5) Connection with Future Blessing
 - 2)) (:6-7) Connection with Present Sanctification
 - 3)) (:8) Connection with Past Deliverance
 - c) (:9-10) Perpetuate This Observance
 - 1)) (:9) Meaningful Observance
 - 2)) (:10) Annual Observance
 - 2) (:11-16) Redemption of Firstborn Sons – Appreciating Our Redemption
 - a) (:11-12) Remember the Promise of Redemption
 - 1)) (:11) Reason = Fulfilment of God's Promise
 - 2)) (:12) Command = Redeem the Firstborn
 - b) (:13) Celebrate the Redemption of the Firstborn
 - 1)) Firstborn of a Donkey

- 2)) Firstborn of Man
 - c) (:14-16) Perpetuate This Observance
 - 1)) (:14) By Communicating its Significance to Future Generations
 - 2)) (:15) By Connecting its Observance to its Historical Roots
 - 3)) (:16) By Continuing to Focus on the Redemption Accomplished by the Lord
- 2. (13:17 – 15:21) Crossing the Red Sea
 - a. (13:17-22) Divine Guidance –
Divine Guidance Uses Perplexing and Challenging Paths to Both Protect and Prepare Us for What Lies Ahead
 - 1) (:17-18) Perplexing Route –
Divine Guidance Doesn't Always Immediately Make Sense
 - a) (:17) Divine Guidance Doesn't Always Take the Shortest Route
 - b) (:18a) Divine Guidance Leads Through Paths of Suffering and Hardship
 - c) (:18b) Divine Guidance Does Not Promote Disarray and Chaos – But Order and Discipline
 - 2) (:19) Patriarchal Promises –
Divine Guidance Fulfills God's Will
 - 3) (:20-22) Providential Guidance –
Divine Guidance Leads Us One Step at a Time with the Assurance of God's Presence
 - a) (:20) Divine Guidance Can Look Challenging
 - b) (:21) Divine Guidance Is Clear and Reassuring
 - 1)) Presence of the Lord
 - 2)) Pillar of Cloud by Day
 - 3)) Pillar of Fire by Night
 - 4)) Promoting Travel by Day and by Night
 - c) (:22) Divine Guidance Does Not Take a Day Off
 - b. (14:1-31) Desperate Situations Call for Stepping Out in Faith
 - 1) (14:1-14) Desperate Situations – Between a Rock and a Hard Place –
Desperate Situations Call for Faith Instead of Fear in Light of God's Control and His Desire to Glorify His Name
 - a) (:1-4) The Purposes of God Bring Glory to His Name (God is In Control)
 - 1)) (:1-2) Israel = Sitting Ducks
 - 2)) (:3) Pharaoh = Licking His Chops
 - 3)) (:4) Lord = Springing the Trap
 - a)) Hardening Pharaoh's Heart so that He Chases After the Israelites
 - b)) Honoring God's Name through the Slaughter of Pharaoh and His Army
 - c)) Highlighting the Dominion of the Lord

- 4)) (:4b) Israel = Carrying Out the Plan
- b) (:5-9) The Pursuer of God's People Salivates at Opportunities to Exercise Dominion –
(Our Circumstances Can Look Desperate)
 - 1)) (:5) Second Thoughts
 - 2)) (:6-9) Fierce Pursuit
 - a)) (:6-7) Marshalling His Forces
 - b)) (:8-9) Trapping the Israelites
- c) (:10-14) The People of God Can Smell Catastrophe
(Faith Not Fear Must be Our Response)
 - 1)) (:10-12) The Panic of Fear Cries Out in Complaints
 - 2)) (:13-14) The Antidote of Fear Requires Looking to the Lord for Victory
 - a)) (:13a) Reject Fear –
Embrace Courage
 - b)) (:13b) Reject Reliance on Self –
Embrace Faith in God's Salvation
 - c)) (:13c) Reject Walking by Sight –
Embrace Expecting Victory
 - d)) (:14) Reject Fleshly Activity –
Embrace Looking to the Lord for Victory
- 2) (14:15-31) Stepping Out in Faith –
As We Step Out in Faith the Powerful Salvation of the Lord Glorifies His Name
 - a) (:15-16) Get Moving –
Step out in Faith to Accomplish God's Mission
 - 1)) (:15) Mobilize God's People
 - a)) Time to Stop Praying for Guidance
 - b)) Time for Action = Go Forward!
 - 2)) (:16) Make a Way Where There Seems to be No Way
 - a)) Divide the Sea to Make a Way to Move Forward
 - b)) Direct God's People to Walk by Faith to Overcome the Greatest Obstacle
 - b) (:17-18) Prioritize God's Honor –
Look to God to Glorify Himself
 - 1)) (:17a) Strategy = Hardening Hearts –
Leads to Foolish Presumption
 - a)) Harden Hearts – cf. 14:4
 - b)) Foolish Presumption
 - 2)) (:17b-18) Showdown = Seeking Honor
 - c) (:19-20) Maintain Separation –
Between God's People and the World
 - 1)) (:19-20a) God Maintains the Separation
 - a)) Function of the Angel of God

- b)) Function of the Pillar of Cloud
 - 2)) (:20b) Separation Provides Protection
- d) (:21-29) Cross Over in Safety vs Destruction – Parting of the Sea with Two Very Different Outcomes
 - 1)) (:21-22) Safety for Israel
 - a)) (:21a) Role of Moses
 - b)) (:21b) Role of the Lord
 - c)) (:22a) Role of God’s People
 - d)) (:22b) Role of the Walled Up Waters
 - 2)) (:23-28) Destruction for Egyptians
 - a)) (:23-25) Transition from Pursuit to Panic
 - b)) (:26-28) Total Destruction
 - 3)) (:29) Safety for Israel
 - a)) Successful Outcome
 - b)) Supernatural Miracle
- e) (:30-31) See and Believe
 - 1)) (:30a) Historical Fact of Deliverance
 - 2)) (:30b-31) Spiritual Lessons Associated with Seeing and Believing
 - a)) (:30b) Sight of the Dead Egyptians
 - b)) (:31a) Sight of the Miraculous Power of the Lord
 - c)) (:31b) Spiritual Lessons
- c. (15:1-21) Victory Hymn Celebrating God’s Triumph – Those Who Have Experienced Deliverance Should Celebrate God’s:
 - Victory
 - Power
 - Uniqueness
 - Dominion
- 1) (:1-18) Song of Moses (Song of the Sea)
 - a) (:1b-5) Celebrating the Victory of the Lord
 - 1)) (:1b) Victory in Judgment
 - 2)) (:2) Victory in Salvation
 - 3)) (:3-5) Victory as a Conquering Warrior
 - b) (6-10) Celebrating the Power of the Lord (His Weapons)
 - 1)) (:6) Majestic in Power
 - 2)) (:7-8) Fierce in Power
 - 3)) (:9-10) Supreme in Power
 - c) (:11-13) Celebrating the Uniqueness of the Lord
 - 1)) (:11) Unique in His Person and Work
 - 2)) (:12) Unique in His Judgment
 - 3)) (:13) Unique in His Salvation and Guidance
 - d) (:14-18) Celebrating the Dominion of the Lord
 - 1)) (:14-15) Dominion Reflected in the Dread of the Nations

- 2)) (:16-17) Dominion Reflected in the Deliverance of God's People
 - 3)) (:18) The Eternal Dominion of the Lord
- 2) (:19) Story Behind the Rejoicing
 - a) (:19a) Destruction of Egyptian Army
 - b) (:19b) Deliverance of Israel
- 3) (:20-21) Song of Miriam
 - a) (:20) Musical Celebration
 - 1)) Led by Miriam
 - 2)) Accompanied by Instrument of Choice and Involvement of All the Women
 - b) (:21) Verbal Celebration – Focus on the Lord's Person and Work
 - 1)) Focus on the Lord's Person
 - 2)) Focus on the Lord's Work

II. (15:22 – 18:27) WILDERNESS JOURNEY: A REVELATION OF YAHWEH'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE (PROVISION AND PROTECTION)

A. (15:22–27) WATER AT MARAH --

OUR CIRCUMSTANCES ALWAYS CHANGE, BUT OUR FAITH IN GOD'S PROVISION SHOULD NEVER WAVER

- 1. (:22-24) Trials Test Our Attitude Towards Spiritual Leadership
 - a. (:22) Challenge of No Resources – No Water to Drink
 - b. (:23) Challenge of Deceptive Resources – Water Turned out to be Bitter
 - c. (:24) Complaints Against Spiritual Leadership
- 2. (:25-27) Spiritual Leaders Know How to Secure God's Provision for God's People
 - a. (:25a) Cry Out to the Lord for Provision
 - b. (:25b) Change Your Attitude to Embrace God's Testing
 - c. (:26) Commit to Obedience and the Lord will Deliver
 - 1) Priority of Obedience
 - 2) Prevention of Harm
 - 3) Provision of the Lord
 - d. (:27) Continue to Follow the Lord's Leading and He Will Abundantly Provide

B. (16:1–36) MANNA AND QUAIL FROM HEAVEN –

GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO STOP COMPLAINING AND TRUST IN HIS FAITHFUL PROVISION FOR ALL THEIR NEEDS

- 1. (16:1-8) Why Complain Against God?
 - God Directs Both Our Trials and His Gracious Provision to Manifest His Supreme Glory
 - a. (:1-3) Grumbling of God's People Over Trial of Lack of Food
 - 1) (:1) Next Stage on the Wilderness Journey
 - 2) (:2) Next Round of Grumbling Against Spiritual Leaders
 - 3) (:3) Next Expression of Despair

- a)) We Were Better Off in Egypt
 - b)) Your Leadership Has Been a Disaster
 - b. (:4-5) Gracious Provision from God in Raining Bread from Heaven
 - 1) (:4) Daily Provision
 - 2) (:5) Double Portion on the Sixth Day
 - c. (:6-8) Glory of the Lord Manifested in Providing Both Bread and Meat in Time of Trial
 - 1) (:6) Testimony of God's Faithfulness Revealed Each Evening
 - 2) (:7) Testimony of God's Faithfulness Revealed Each Morning
 - 3) (:8) Testimony of God's Faithfulness Communicates Key Spiritual Lessons
 - a)) Lesson #1 = God Provides Abundantly All You Need
 - b)) Lesson #2 = God Hates Your Grumbling Against His Goodness
 - c)) Lesson #3 = God Takes Your Grumbings Personally – When You Attack Your Spiritual Leaders You Really are Attacking God
- 2. (16:9-15) Antidote to Grumbling Against the Lord – God Puts a Stop to Grumbling by Manifesting His Presence and His Provision
 - a. (:9-10) Reminder of the Presence of God Should Stop All Grumbling
 - 1) (:9) The Lord Responds to Our Grumbling
 - 2) (:10) The Lord Reminds His People of His Presence
 - b. (:11-15) Recognition of the Provision of God Should Stop All Grumbling
 - 1) (:11-12) The Lord Responds to Our Grumbling
 - a) Hearing
 - b) Feeding
 - c) Teaching
 - 2) (:13-14) The Lord Provides Needed Sustenance on a Daily Basis
 - a) Provision of Meat in the Evening
 - b) Provision of Manna in the Morning
 - 3) (:15) Identification of God's Gracious Provision
 - a) Identification Unknown
 - b) Identification Revealed
- 3. (16:16-21) Instructions Regarding Our Daily Bread – The Bread of Heaven Must be Gathered in Accordance with God's Instructions and Consumed that Day
 - a. (:16-18) Instructions Regarding Sufficiency and Quantity
 - 1) (:16a) Sufficiency
 - 2) (:16b) Quantity
 - a) On an Individual Basis
 - b) On a Household Basis
 - 3) (:17) Quantity
 - 4) (:18) Sufficiency
 - b. (:19-20) Instructions Regarding Leftovers
 - 1) (:19) No Leftovers
 - 2) (:20) No Exceptions

- a) Disbelief
 - b) Disobedience
 - c) Decomposition
 - d) Disturbing
 - c. (:21) Instructions Regarding Timing and Spoilage
 - 1) Timing
 - 2) Spoilage
- 4. (16:22-36) The Sabbath – God’s Gift of Rest and Worship –
The Pattern of Manna Distribution Reflects the Uniqueness of the Sabbath as a Holy Day Set Aside for Rest and Worship
 - a. (:22-26) Significance of the Sabbath =
Special Day Set Aside from Work to Rest and Worship the Lord
 - 1) (:22-24) Preparation Required
 - a) (:22a) Gather Twice as Much on the Sixth Day
 - b) (:22b-23) Bake Ahead of Time so You Can Worship on the Sabbath
 - c) (:24) Avoiding Work on the Sabbath Won’t Compromise God’s Provision
 - 2) (:25-26) Provision Will be Sufficient
 - a) (:25) No Manna in the Field, But Food on the Table
 - b) (:26) Principle of Working Six Days and Resting from Work on the Sabbath
 - b. (:27-31) Sacrilege of the Sabbath =
Profaning God’s Gracious Gift of the Sabbath Demonstrates Rebellion and Ingratitude
 - 1) (:27) Direct Violation of God’s Sabbath Instructions
 - 2) (:28-30) Divine Patience in Re-Issuing Sabbath Instructions
 - a) (:28) Persistent Rebellion
 - b) (:29) Persevering Instruction
 - c) (:30) Practical Application = Day of Rest
 - 3) (:31) Description of the Manna
 - a) Name
 - b) Appearance
 - c) Taste
 - c. (:32-36) Saving of the Jar of Manna =
Testimony to Future Generations of:
 - Past Redemption from Egypt
 - Present Provision During the Wilderness Journey
 - Future Rest in the Land of Promise
 - 1) (:32) Celebrating God’s Faithfulness
 - 2) (:33-34) Securing a Jar of Manna as a Memorial
 - a) (:33) Instructions to Aaron
 - b) (:34) Implementation by Aaron
 - 3) (:35) Sustaining the Nation Until They Reached the Land of Promise
 - 4) (:36) Aside: Defining an Omer

**C. (17:1–7) WATER FROM THE ROCK --
TESTING GOD BY DOUBTING HIS POWERFUL PRESENCE TO PROVIDE
EXPOSES OUR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY BUT ENHANCES GOD’S
PATIENCE AND GRACE**

1. (:1-3) Testing God Never Helps Your Difficult Situation
 - a. (:1) God Legitimately Testing His People -- Repeating a Prior Failed Test
 - 1) Our Spiritual Journey Includes God Testing Us
 - 2) Trials Can Involve Difficult Challenges
 - b. (:2) God’s People Illegitimately Testing God
 - 1) Trying to Control God – Making Demands on Our Terms
 - 2) Trying to Judge God –
Making God Accountable to Our Demands
 - c. (:3) Grumbling Against God’s Appointed Leadership
 - 1) Legitimate Needs – Denying God’s Provision
 - 2) Irrational Arguments – Denying God’s Protection
2. (:4-7) Testing God Never Nullifies the Gracious Provision from God’s Powerful Presence
 - a. (:4) Priority of Prayer and Dependence on the Lord in Desperate Times
 - b. (:5-6) Gracious Provision from God from a Surprising Source
 - 1) (:5) Preparing the Miracle of Gracious Provision
 - 2) (:6) Performing the Miracle of Gracious Provision
 - c. (:7) Powerful Presence of God Despite the Failure of God’s People
 - 1) Failure of God’s People
 - 2) Fundamental Issue:
Can We Count on the Powerful Presence of God?

**D. (17:8–16) PROTECTION FROM THE AMALEKITES (SPIRITUAL WARFARE) --
VICTORY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE REQUIRES GOD’S PEOPLE
ACTIVELY FIGHTING WHILE DEPENDING ON THE POWER OF THE
LORD WHO DESERVES ALL THE CREDIT**

1. (:8-13) Achieving the Victory in Partnership with the Lord
 - a. (:8) Conflict Against Israel Initiated by the Amalekites
 - b. (:9) Champions for Israel Strategically Deployed
 - 1) Leadership Role of Joshua –
Responsibility to Fight
 - 2) Leadership Role of Moses –
Dependence on the Power of God is the Key
 - c. (:10-13) Champions for Israel Play Out Their Strategic Roles
 - 1) (:10a) Joshua Displays Obedience, Faith and Bravery
 - 2) (:10b-12) Moses and His Supporters Seek God’s Power for Victory
 - 3) (:13) Joshua Leads Conquest of the Amalekites
2. (:14-16) Ascribing All the Credit to the Lord
 - a. (:14) Prophecy of the Eradication of the Amalekites Recorded and Recited
 - b. (:15) Proclamation Giving Credit for the Victory to the Lord via an Altar

- c. (:16) Promise of Ongoing War vs. Amalek

**E. (18:1-27) JETHRO'S VISIT TO MOSES –
TESTIMONY TO THE SUPREMACY OF GOD AND COUNSEL REGARDING THE
VALUE OF SHARED LEADERSHIP**

- 1. (18:1-12) God Making Himself Known to the World –
God's Work of Redemption Enhances His Reputation and Earns Praise and Commitment
 - a. (:1-6) God's Work of Redemption Enhances His Reputation
(Testifies to the Watching World)
 - 1) (:1a) Testimony Impacts Jethro
 - 2) (:1b) Testimony Focuses on God's Work of Redemption
 - 3) (:2-6) Testimony Prompts a Family Reunion for Moses
and His Wife and Sons
 - a) (:2-4) Reunion Participants
 - b) (:5) Reunion Logistics
 - c) (:6) Reunion Introduction
 - b. (:7-12) God's Work of Redemption Earns Praise and Commitment
from Jethro and Moses
 - 1) (:7) Renewing Family Relationships and Reviewing Personal
Testimonies
 - a) Respect and Affection
 - b) Concern for Each Other's Welfare
 - 2) (:8) Reviewing Personal Testimonies of God's Faithfulness
 - 3) (:9-11) Rejoicing in the Supremacy of the Lord
 - a) (:9) Rejoicing in the Goodness of the Lord
 - b) (:10) Rejoicing in the Deliverance Accomplished by the Lord
 - c) (:11) Rejoicing in the Greatness of the Lord
 - 4) (:12) Remembering God's Work in Sacrifices and Fellowship Meal
 - a) Participating in Sacrifices
 - b) Participating in Fellowship Meal
- 2. (18:13-27) Administrative Delegation of Judging Duties –
Progressive Revelation Introduces the Importance of Shared Leadership
 - a. (:13-16) Problem Recognition = One-Man Centered Leadership
 - 1) (:13) Observing of the Process of Judging – Takes Moses All Day
 - 2) (:14) Identifying the Bottleneck of the Process of Judging –
Depends Completely on Moses
 - 3) (:15-16) Justifying the Process of Judging Based on the
Essential Role of Moses
 - a) (:15) Essential in Inquiring of God
 - b) (:16a) Essential in Rendering a Decision
 - c) (:16b) Essential in Communicating God's Laws
 - b. (:17-23) Corrective Counsel = Shared Leadership
 - 1) (:17-18) Counsel Regarding the Negative Impact of the Current
Process
 - a) (:17) Judged as "Not Good"
 - b) (:18) Judged as Burdensome -- Leading to Burn-out

- 2) (:19-23) Counsel Regarding the Corrective Action to Fix the Process
 - a) (:19a) Listen to Counsel and Trust the Lord
 - b) (:19b-20) Concentrate Your Efforts on Essential Functions
 - c) (:21-22) Delegate Judging Responsibility to Qualified Leaders
 - d) (:23) Expect Positive Results
- c. (:24-27) Successful Implementation
 - 1) (:24) Embracing the Counsel
 - 2) (:25-26) Implementing the Changes
 - a) (:25) Selecting and Installing Qualified Judges
 - b) (:26) Differentiating Between Difficult and Minor Disputes
 - 3) (:27) Parting with Jethro

III. (19:1–24:18) COVENANT AND THE LAW: A REVELATION OF YAHWEH'S CHARACTER AND EXPECTATION FOR HIS SPECIAL NATION

A. (19:1–25) PREPARATION TO ACCEPT THE COVENANT

GOD'S PEOPLE PREPARE FOR INTIMATE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BY A PROCESS OF CONSECRATION AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES THAT RESPECT GOD'S AWESOME TRANSCENDENCE

- 1. (:1-9) Preparing God's People for Covenant Relationship
 - a. (:1-2) Fulfillment of the Promise to Bring Israel to Sinai
 - b. (:3-8) Features of the Treaty Preparing God's People for Covenant Relationship
 - 1) (:3) Summons by God
 - 2) (:4) Historical Prologue – Reminding Them of Their Redemption
 - 3) (:5a) Stipulations – Requiring Obedience and Faithfulness
 - 4) (:5b-6) Blessings –
Revealing 3 Distinct Privileges of the Believing Community
 - 5) (:7-8) Acceptance in a Solemn Assembly
 - c. (:9) Fear-Inspiring Mode of Communication that Will Validate the Leadership of Moses
- 2. (:10-15) Prescribing Consecration and Boundaries
 - a. (:10-11) Consecration
 - b. (:12-13) Boundaries
 - c. (:14) Consecration
 - d. (:15) Boundaries
- 3. (:16-25) Producing Holy Fear and Reverence for God's Transcendence
 - a. (:16-17) Demonstration of Divine Majesty
 - 1) (:16) Creating Fear
 - 2) (:17) Creating Expectation
 - b. (:18-25) Warning to Maintain Distance – Don't Get Too Close
 - 1) (:18) Visual Display
 - 2) (:19-20) Vocal Demonstration
 - 3) (:21-22) Violent Danger
 - 4) (:23-25) Vouching Dialogue

B. (20:1–23:33) PRESENTATION OF THE COVENANT

1. (20:1-21) Ten Commandments –

The Ten Commandments Display the Character of God and Reveal His Moral Will for His Covenant People

(:1-2) Preamble and Prologue – God’s Unique Role as Redeemer

- 1) Preamble – Who God Is
- 2) Prologue – What God Has Done for His Covenant People
- a. (:3) First Commandment – No Other Gods
- b. (:4-6) Second Commandment – Don’t Worship Idols
- c. (:7) Third Commandment – Respect the Name of the Lord
- d. (:8-11) Fourth Commandment – Sabbath Observance
- e. (:12) Fifth Commandment – Obedience to Parents (Authority)
- f. (:13) Sixth Commandment – Don’t Murder (Sanctity of Life)
- g. (:14) Seventh Commandment – Don’t Commit Adultery
- h. (:15) Eighth Commandment – Don’t Steal
- i. (:16) Ninth Commandment – Don’t Bear False Witness (vs. Truth)
- j. (:17) Tenth Commandment – Don’t Covet (vs. Contentment)
- (:18-21) Epilogue – Response of the People and of Moses

1) (:18) People Perceive God’s Majesty and Tremble

- a) Awesome Display of God’s Majesty
- b) Awareness of God’s Transcendence

2) (:19) People Request that Moses Acts as Intermediary

3) (:20) Moses Reassures the People

- a) Don’t Be Afraid
- b) Don’t Miss the Point

4) (:21) People and Moses Respond Very Differently

- a) People Keep Their Distance
- b) Moses Approaches God

2. (20:22-26) Introduction to the Book of the Covenant –

Our Relationship with the One True God Requires Approaching Him and Worshiping Him on His Terms

a. (:22-23) Prohibition of Substituting Man-Made Idols for the Worship of the One True God

- 1) (:22) Based on the Authority of God Who Communicates with His People (Authority of the Law and of His Word) to Dictate His Terms
- 2) (23) Based on the Uniqueness of the One True God

b. (:24-26) Prescription for Meeting God and Worshiping Him on His Terms

- 1) (:24) Worship Involving Appropriate Sacrifices In Dependence on God’s Sovereign Grace Meets with God’s Approval
 - a) Nature of Proper Altar
 - b) Nature of Proper Sacrifices
 - c) Nature of God’s Approval
- 2) (:25-26) Worship Involving Man’s Prideful Work-Based Efforts Rejected

- a) (:25) Rejection of Man's Efforts (Contributing His Own Workmanship)
 - b) (:26) Rejection of Man's Pride (Trying to Ascend to God)
- 3. (21:1-11) Merciful Provisions for Hebrew Slaves – Freedom and Protection Afforded to Hebrew Slaves
 - (:1) Prologue
 - a. (:2-6) Freedom Possible for Hebrew Male Slaves Unless They Choose Permanent Servitude
 - 1) (:2) Conditions of Service
 - 2) (:3) Normal Situations
 - 3) (:4-6) Special Situations
 - b. (:7-11) Protection Mandated for Hebrew Female Slaves
 - 1) (:7) Different Situation for Female Hebrew Slaves
 - 2) (:8) Options for Change in Status if Found Displeasing
 - a) Possibility of Redemption
 - b) Prohibition of Being Sold to a Foreigner
 - 3) (:9) Married Daughter Status
 - 4) (:10-11) Options When Displaced as Wife
 - a) (:10) Provision of Basic Needs
 - b) (:11) Provision for Freedom Without Payment
- 4. (21:12-17) Capital Punishment Offenses – Certain Egregious Crimes are Worthy of Capital Punishment
 - a. (:12-14) Murder and Manslaughter
 - 1) (:12) Murder – General Rule
 - 2) (:13) Unintentional Homicide (Manslaughter) – City of Refuge
 - 3) (:14) Intentional Homicide – No Escape from Death Penalty
 - b. (:15) Violence Towards Parents
 - c. (:16) Kidnapping and Slave Trading
 - c. (:17) Cursing Parents
- 5. (21:18 – 22:15) Violence to People and Animals / Property Rights – The Book of the Covenant Lays Down God's Laws (Including Principles of Punishment and Restitution) Dealing with Violence to People and Animals and with Property Rights
 - a. (21:18-27) Violence Associated with Humans and Principles of Punishment and Restitution
 - 1) (:18-21) Injuries Caused by Hitting Someone
 - a) (:18-19) Hitting Someone in a Mutual Quarrel
 - b) (:20-21) Hitting a Slave
 - 2) (:22-27) Injuries Potentially Causing Permanent Injury
 - a) (:22-25) Collateral Damage
 - b) (:26-27) Injuries Against Slaves
 - b. (21:28-36) Violence Associated with Animals and Principles of Punishment and Restitution
 - 1) (:28-32) Animals Hurting People
 - a) (:28-29) Case of an Animal Killing a Person
 - b) (:30) Mercy Possible When Ransom is Accepted

- c) (:31) No Differentiation Due to Sex of Victim
 - d) (:32) Lesser Penalty When a Slave is Killed
 - 2) (:33-34) Animals Hurt by Human Negligence
 - 3) (:35-36) Animals Hurt by Someone Else's Animal
 - a) (:35) Unexpected Behavior Results in Equal Settlement
 - b) (:36) Expected Behavior Results in Unequal Settlement
 - c. (22:1-15) Property Laws and Principles of Restitution
 - 1) (:1-4) Dealing with Thieves
 - a) (:1) Dealing with Stealing Livestock – Not Recoverable
 - b) (:2-3) Dealing with Thief Caught Breaking In
 - c) (:4) Dealing with Stealing Livestock – Recoverable
 - 2) (:5-6) Damages Due to Neglect
 - a) (:5) Caused by Straying Animals
 - b) (:6) Caused by Out of Control Fire
 - 3) (:7-13) Disputes Over Custody of Property in Safekeeping
 - a) (:7-9) Property Reported Stolen
 - b) (:10-13) Property Loss as it Relates to the Issue of Restitution
 - 4) (:14-15) Disputes Over Property Borrowed
 - a) (:14) Conditions Requiring Restitution
 - b) (:15) Conditions Not Requiring Restitution
6. (22:16 – 23:9) More Religious, Social and Judicial Obligations –
 The Book of the Covenant Reveals How Our View of God Must Impact Our Relationship
 with Others (Especially the Vulnerable) and Our Pursuit of Justice and Holiness
- a. (22:16-17) Providing Dowry Payment for Seducing a Virgin
 - 1) (:16) Necessity of a Dowry
 - 2) (:17) No Necessity for a Marriage
 - b. (22:18-20) Pronouncing Death Penalty for Spiritual Adultery
 - 1) (:18) Sorcery
 - 2) (:19) Bestiality
 - 3) (:20) Polytheism or Idolatry
 - c. (22:21-27) Prohibiting Oppression Against the Vulnerable
 - 1) (:21) Oppressing Foreigners
 - 2) (:22-24) Afflicting Widows and Orphans
 - 3) (:25-27) Charging of Interest to Poor Israelites
 - d. (22:28-31) Pursuing Holiness
 - 1) (:28) Cursing Authorities
 - a) Cursing God
 - b) Cursing Rulers
 - 2) (:29-30) Consecrating Offerings to the Lord in a Timely Fashion
 - a) (:29a) Offerings
 - b) (:29b-30) First-born
 - 3) (:31) Call to Holiness
 - e. (23:1-9) Pursuing Justice
 - 1) (:1-3) Integrity in the Context of the Legal System

- a) (:1) Avoid False Reports
 - b) (:2) Resist Peer Pressure
 - c) (:3) Don't Show Partiality
 - 2) (:4-5) Assistance Even Towards Your Personal Enemies
 - a) (:4) Catch and Return
 - b) (:5) Release and Return
 - 3) (:6-9) Integrity in the Context of the Legal System
 - a) (:6) No Perversion of Justice
 - b) (:7) No False Charges or Wrongful Punishment
 - c) (:8) No Taking of Bribes
 - d) (:9) No Oppression of Strangers
- 7. (23:10-19) Sabbath Observances and Feast Celebrations –
God Instructed Israel to Observe Sabbath Laws and Celebrate Three Annual Pilgrim Festivals
 - a. (23:10-13) Sabbath Observances
 - 1) (:10-11) Observe the Sabbath Year = Every Seventh Year
 - a) (:10) Work the Land for Six Years
 - b) (:11a) Rest the Land on the Seventh Year
 - c) (:11b) Same Pattern for Vineyard and Olive Grove
 - 2) (:12) Observe the Sabbath Day = Every Seventh Day
 - a) Work for Six Days
 - b) Rest on the Seventh Day
 - 3) (:13) Guard Against Idolatry
 - a) Be Vigilant
 - b) Be Loyal
 - b. (23:14-19) Pilgrimage Feasts
 - 1) (:14-17) Observe Three Annual Feasts
 - a) (:14) General Command
 - b) (:15-16) Specific Feasts
 - c) (:17) General Command
 - 2) (:18-19) Obey Specific Instructions Regarding Sacrificial Worship
 - a) (:18a) Don't Mix Blood with Bread
 - b) (:18b) Don't Save Leftovers
 - c) (:19a) Give Your Choice First Fruits
 - d) (:19b) Avoid Fertility Cult Practices
- 8. (23:20-33) Epilogue of the Book of the Covenant –
The Divine Promise of Guidance and Victory Motivates Obedience in Loyal Worship
 - a. (:20-23) Promised Guarding and Guiding to Reach the Promised Land –
Contingent on Obedience
 - 1) (:20) Promised Guarding and Guiding
 - 2) (:21) Contingency of Obedience
 - a) Obey
 - b) Don't Rebel
 - 3) (:22-23) Leadership of the Angel of the Lord Secures the Victory

- a) (:22) Obedience Makes the Lord the Adversary of Your Enemies
 - b) (:23) Victory Assured by the Leadership of the Angel of the Lord
- b. (24-33) Promised Victory Over the Enemies in the Land
 - 1) (:24-25a) Two Human Requirements for Victory Associated with Loyal Worship
 - a) (:24) Reject Idolatry
 - b) (:25a) Serve the Lord
 - 2) (:25b-26) Four Physical Blessings Associated with Victory
 - a) (:25b) Material Provision
 - b) (:25c – 26a) Health
 - c) (:26a) Fertility
 - d) (:26b) Longevity
 - 3) (:27-31) Three Divine Keys to Victory
 - a) (:27-28) Unleashing the Terror of the Lord
 - b) (:29-31) Driving Out All Enemies Gradually
 - c) (:31) Protecting the Boundaries of the Land from Enemies
 - 4) (:32-33) Two Fundamental Principles of Maintaining Separation
 - a) (:32) No Concessions to Allow Them to Live in the Land
 - b) (:33) No Comingling Due to Threat of Idolatry

**C. (24:1–18) RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT --
THE RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT IS ROOTED IN THE BLOOD OF
THE COVENANT AND IS DESIGNED TO MANIFEST THE GLORY OF GOD**

- 1. (:1-11) The Blood of the Covenant Allows God's People to Enter into a Relationship of Worship and Obedience
 - a. (:1-2) God's Holiness Constrains His Accessibility and Requires Mediation
 - 1) (:1) Upward Call -- Priority of Drawing Near to God to Worship
 - 2) (:2) Principle of Representation Due to God's Holiness
 - b. (:3-4a) God's Word Dictates the Terms of the Relationship = Obedience
 - 1) (:3a) Recounting Orally the Words of God
 - 2) (:3b) Responding in Commitment to Obey the Words of God
 - 3) (:4a) Recording in Written Form the Words of God
 - c. (:4b-8) God's Propitiation Depends on the Blood of the Covenant – 7 Key Actions:
 - 1) (:4b) Building the Altar for Covenant Sacrifices
 - 2) (:4c) Erecting Twelve Stone Pillars
 - 3) (:5) Offering Covenant Sacrifices
 - 4) (:6) Pouring Blood in Basins and Sprinkling Blood on the Altar
 - 5) (:7a) Reading the Book of the Covenant
 - 6) (:7b) Committing to Obey the Covenant
 - 7) (:8) Final Sprinkling the Blood of the Covenant on the People
 - d. (:9-11) God's Appearance Inspires Both Fear and Intimacy

- Meeting with God
 - 1) (:9) Approaching God
 - 2) (:10) Facing God and Seeing His Majesty
 - 3) (:11a) Fearing God and Experiencing His Mercy
 - 4) (:11b) Fellowshiping with God and Eating Together in the Context of a Covenant Ratification Meal
- 2. (:12-18) The Covenant Relationship is Designed to Manifest the Glory of the Lord
 - a. (:12-14) God Initiates and Defines the Covenant Relationship
 - 1) (:12-13) Upward Call – Priority of Drawing Near to God to Worship
 - 2) (:14) Instructions to the Elders
 - b. (:15-18) God Manifests His Glory in the Context of Covenant Relationship
 - Meeting with God
 - 1) (:15-17) 3 Manifestations of the Presence of God = His Glory
 - a) (:15-16a) Glory in the Cloud
 - b) (:16b) Glory in the Voice of God
 - c) (:17) Glory Appearing as a Consuming Fire
 - 2) (:18) Moses Enters Into the Presence of God

IV. (25:1–40:38) THE TABERNACLE AND WORSHIP: THE IMPORTANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND THE REVELATION OF YAHWEH'S PURPOSE

A. (25:1–31:18) INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABERNACLE AND ITS SERVICE: THE RIGHT WAY TO GOD'S PRESENCE

B. (32:1–34:35) THE GOLD CALF: THE WRONG WAY TO SECURE GOD'S PRESENCE

C. (35:1–40:38) REPORT OF BUILDING THE TABERNACLE: SECURING YAHWEH'S PRESENCE IN YAHWEH'S WAY

TEXT: Exodus 1:1-22

TITLE: DESPERATE TIMES IN EGYPT FOR GOD'S PEOPLE – BLESSING AND PROTECTION

BIG IDEA:

THE BACKDROP FOR DIVINE DELIVERANCE AND THE FULFILMENT OF COVENANT PROMISES SHOWCASES GOD'S BLESSING AND PROTECTION DESPITE SATAN'S EFFORTS TO THWART GOD'S PURPOSES

INTRODUCTION:

Four hundred years is a long time for God's people to be experiencing dark days in Egypt – oppressed and afflicted. The covenant promises must have seemed empty and so far away. Yet God was still at work to prepare the way for divine deliverance and for the fulfilment of everything He had promised to the patriarchs about a land and a multitude of a people for His own possession. God does His best work in the darkest of times – bringing blessing and protection to His people and thwarting Satan's efforts to fight against God's purposes.

The Book of Exodus is the continuation of the story began in Genesis. The direct connections are clear and significant. The story lines played out in Exodus will initiate threads you can trace throughout the rest of history – with direct application to our times today. God sees the desperate plight of His people and cares. He is with His people to accomplish His purposes even in the most oppressive circumstances. We should never lose hope or doubt His ability to deliver.

Constable: The central idea [in this pericope] is that God faithfully fulfills His covenant promises in spite of severe and life-threatening opposition. Even Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth could do nothing to thwart God's purpose. In fact, God actually used Pharaoh's opposition as a means of carrying out His promises.

I. (:1-7) INITIAL EXPLOSIVE GROWTH OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL IN EGYPT = INDICATION OF GOD'S BLESSING

A. (:1-5) Reminder of God's Covenant Promises -- Names of the Sons of Jacob / Israel

1. (:1) Summary Statement of Israel's Background

“Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household.”

Tim Chester: The book of Exodus begins with the word “*and*”. It's missed out in most English translations, but it's there in the original Hebrew, in which Exodus was first written. . . It immediately alerts us to the fact that this story is part of a bigger story, The end of the previous book, Genesis, has already hinted at a sequel (**Genesis 50:24-**

25), and the first nine words of Exodus are an exact repetition of **Genesis 46:8**: “*These are the names of the sons of Israel*”. The book of Exodus is in many ways chapter two of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. And so the whole book needs to be read in the light of what has gone before. . . the promise of a people and the promise of a land.

John Hannah: the use of the simple copulative “*and*” to begin a book (cf. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 2 Chronicles). This feature appears to indicate that the writer was conscious of the fact that he was contributing to an ongoing sequence of revelation and narration.

2. (:2-4) Eleven Sons of Jacob Heading Up the Tribes

a. (:2-3a) First 6 Sons of Leah

“*Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah;
Issachar, Zebulun*”

b. (:3b) Second Son of Rachel

“*and Benjamin,*”

[Joseph, Rachel’s second born son, not mentioned because he was already in Egypt]

c. (:4) Four Sons of Maidservants

1) Two Sons of Rachel’s Maidservant Bilhah

“*Dan and Naphtali,*”

2) Two Sons of Leah’s Maidservant Zilpah

“*Gad and Asher.*”

3. (:5a) Total Number of Descendants of Jacob

“*And all the persons who came from the loins of Jacob
were seventy in number,*”

Speaking of the total number of males – cf. **Gen. 46:27**; **Deut. 10:22**; **Acts 7:14**

David Thompson: Now it is specifically mentioned that these are the ones who came from the “*loins of Jacob*,” who were 70 in number. Now if we look at **Genesis 46:26**, the number says 66 persons came to Egypt. So how do we arrive at the number 70?

The solution is found in **Genesis 46:27**. If you include “*Jacob*,” that makes 67 and then if you include Joseph and his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, who were already in Egypt, that makes 70. So the total number is exactly right, 70 Israelis are in Egypt.

Also if you take the number 66 (**Gen. 46:26**) and leave out Joseph and Jacob, but add Ephraim and Manasseh, you get 68. Then if you add the seven grandsons of Joseph—Manasseh had three sons – Machir; Asriel; Zelophehad (**I Chron. 7:14-15**) and Ephraim had four sons – Shuthelah, Shuthelah, Ezer, Elead (**I Chron. 7:20-24**) – the

total number is 75 ($68 + 7 = 75$), which is exactly the number Stephen cited in the book of Acts (**Acts 7:14**).

4. (:5b) Unique Status of Joseph

“but Joseph was already in Egypt.”

Key – study how Joseph ended up in Egypt so that you can review the faithfulness and providence of God in His goodness taking what looked like evil and transforming it for good for Joseph and his brethren

B. (:6-7) Record of God’s Abundant Blessing

1. (:6) Expiring Generation

“And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.”

2. (:7) Explosive Growth

“But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.”

John Hannah: God providentially protected the children of Jacob (also called Israel) and increased their descendants from a small group to a large segment of the population in Egypt.

II. (:8-22) SUBSEQUENT EXPLOSIVE GROWTH DESPITE OPPRESSION AND GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS AT POPULATION CONTROL = INDICATION OF GOD’S PROTECTION

A. (:8-10) Israel Viewed as a Major Threat by the New King of Egypt

1. (:8) New King

“Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”

This king of Egypt (or Pharaoh) must be viewed as a type of God’s ultimate enemy = Satan – who is constantly trying to fight God’s kingdom agenda and thwart His purposes

John Hannah: no appreciation for Joseph’s character or achievements

2. (:9-10) New Antagonistic Stance Towards God’s People

a. (:9) Motivation of Fear

“And he said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we.’”

b. (:10) Mission of Opposition

“Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and in the event of war, they also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us, and depart from the land.”

The logic of the king is easy to understand; they gave safe haven to these relatives of Joseph and now the numbers have increased exponentially so that they pose a definite threat to Egypt

John Hannah: The situation called for an extremely delicate balance: Pharaoh needed to maintain the Israelite presence as an economic asset without thereby jeopardizing Egypt's national security.

B. (:11-14) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Increasing Oppression by Slave Labor (Satanic Strategy #1)

1. (:11) Work Them to Death

a. Afflictions

“So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor.”

b. Accomplishments

“And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.”

Deffinbaugh: Pharaoh's plan, which was readily adopted by the people, was to enslave the Israelites, and to tighten their control over them. A substantial part of this plan seems to be that of intimidation and oppression, so demoralizing and frightening the Israelites that they would not dare to resist their masters. In addition, their value as slave labor would be utilized to strengthen the nation both economically and militarily. The storage cities of Pithom and Rameses were built by the Israelites with brick and mortar, and the fields were worked by them as well. Josephus claims that Israelite manpower was also used to dig canals. . . The Egyptian response to the continued phenomenal numerical growth of the Israelites was to increase the workload and to intensify the harassment and cruelty imposed on them by their taskmasters (**1:14**). It is apparent that these tactics did not work, which led to an even more evil plot directed against the people of God, as outlined in verses **15-21**.

2. (:12) Watch Them Multiply

“But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel.”

Constable: The first plan (plan A) was to make the Hebrews toil hard in manual labor. Normally a population grows more slowly under oppression than in prosperous times. However, the opposite took place in the case of the Israelites ("*the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied*"; **v. 12**). Physical oppression also tends to crush the spirit, and in this objective the Egyptians were somewhat successful (**2:23-24**).

3. (:13-14) Work Them Harder

“And the Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks

*and at all kinds of labor in the field,
all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.”*

John Hannah: “bitter” – a fact that would later be commemorated in the Passover meal, which was eaten “with bitter herbs” (12:8). The emphasis of vv. 8-14 falls on the “ruthlessness” of the work and servitude imposed on Israel.

C. (:15-21) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Government Attempts at Population Control via Infanticide and Genocide (Satanic Strategy #2)

1. (:15-16) Cruel Command of Pharaoh to the Hebrew Midwives

“Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other was named Puah; and he said, ‘When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birth stool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.’”

Deffinbaugh: What a gracious gift of God to these two God-fearing Hebrew midwives—He records their names for an example to believers throughout the centuries. God doesn’t really care that much about the name of the king, king “what’s his name,” but He is intimately concerned with Shiphrah and Puah, for they trust and obey Him. What better honor than to be known and remembered by God.

Bob Roe: Shiphrah, which probably means "beauty" and Puah, which probably means "splendor."

2. (:17) Commendation for the Midwives

a. Motivated by Fear of God

“But the midwives feared God,”

John Hannah: Their reverence for life reflected a reverence for God.

b. Disobeyed Pharaoh

“and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them,”

First example in the Scriptures of civil disobedience where the laws of the political ruler were in clear violation of the laws of God and had to be disobeyed. **Rom. 13:5**

c. Protected the Infant Boys

“but let the boys live.”

3. (:18-19) Confrontation between Pharaoh and the Midwives

a. (:18) Interrogation

“So the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said to them, ‘Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?’”

b. (:19) Interpretation of the Circumstances

“And the midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them.’”

2 views:

- this could be a clever cover-up
- this could be the simple explanation of what happened

4. (:20-21) Corresponding Divine Blessing to the Midwives

a. (:20) Multiplied Them

*“So God was good to the midwives,
and the people multiplied, and became very mighty.”*

From this blessing it would seem that the midwives were directly responsible at least in part for the protection of the Hebrew infants

b. (:21) Established Households for Them

“And it came about because the midwives feared God, that He established households for them.”

John Hannah: God blessed the Israelites in general with increased fertility (cf. v. 7), and bestowed mercy on Shiphrah and Puah in particular. God’s purpose in granting the increase seems to have been to stir the ire and fear of the Egyptians so that they would more severely discomfort God’s people and thus cause them to desire deliverance. So immediate blessing effected a negative action that later precipitated a larger future blessing.

D. (:22) Israel Continues to Grow Despite Intensified Government Attempts at Population Control via Infanticide and Genocide (Satanic Strategy #3)

*“Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying,
‘Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile,
and every daughter you are to keep alive.’”*

John Hannah: A single concluding and transitional verse summarizes **chapter 1**. Pharaoh needed to openly command by decree what had proved abortive by mere speeches. “*All his people*” were made agents of this crime in order to nullify the divine work of increased Hebrew children. This clearly parallels Herod’s action at the birth of Christ. Thus the third program began.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have times seemed the darkest for you and what gave you hope?

2) Why is it so important to maintain that God is sovereign even over the evil decisions and practices of wicked world rulers?

3) How can we imitate the faith and commitment of these two mid wives who are singled out for their civil disobedience and heroism?

4) What parallels do you see between the terrible decrees of Pharaoh regarding the Hebrew infants and our own country's endorsement of abortion on demand?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The three prominent subjects of Exodus are:

- (1) God's plan for deliverance,
- (2) God's guidance for morality, and
- (3) God's order for worship.

As the writer begins his work, however, another prominent fact that governs the whole theology of Exodus is immediately set forth: **vv. 1-7** are a virtual commentary on the ancient promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea (e.g.. **Gen 15:5; 22:17**). In fact, as if to underscore this connection with Genesis, **vv. 1-4** virtually repeat **Genesis 35:22-26; v. 5** is a reiteration of **Genesis 46:27; v. 6** of **Genesis 50:26**; and **v. 7** of **Genesis 1:28**. However, these repetitions were not without some new features. The reference to "*families*" or "*households*" in **v. 1** was new, as was the fact that Joseph was treated separately from his brothers in **v. 5**; so also was the notice in **v. 6** that "*all that generation*" along with Jacob's twelve sons had died.

History, at once the scandal and the uniqueness of biblical faith, was the sphere of God's revelation. While heathenism and modern scientific naturalism affirm that only nature is ultimately real, Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism attempt to extricate man from both nature and time. In this Book of Exodus, both nature and time are real and not bothersome nuisances. Rather they are participants in the fabric of God's revelation. Thus our book begins with a list of names and takes us to real places and personages in the Near East.

David Thompson: (:1-7)

GOD WANTED HIS PEOPLE TO LEAVE EGYPT AND GO TO THEIR PROMISED LAND AND SO HE SOVEREIGNLY STARTS DIRECTING CIRCUMSTANCES AND EVENTS IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH THIS.

The way God gets His people to do His will is to cause some negative things to hit. The primary point of this book is to get Israel out of Egypt. As we said last time, the noun "*Exodus*" means a way out.

There are three main, simple geographical divisions to the book of Exodus:

- Geographical Division #1 - Israel is in Egypt and is taken out of Egypt. **1:1-15:21**
- Geographical Division #2 - Israel moves from Red Sea to Sinai. **15:21-18:27**
- Geographical Division #3 - Israel is at Sinai. **19:1-40:38**

As we come to the opening of the book of Exodus, there are primarily four historical facts that are brought out in this text:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Jacob’s entire family came to Egypt. **1:1**

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – All of Israel was in Egypt. **1:2-5**

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – Joseph died and so all of that generation. **1:6**

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – God was greatly blessing and increasing Israel. **1:7**

According to the calculations of **Dr. Malthus**, population tends to double itself every 25 years. He said if you do the math on all of this, in less than three centuries the Israelites would have grown to a population of over 2 million people. So we may assume that if you add the women and children to the 600,000 men over 20, this nation, Israel, has flourished to the tune of about **2 million people**. (Cited from **George Rawlinson**, Exodus, p. 9.)

There are three concluding observations to make here:

Observation #1 - Life was great for Egypt as long as they treated God’s people right.

God was blessing His people who were living in Egypt at the time and the Egyptians were sharing in those blessings. When the Egyptians turn against God’s people, it becomes the beginning of the end. When there are believers in the nation, state, city or organization, the whole community benefits. God blesses His people and those who are kind to His people share in those blessings.

Observation #2 - Life was so good for Israel that Israel forgot this wasn’t home.

This is such an important point. Had God permitted everything to sail along in Egypt as it was, then Israel would never even think in terms of the fact that we need to get out of here. Let’s face it; if you are in a place where everything is great and you are prospering and flourishing, the danger is to neglect God’s Word and dependency on Him. What would prompt God’s people to want to move if everything was positive? Why would Israel ever want to leave Egypt when they are living in the best that Egypt has to offer? One way God will direct His people and get His people to make a move is to cause everything to fall apart.

Observation #3 - As sinful as some of these people had been, they were still God's people and God, in His grace, was going to lead them to do His will.

You don't have to be perfect to have God lead you and bless you. God is a God of amazing grace. If anyone will turn to the Lord and follow Him, He will bless abundantly and make one very fruitful.

Steven Cole: Hurry Up and Wait – Ex. 1:1 – 2:10

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know what it means to wait on God. God's ways are not our ways and His timing is often not our timing. But what if you waited on God your entire life without hearing from Him? And your kids and their kids and their kids keep waiting, but still no word from God. Centuries have gone by and things are getting worse, not better. You and your people are enslaved by a cruel dictator who is making life miserable. Then, to make matters worse, he orders that all of your male babies be slaughtered.

That's the situation when the Book of Exodus opens.

His story begins in the Book of Exodus. **Philip Ryken** (Exodus [Crossway], p. 27) sums up the theme of Exodus as, "**Saved for God's glory.**" The book falls into three main sections: Deliverance, showing God's power (**1-18**); the Law, showing God's holiness and the holiness He expects of His people (**19-24**); the Tabernacle, revealing God's presence in worship (**25-40**). The entire book shows how God kept His covenant with Abraham by making a great nation of his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. It also shows how God took Israel from bondage to an evil tyrant to servitude to a loving God. At first, they are forced to construct buildings for Pharaoh; by the end, they gladly give to build a dwelling place for God (**Tremper Longman III**, How to Read Exodus [IVP], p. 48).

In the opening section that gives the history and current conditions surrounding the birth of Moses, the message is:

Because in His time God faithfully keeps His covenant promises, wait expectantly on Him.

1. God faithfully keeps His covenant promises.

Why is there this emphasis on the Israelites multiplying? Moses is telling us that in spite of the efforts of the most powerful monarch on earth to thwart God's covenant promise to Abraham, God is keeping His word! Even Pharaoh can't stop Abraham's descendants from becoming as numerous as the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore! And through Moses and his successor Joshua, God will eventually bring them into the land that He had promised to Abraham. Just before he dies Joshua affirms to the Israelites (**Josh. 23:14**), "*Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled*

for you, not one of them has failed.” So in Exodus 1, the repeated emphasis on the Israelites multiplying shows us that God is keeping His covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants.

2. God faithfully keeps His covenant promises in His time and way, not our time and way.

- A. God’s timing is not our timing.
- B. God’s ways are not our ways.

3. Wait expectantly on Him.

You may wonder, “Why does God make us wait? Why doesn’t He answer my prayers quickly? Why the delay?”

- A. Wait because God’s delays in keeping His covenant promises stem from His patience and mercy.
- B. Wait on God even though it often involves increasing trials while you wait.
- C. Wait because God is silently working behind the scenes as His people go through trials.
- D. Wait because God uses these increasing trials to prepare us to appreciate His deliverance when it comes.

As I said earlier, if Israel had been content in Egypt, they wouldn’t have been open to going to Canaan, in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham. If life is sweet, we don’t see our need for the Savior or cry out to Him for salvation. But, their difficult times did not negate God’s covenant promises. The trials that we go through should make our longing for heaven all the greater.

Deffinbaugh: Pharaoh’s Fears and Israel’s Faith

Have you not experienced times in your life, especially times of adversity, when it appeared as though God was not present? The period of time depicted in the first chapter of Exodus is one of those times—a time when from all appearances, God was silent. Nevertheless, God was there. We shall learn to see His hand in those “silent times” as we study this first chapter of Exodus more carefully. . .

let us keep two words in mind which will enable us to summarize the role of this section [1:1-7]. The two words are CONTINUITY and CONTRAST. We are reminded of the continuity of God’s program by the fact that the promises and purposes of God commenced in the Book of Genesis are continued in the Book of Exodus. We see the contrast between these two books: a small handful of men entered Egypt to dwell with Joseph, but a great multitude will leave Egypt with Moses to dwell in the promised

land. It is this rapid growth of Israel, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and in preparation for possessing the land, which was the result of God's providential dealings with Israel under the cruel hand of the Egyptians. Let us look then at the providential hand of God in this period of Israel's history. . .

he application of these verses to the present American abomination of abortion on demand should be obvious. There is a deadly sequence of events in **Exodus 1** which closely parallels the origins and rise of abortion in America. It begins with a disdain for those who threaten our self-interests. The Egyptians disdained the Israelites who seemed to endanger their position of power and prestige, just as Americans disdain children as an economic liability and an unwanted burden. The killing of the Israelites began as a matter of national policy, just as the Supreme Court's decision opened the door to the mass slaughter of the innocent unborn. The killing is subtle at first, and then much more blatant. Pharaoh seemed to want the midwives to arrange for the death of the boy babies, making murder appear to be a result of the birth process. Finally, the boy babies were commanded to be thrown (after their birth) into the Nile. So too in our day, the abortions which once were allowed early in pregnancy now are performed very late, and children are also terminated after birth as well. Just as the murder of the babies was selective (boys only) in Egypt, so we kill babies for being of the "wrong" sex or for having a possible imperfection which may make our lives inconvenient. Let us not avoid seeing the great similarities between the murder of the infants in that day and in our own. Let us be like those midwives and have no part in such murder. . .

As we consider the events of Exodus 1 we need to recognize that there are several points of view. From the human perspective, there is the selfish and sinful motivation of the Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, willing to sacrifice the Israelites to their own self-interest. There is also the perspective of the Israelites who may well have wondered where the God of their fathers was. The perspective of the Hebrew midwives should be our model. While they did not understand all that was going on, they did fear God, and they refused to obey the orders of Pharaoh when they were contrary to the will of God. Then too there is the supernatural perspective which recognizes in all of the events of this chapter the hand of Satan, seeking to thwart the purposes of God by using the rulers of this world to his own ends. The battle between the Serpent and the seed is not to be overlooked in this Egyptian episode.

Finally, there is the divine perspective. God was achieving His purposes and promises largely unnoticed by any of the actors in this divine drama. . .

We can therefore derive several principles from this passage which will help us in those times when the hand of God is not evident and when the forces of evil seem to be prevailing.

- First, God's purposes are being fulfilled, even when we are not actively involved in bringing them to pass.
- Second, God's purposes are being fulfilled, even when we are not aware of it and when every appearance points to the contrary.

- Third, when this is the case, God has often previously announced prophetically what He is going to do during such times of apparent silence.
- Fourth, when God is “silent” we must live by faith (as at all other times) and by the principles of His word.
- Fifth, God’s purposes are as easily achieved in adversity as they are in comfort, and as readily accomplished through unbelievers as through the saints.
- Sixth, there are great similarities between these experiences of Israel and the events of the last days before our Lord’s return.

S. Lewis Johnson: The House of Bondage

Exodus is the story of Israel’s redemption from Egypt’s bondage and the story is a pageant of the believers’ spiritual pilgrimage from bondage to liberty in Christ, because as you well know from reading the Bible, the experiences of the nation, Israel, are illustrative of the experiences that we have believers (**1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Rom. 15:4**). . .

the term, “*Exodus*,” then is not really a part of the Hebrew text at all, but it is a very good designation of the Book of Exodus, because, *ex hodos* means, “*a way out*.” *Hodos* in Greek means, “*a way*,” *ek* means “*out*.” Exodus, a way out. And so what it is? It is a description of how Israel became a nation and how they ultimately were prepared to come out of Egypt and into the wilderness. You probably have noticed that the Book of Genesis ends with the Words, “*So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*” So, the Book of Genesis concludes with “in a coffin in Egypt.”

I don’t not know whether you have noticed this or not, perhaps you have, that the Book of Exodus and chapter 40, the last chapter of the Book’ concludes with this expression: “*For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.*” And so, Genesis ends in a coffin in Egypt. That is the nation’s condition. One thinks of a coffin in Egypt as a people that are dead and spiritually dead is suggested by that, but Exodus concludes with the tabernacle constructed and the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire resting over the Tabernacle or the divine presence in the Tabernacle.

So, we move then from a coffin in Egypt to the divine presence over the tabernacle. And that is designed to illustrate for us that it’s through redemption that we come from death to life and to the experience of communion with the Lord God. . .

Egypt is a very interesting place, and no doubt, it was designed to be instructive on the Lord’s part that they went to Egypt. Someone has said, “Egypt is one of the strangest lands on the face of the earth.” It is, practically speaking, just a tableland of sand, but because the Nile river flows for 500 miles down into the Mediterranean, and because it

overflows every year with the water that comes down from the highlands in Central Africa, what happens is, that river overflows and floods and about 7 miles on each side of the Nile is some of the most fertile land in all of the world. So, you have a land which is largely peopled by people around the Nile River and the rest of it is just sand, red sand. That is a very strange place, but very blessed because the land is very fertile. But of course in a land like that, with that much fertility, without having to do anything about it, people tend to take life easy. We are not surprised that Egypt becomes a type of the world; that is, everything went easy for the Egyptians. Others have to dig into hard ground, take the rocks out, take away the trees, and then they have to farm the land with a great deal of difficulty. You can see pictures of Egyptians farming their land and they have a little plough that you can use with one hand. They did not need any more than that. The land is marvelously fertile and that is why so many people have gathered down there, through the years. So, Egypt is a beautiful illustration of the world and material prosperity and all of the things that keep a person from thinking about the Lord God. . .

The scene is very illustrative of a number of things. It is illustrative first of all, of sin and the bondage that sin brings in the world. Egypt suggests the old life. Egypt suggests the life of the individual before he knows redemption. Israel in Egypt is representative of us in bondage to our sin and Pharaoh. "*He who commits sin is the servant of sin,*" the Lord Jesus said. All Christians, sooner or later, confess in their faith in Christ that they were in bondage to sin. And all of us are afflicted by original sin. That is one of the great truths of the Bible. All ours are born in sin and under divine condemnation, in an Egypt, spiritually.

David Thompson: 1:8-22

GOD, IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY, WILL, AT TIMES, TURN HIS PEOPLE'S WORLD UPSIDE DOWN IN ORDER TO DIRECT HIS PEOPLE TO DO HIS WILL.

Scott Grant: God's Purposes Can't Be Defeated

Intensifying affliction brought on by the Egyptians brings the Israelites to the point of destruction. But that's only part of the story. Each stage of increasing affliction is answered by God. Each attempt by the king of Egypt to rein in the Israelites is thwarted by God, who causes their numbers to increase. God will not be deterred from advancing his purposes for his people. God does His greatest work in the darkest of times.

We may face intensifying affliction. Things go from bad to worse. But the message of **Exodus 1** is clear: God's purposes for his people will not be thwarted. His purposes for us advance despite intensifying affliction and through intensifying affliction. From our perspective, things may go from bad to worse. We agonize in the pains of labor. But God is giving birth. . .

At first, everything seems fairly insignificant. There are 12 sons and 70 people. From our perspective, they don't amount to much. But these numbers are extremely significant. The number 12 throughout scripture is often equated with the people of God. Not only were there 12 sons of Israel, who comprised the people of God, there

were 12 disciples of Jesus who did so as well. Seven is often used as a number of completeness, being most evident in the number of days of creation. Seven multiplied by 10 simply intensifies the concept of completeness. In **Genesis 10**, when God started over, giving mankind another chance after the flood, there were 70 nations. And that is precisely what he's doing with the sons of Israel: starting over with mankind, this time with one nation through whom he plans to bless the world. The numbers may not seem inspiring from our perspective, but from God's perspective they are perfect. . .

Affliction and growth not only coexist, affliction contributes to growth. When we feel so oppressed, we may feel that God is inactive and the growth is non-existent. But it's not true. God is bringing increase, but we can't see it, because all we see is our pain. . .

Things get progressively worse for God's people. First, they seemed insignificant. Then they were overlooked. Then they were afflicted. Now destruction looms. The king attempts to have the sons killed because it is boys who grow up to be warriors, and he was worried that the Israelites would ally themselves with another nation and fight against Egypt (**1:10**).

Once again, the handiwork of Satan is evident. Beginning in **Genesis 3:15**, when God declared that the serpent and the promised "*seed*" of the woman would war against each other, Satan tried to snuff out the seed. The seed through whom God's blessing would come is Christ, who was to be a descendant of the woman (**Genesis 3:15**), Abraham (**Genesis 22:18**) and David (**2 Samuel 7:12**). Cain killed Abel, but God answered with Seth (**Genesis 4:8, 25**). The wicked Athaliah killed all the royal offspring, but God answered with Jehoshabeath, the king's daughter, who hid one son, Joash, through whom the Savior would come (**2 Chronicles 22:10-11**). When Jesus was born, Herod slew all the male children near Bethlehem, but God answered with an angel, who told Joseph to flee to Egypt (**Matthew 2:13-18**). Satan, appearing as a red dragon, himself is depicted as ready to devour Christ, but God answers by enthroning him (**Revelation 12:3-5**).

In similar fashion, the Egyptian king tries to kill all Hebrew male children at birth, but God answers with two midwives. The king was worried about thousands of Hebrew men fighting against him; he should have been worried two Hebrew women who feared God.

The two midwives are juxtaposed against the two cities. The king builds two cities, but God has all along been building two women. One of the cities, Raamses, was known for its beauty. One of the women is named Shiphra, which means "beauty."

In this account, the name of the powerful Egyptian king is never mentioned. But the text prominently names two lowly midwives. The author leaves no doubt who had the greater impact. . .

Egypt, and all the desperation it represents, then becomes, of all things, the womb of God. It is the place where God gives birth. It is the place where new life springs forth. It

is the place where fruitfulness busts loose. Things may get worse before they get better. Labor pains always intensify. But God, deep in the womb, in quiet and unseen ways, is nurturing new life. And he will give birth. *"Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psalm 126:5-6).

Michael Crawford: Exodus is legendary story – audacious and astounding – that God would reach down and do so many extraordinary things. People in this book are amazing. Exodus is fifth most quoted book in bible.

1) vv. 1-7 Introduction to the book -- The Connection this Book has to Genesis -- continuation of the story of book of Genesis; penned by Moses to recount the story of the Israelites; important to know where you came from and why you are here; fundamental questions;

Observations:

- Symbolism of 12 tribes of Israel and number of 70
- “Joseph was already in Egypt” -- Consider how Joseph got to Egypt – sold into slavery but God was with him and sustained him and prospered him; God can turn what looks like evil into good
- Joseph and his generation all died – we will all die; the future is behind us
- Background is famine and marginalization; God brings something out of nothing; Israel now flourishing in the land of Egypt

2) Vs. 8ff – Context of Exodus

A record of a devastating and extensive treatment of Israel;

Former Pharaoh had a liking for Joseph;

Starts when a person of power does not see image of God in the Israelites; Joseph and his people meant nothing to him; sounds like Adolph Hitler and KKK; premise that someone is less than what God says they are (**Gen. 1:27-28**)

Vs. 11 – they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor; they basically built Egypt – the great Pyramids were built by slaves; this is how Egypt became such a super power – on the backs of slaves;

Vs. 12 – increased the level of oppression; then they multiplied even more; “dread the Israelites” -- cf. how we dread the dentist; components that make up dread: fear and loathing; cultural clash; Pharaoh is feeding all this; rather than being a Reconciler; throwing logs into this fire

Vs. 13-14 – *worked them ruthlessly*; worked them like a dog; (but our dogs don’t work!); subtle and sinister and satanic plot to get rid of the Jews – work them until they die; don’t want them to revolt and fight back; whip them and enslave them; you weren’t going to march your way out of this; you were not going to social media your way out of this; will take divine intervention

They are not only surviving, they are thriving; Astonishing!

Vs. 15 ff -- Start exterminating baby boys; Pharaoh orders state ordered homicide; Mid wives report that this strategy is not working either – they push babies out quickly and protect them (get this baby out and into hiding and safety) – “*more vigorous*” – they were just telling the truth;
God is mightier than any king and any legislation
God gave mid wives families of their own = a really big deal

Vs. 22 -- Pharaoh ups his game – orders all his people to kill all the baby boys; sanctioned murder of young babies; Why throw them into the Nile? Think about that. Think about how much Pharaoh must hate Jews; why not an easier way to kill babies in more sanitized fashion – like Planned Parenthood – a death factory (cf. their verbiage on in-clinic abortion procedures from their internet site – always talks about how safe it is; never talks about safety for baby – calls it just tissue); killing babies is a sin; wicked and an abomination

Applications:

- Sanctity of human life is a bigger issue than just abortion – talking about poor and marginalized; must engage people with disabilities; deals with slavery and poverty
- God cared about oppression of the Jewish people; human beings not being treated like human beings
- Abortion is greatest example of distortion against sanctity of life; if your president is pro-choice, they are pro-murder; over 60 million abortions since Roe v. Wade; life is God’s and it is His to take
- These mid wives are legends and we should honor them and take note and imitate them; two women stood against Pharaoh; sometimes civil disobedience is necessary; they fear God and are committed to Him

TEXT: Exodus 2:1-10

TITLE: PRESERVATION OF MOSES – ERASING PHARAOH'S EDICT

BIG IDEA:

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PROTECTED MOSES AFTER HIS BIRTH, PLUCKED HIM FROM THE NILE AND PREPARED HIM FOR HIS FUTURE LEADERSHIP ROLE

INTRODUCTION:

The Providence of God dominates the events surrounding the birth and protection of the baby Moses. Significant parallels trace important themes of salvation and redemption in this account:

- Noah and the ark vs. Moses and his wicker basket
- Moses as a type of Christ, the ultimate Prophet and Redeemer

The faith of Moses' parents is certainly commended in Hebrews 11. God also elevates the role of women in this story as he gives them prominent roles in the preservation and development of this important Jewish leader.

Constable: Several women were involved in the events surrounding Moses' birth: the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, her maid, Moses' sister, and Jochebed. How ironic it was that women, whom Egyptian and Israelite men looked down on as less significant than themselves, should have been responsible for saving Israel's savior! Truly the hand of God is evident. The Gospel writers also recorded that several women ministered to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, during His first advent.

**I. (:1-4) MOSES HIDDEN TO PROTECT HIM FROM PHARAOH'S INFANTICIDE –
PROTECTED BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**

A. (:1-2a) Birth of Moses

1. (:1) Parents

“Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi.”

Such a simple statement of normal creation of a new family unit – and yet this is the couple that will give birth to one of the most significant figures in God's redemptive program.

2. (:2a) Conception and Birth

“And the woman conceived and bore a son;”

John Hannah: The names of Moses' parents are not given here but in **6:20** it is learned that his father was Amram and his mother Jochbed, Amram's aunt. This Levite couple

had two other children: Miriam (**15:20**) and Aaron (**6:20**). Aaron was three years older than Moses (**7:7**).

[Some commentators argue that there are some generations skipped in this narrative so that Amram and Jochbed were not directly the parents.]

B. (:2b) Faith of Moses' Mother

1. Appreciation of God's Gift

"and when she saw that he was beautiful,"

He was a very special child from day one; certainly destined to play a critical role in God's covenant purposes; that seems more likely to me than Deffinbaugh's view below;

Alternative view:

Deffinbaugh: The two principle explanations of the statement in **verse 2** are:

- (1) that the child was exceedingly well-formed and beautiful; and
- (2) that the parents somehow perceived that God had a special purpose for this child. . .

In **Exodus 2:2** the text could simply be rendered, "*she saw that he was good.*" The Hebrew word rendered "*good*" is frequently used by Moses in the five books of the Law, and in most it has the sense of goodness which is the result of being made (or given) by God, and/or of being declared good by Him. Thus, the frequent expressions in **Genesis 1 and 2**, "*it was good*," employ the same term. The same sense is suggested by Arndt and Gingrich in their Greek lexicon for the Greek word which refers to the child. Stephen's words, "*he was good, to God*" (**Acts 7:20**), points us in this same direction.

I would therefore suggest that Moses is not telling us that God moved his parents to hide him because they were convinced that there was something very special (either in appearance or in purpose) about him as a particular child, but rather that they saw something special about him as a child, period. You see, the biblical perspective is that children come from God (cf. **Ps. 127**). Every child is the product of divine creation (cf. **Ps. 139:13-14**), and thus is "*good*" in the eyes of God. Moses' parents refused to put their child to death because God had created him, and because this meant that this child (like every other child ever born) was good in God's eyes. . .

2. Aggressive Risk Taking to Hide Moses

"she hid him for three months."

Faith of both parents involved – **Heb. 11:23**

C. (:3-4) Resignation to Providence of God

1. (:3) Secret Operation

- a. Preparation of Ark of Salvation (Wicker Basket)

“But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch.”

Cf. **Gen. 6:14** – tar and pitch covering the ark

Noteworthy that these actions were not cited in **Hebrews 11** as acts of faith; so the aggressive risk taking of the first 3 months have now been replaced with a more resigned, passive role in seeing how things will play out

b. Placing of the Ark

*“Then she put the child into it,
and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.”*

Ironic that the parents were coming close to a parallel scenario of the king’s edict of casting the infant into the Nile River

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The intricate detail is a “beautiful illustration of the connection which should always exist between the diligent use of means and a pious trust in providence. Instead of sitting down in sullen despair, or passive dependence on divine interposition to do all the work, everything is done which can be done by human agency” (**Bush**, *Exodus*, 1:25).

Philip Ryken: Both Noah and Moses passed through the deadly waters by riding in an ark, the vessel of salvation. They were baptized, as it were, in the same water in which others perished.

2. (:4) Strategic Observation

“And his sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.”

MacArthur: The careful actions of Moses’ mother to construct the ark of bulrushes, to set Moses afloat close to the royal bathing place, and to have his sister watch to see what would happen, indicate a hope that something would work out right for the child.

**II. (:5-6) MOSES RESCUED BY PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER –
PLUCKED FROM THE NILE BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD**

A. (:5) Appealing to Motherly Instincts

1. Divine Appointment

*“Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile,
with her maidens walking alongside the Nile;”*

2. Discovery of the Wicker Basket

*“and she saw the basket among the reeds
and sent her maid, and she brought it to her.”*

B. (:6) Awakening Compassion

1. Power of a Baby's Tears

*"When she opened it, she saw the child,
and behold, the boy was crying."*

2. Pity of a Royal Princess

*"And she had pity on him and said,
'This is one of the Hebrews children.'"*

John Hannah: Once again Pharaoh's efforts to exterminate the male Hebrew population were thwarted. The child was protected in a reed basket as it floated helplessly in the Nile and then by the instantaneous affection, ironically, of Pharaoh's own daughter. In God's sovereignty He kept the infant safe from Pharaoh's edict and even made the child a member of the royal family!

David Thompson: Now how did she know he was a Hebrew boy? Probably four ways:

- 1) There were physical differences in the look between Jews and Egyptians.
- 2) There were differences in clothing between the Hebrew children and Egyptian children.
- 3) She discovered this baby in an area in close proximity to where Hebrew families lived.
- 4) No Egyptian baby needed to be hidden, only Hebrew babies.

II. (:7-10) MOSES NURTURED BOTH BY HIS HEBREW MOTHER AND AS A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL EGYPTIAN FAMILY – PREPARED BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD FOR FUTURE RULE AS DELIVERER

A. (:7-9) Nursed by His Own Mother for Profit

1. (:7-8) Connection Facilitated by Moses' Sister

*"Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?'
And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go ahead.'
So the girl went and called the child's mother."*

2. (:9) Contract Benefits Both Moses and His Mother

*"Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me and I shall give you your wages.'
So the woman took the child and nursed him."*

B. (:10a) Nurtured with Royal Privileges

1. Healthy Development

"And the child grew,"

Allowed time for the parents to provide some elementary religious instruction as well.

2. Handed Back Over to Pharaoh's Daughter

"and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter,"

C. (:10b) Named as a Miracle Son

"and he became her son.

And she named him Moses, and said, 'Because I drew him out of the water.'"

Warren Wiersbe: In the Egyptian language, Moses means "*born*" or "*son*" and sounds like a Hebrew word that means "*to draw out*" (of the water). Years later, his name would remind Moses of the God who rescued him and did great things for him in Egypt. On more than one occasion, Moses would rescue his people because he trusted the Lord.

MacArthur: The position of "*son*" undoubtedly granted Moses special privileges belonging to nobility, but none of these persuaded Moses to relinquish his native origin. . . The formal education in the court of that time meant that Moses would have learned reading, writing, arithmetic, and perhaps one or more of the languages of Canaan. He would also have participated in various outdoor sports, e.g. archery and horseback riding, two favorites of the 18th Dynasty court.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does the author make the point that both of Moses' parents were from the tribe of Levi?
- 2) What factors influenced the decision of Moses' parents to place him in the basket in the Nile River?
- 3) How does man's responsibility work in conjunction with God's sovereignty?
- 4) How did God prepare Moses for his future leadership role? What special circumstances did God use in your life to help cultivate your spiritual gift?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tim Chester: But behind all of this, we are meant to see the providential hand of God. It is a remarkable sequence of events: the coincidences of Pharaoh's daughter coming, the pitiful cries of the baby, the provision of a wet-nurse. And it leads to a remarkable scenario: Moses being cared for by his mother and her being paid to do so. This means that Moses is raised a Hebrew with the privileges of Egypt. In **Acts 7:22**, the early

Christian (and first martyr) Stephen says that Moses “*was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action*”. Moses is saved from Pharaoh to live in his court, and one day he will defeat him, rescuing God’s people.

All this happens with God hardly being mentioned. Yet the writer invites us to see his hand – and perhaps to seek to detect his hand in our own lives when we trust God’s covenant promises. After all, Moses is kept safe in the place of violence and death. Here is sin at its most cruel and insane – and yet right here, the hand of God is at work. Even sin is a context in which God is at work, for he incorporates acts of sin into his purposes. That is what he is doing here; it’s what he did when two other rulers opposed not his people but his own Son (**Acts 4:27-28**); and it’s what he does in and around us still today as he works for our good in **all** things (**Romans 8:28**).

Constable: This name became even more appropriate as Moses’ great life work of drawing the Israelites out of Egypt took shape. Ancient Near Easterners regarded the waters of the sea as a very hostile enemy because they could not control them. The Egypt of Moses’ day was such a hostile foe for the Israelites. In this sense Moses’ name proved prophetic. Moses’ name may have been longer and may have had some connection with the name of an Egyptian god, as the other “*mose*” compound names referred to above did. If this was the case, “*in refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter*” Moses was actually refusing reference to an Egyptian deity.” [Note: **Nichol**, 1:504.]

The fact that Moses later chose to identify with the Israelites rather than the Egyptians is remarkable in view of his Egyptian privileges and background. His parents must have had a strong influence on him beginning very early in his life (cf. Joseph). We should never underestimate the power of parental influence even early in life. Note too that the faith of a child can grow stronger when tested by an ungodly environment.

Deffinbaugh: The Preservation and Preparation of Israel’s Deliverer

The Pharaoh could sit upon his throne and pass down edicts which caused untold sorrow, suffering, and death without ever being touched by the consequences of his decisions. Now, the Pharaoh’s daughter came face to face with the implications of her father’s policy of genocide. Looking into that basket, she saw a Hebrew baby—there was no mistaking its identity (v. 6). The child was crying, perhaps already having been adversely affected by his period of exposure. Nevertheless, this was a pathetic sight, one that tugged at the compassion and maternal instincts of this woman.

What her father, the Pharaoh, had commanded was not only unthinkable; it was undoable. No doubt she was pondering what she would do with the child when Moses’ sister arrived with the solution. How gracious of God to give this child back to his parents for a time and even to pay the mother wages for keeping him. This must have given a year or two, or more, during which they enjoyed their son with the protection of Pharaoh’s daughter. Depending on the age of Moses and the amount of ongoing contact his parents had with him, they must have had some opportunity to instruct him in the ways of the Lord. Let us not forget, however, that God’s plan for the education of

Moses included years of instruction at the feet of pagan Egyptians, too (cf. **Acts 7:22**), which greatly facilitated his future leadership. . .

The writer to the Hebrews chose to cite the hiding of Moses for the first three months of his life as an evidence of his parents' faith, but virtually ignored the incident of the tar-covered ark in which Moses was put in the Nile: "*By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict*" (**Heb. 11:23**). Accepting these verses as divinely inspired and authoritative, I came to the conclusion that the act of Moses' parents in hiding him for three months was a matter of greater faith than their act of putting him in the basket in the Nile.

But this does not go far enough when we take into account the words of Stephen:

*"Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to **throw out** their newborn babies so that they would die. At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was **placed outside**, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son"* (**Acts 7:18-21**, NIV, emphasis mine).

Stephen, like the writer to the Hebrews, refers to the three month period when Moses was hidden in the house of his parents. Unlike Hebrews, Stephen does obliquely refer to the placing of the ark in the Nile but in such a way as to suggest a very distressing thought: this was more an act of unbelief than it was an act of faith. The translation of the NIV blunts Stephen's point by translating the same Greek term by two different words ("*throw out*," v. 19; "*placed outside*," v. 21). The NASB brings the force of Stephen's words home much more literally and precisely by rendering the same term "*expose*" in both verses. The point, disturbing as it may be, is this: Just as Pharaoh commanded that Hebrew boy babies be "put out to die," Moses' was "put out to die" by his parents.

No wonder the writer to the Hebrews chose not to include the placing of Moses in the River Nile as an example of Old Testament faith, which we should strive to imitate. Moses' parents were at first unwilling to put their child to death, hiding him at home in defiance of Pharaoh's decree. But, when this seemed impossible, they weakened to the point where they were willing to put their child in the Nile, in partial obedience to Pharaoh's order. They were unwilling to put their child to death and thus put him in that woven basket. In their hearts, I believe that there was some hope that something might happen to save their child's life, but mostly there was the fear that he would die (to which Stephen refers). The writer to the Hebrews thus rightly passes over this occasion, for it is not a model of biblical faith.

Third, described in these verses is not just "the deliverance of the deliverer," but the deliverance of the Hebrew boy babies for drowning in the Nile. Not only did God deliver Moses, but through his deliverance it appears that the Pharaoh's policy of

genocide was set aside. Pharaoh had decreed that every boy baby born to an Israelite was to be cast into the Nile, but Pharaoh's own daughter defied this order, thereby making it virtually impossible for the Pharaoh to enforce his own decree.

Think about it for a moment. Pharaoh's daughter refused to abide by her father's orders by taking Moses out of the water, and then she takes a Hebrew child home with her as her son. Now, in the palace of the Pharaoh whose orders were, "*Throw them in the water!*", there is a Hebrew boy whose name means "*Taken from the water.*" There is, in my mind, no way that Pharaoh could have enforced his decree when his own daughter disobeyed it when living testimony of this disobedience (namely Moses) lived in the palace of Pharaoh, under his protection. Once again, Pharaoh's efforts to destroy the people of God are turned inside-out, resulting in the fulfillment of His promises concerning the blessing of His people, Israel.

Once again, God has providentially preserved and prospered His people. Moses has been spared, and so have the other Israelite boy babies; now there is a Hebrew living in the palace, part of the royal family.

S. Lewis Johnson: Prophet, Providence and Covenant – Exodus 2

So, it is obvious that the mother of Moses knew that if they took the child and put the child down there in the water, he would be noticed, and so they put him also in among the bulrushes, among the reeds, by the river's bank, in order that you might not float out into the Nile river and be lost of him, but see he had some protection. But nevertheless, he was there, and so now we see the providential hand of God. And Moses is there and it's not long before the daughter of Pharaoh comes down to wash herself there and her maidens walked along the river sides and they saw this little ark among the flags in it looked very interesting, and so Pharaoh's daughter said one of her maids over to get it and bring it to her, and when she opened it, she saw the child and Moses was crying. Have you ever seen a mother that does not respond to that or a female that does not respond to that? So, Moses is crying and she had compassion on him and she said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." You know, there is a marvelous little text over in the Book of Job that says something like this. It is chapter 5 and verse 13. And I did not memorize it before this message because it just occurred to me right as I was finishing up and it is the little verse that reads, "*He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the forward is carried headlong.*" He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And so, God is superintending all of these affairs and Moses is there and Pharaoh's daughter comes with all of her maids and now Pharaoh's daughter is touched by the little babe and about this time Miriam comes up and she says, "*Shall I and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?*" And so, Pharaoh's daughter thinks that is a pretty good idea. "*Go get a Hebrew nurse.*" "*And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.*"

Now, think of this. Moses comes under the care of Pharaoh's house. God arranged that. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. Pharaoh says, "*Kill all the Hebrew sons.*" And, one of them now is going to be raised in his own house. And not only that, nursed

by his own mother. And not only that, paid by Pharaoh, and furthermore, will have a royal education at government expense. Why, even an Egyptian child was not taken care of like that, and so God makes the wrath of men to praise him.

J. Ligon Duncan: The Deliverer Delivered (by Women)

I. God prepares to save His people through the birth of a baby boy.

In verses 1 through 4 we see the first section of the story where God prepares to save His people by the birth of a little boy whose parents, because of the situation in which this child is born, actually end up having to put the boy in the waters of the Nile but protected by an ark and by his sister. Pharaoh wants to destroy all the sons of Israel in order to assume and to assure his control. What's God's response? The birth of a boy. In the midst of this scene of severe persecution, a nameless child is born to two parents, both of whom are descended from the house of Levi. . .

But the story, of course, is emphasizing this weak infant that God is going to use to accomplish His sovereign designs. It is God's delight to use that which seems foolish and weak in our eyes, in the eyes of men, to bring about His promises and purposes. Over and over in the story of redemption, God will bring about rescue for His people through the birth of children to people in obscure situations, whether it be Samson or Samuel or David or Jesus. Over and over God displays His sovereign power and His delight to use that which seems foolish and weak in the eyes of men. It's so important for us to remember that principle.

Paul comes back to that principle as he talks about the gospel. You know it may seem foolish in the eyes of the world that the preaching of the message of salvation is the way that God is going to save His people and accomplish His plans in the world. That seems so outdated in our day and age doesn't it? It seems archaic; it seems almost quaint, but Paul says it is by the foolishness of preaching that God intends to build up His people. We must believe that, even though it doesn't look like it makes a whole lot of sense to us when we're looking at it from a natural perspective. But from a divine perspective, God's delight is to use that which is foolish and weak in the eyes of men. So here right away in the first eleven verses we see God's silent and ironic hand of providence preparing to save his people in a most unlikely way through the birth of this unnamed male Hebrew child.

II. The rescue of Moses.

And Moses is helping his people understand how to read God's providence in their lives. God is in control every step of the way. God is using even their enemies to bless them. God is working out His own designs and protecting them all the way. One of Pharaoh's own children delivers a Hebrew child who would later save God's children from bondage. God thus uses one from the house of the seed of the serpent to help deliver the seed of the woman. God is emphasizing His sovereignty to Israel, even as He emphasizes their responsibility and as He emphasizes His ability use even that

which is evil for His own purposes.

III. Moses saved by his sister and raised by his mother.

God in His sovereignty works His will, using the enemies of His people to accomplish blessing for them, and to further His grand design. God is convincing the Hebrews how they need to read His powerful hand of providence in their own experience. It's after the fact. It would have been hard for them to take in some of these things while they're in the middle of this trouble. Even as it's hard for you to believe that God had a purpose in some things that He's doing in your life. I'm the world's worst Arminian when I go through a trial. Suddenly, I'm in control and God is not when trials come. Suddenly, there's no reason, there's no rhyme. God has somehow forgotten His job when I'm in the midst of a trial. That's my sinful heart. God knows that. Why do you think God is taking such care to convince His people that He's always on watch, that He's always working out His plan, and even when our enemies orate against us, His hand is in it for good. That's something worth learning. That's something worth believing.

David Thompson:

GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL SOVEREIGNTY PERMITTED A BABY BOY TO BE BORN WHO WAS PROTECTED BY THREE WOMEN , WHO WOULD GROW UP TO COMPLETELY DELIVER ISRAEL FROM THE EVIL BONDAGE OF THE EGYPTIANS.

These verses are some of the most amazing verses concerning the providential, protective sovereignty of God that you will ever see. God is sovereignly and providentially directing human affairs. As one Bible expositor said, "while Pharaoh was planning Israel's extermination, God was planning Israel's emancipation." We will notice that verse 1 begins with a connective "now," which immediately links us back to the previous verses, which describes the fact that Hebrew boys were supposed to be cast into the Nile River. What God was about to do is use the Nile River to bring a Hebrew baby into existence that He would use to deliver the Hebrews. This is an amazing display of the providential sovereignty of God.

One writer called this the providence of great destiny.

Dan Duncan: The Birth of the Deliverer

Unlike a miracle in which the natural processes are circumvented, in providence, God uses natural means to govern His creation and carry out His will. And we see that in our passage this morning. He uses the natural affection of a mother and a sister; their industry, their courage; as well as a woman's pity and the culture of Egypt. Most importantly, He uses faith, the faith of a woman, in all of this to bring about His purpose. . .

Moses is the type of Christ in so many ways, particularly in that aspect of being a prophet as well as being a deliverer. And so in light of that, we might have expected that his birth, like that of Isaac and Jacob and Sampson, would have been preceded by a

divine announcement. But instead it follows the normal course of events – no divine announcement no dream, nothing of that kind of thing that we might think would portend his birth.

And I think there's an important lesson in that. The normality of events should never suggest to us that God is not involved. The fact that we don't hear Him, don't see Him, and things are all that evident to us that He's present. The circumstances that may seem to indicate to us that He's silent and indifferent, well, they shouldn't indicate that, because God is as involved in the routine of human affairs as much as He is in the miraculous, in the healing of a blind man, or in the raising of the dead. . .

When Moses' mother placed this little ark in the water, it and its treasured cargo were totally dependent upon God's protection and upon God's guidance. She couldn't have known who would find the child, but she sent her daughter Miriam to watch for the outcome of the events. . .

Well, the providence of God runs throughout this passage and in it we see a number of things. We see, first of all, God's power over His enemy. It's at the height of the king's fury that the deliverer of Israel is born. At the most perilous time in Israel's history, at the time that we would think is the most unlikely time for a deliverer to be born, the most unsafe time, that's when God brings him into this world. And yet He preserves him.

He doesn't preserve him by means of a strong army. But instead, he uses against this great king this mighty foe of the people, he uses women. He did that earlier, if you'll remember in last week, in the first chapter when He used the midwives against Pharaoh to thwart his purpose. And here He uses a mother, a little sister, and Pharaoh's own daughter. As Paul says in **1 Corinthians 1**, "*He has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*"

Now why does He do that? Why does He do it throughout history? And why does Paul remind us of that? Well, in order that our confidence would be in Him and not in ourselves, that we would give glory to whom glory is due and we would live lives of trust in the one who's able to deliver us. We're called upon to do some rather difficult things. We're called upon to live in the midst of a hostile world and live totally contrary to it, to be lights in a dark place, to put things on the line.

And yet we have the confidence of knowing that the very one who commands us to do that is in complete control of all of the affairs of life.

TEXT: Exodus 2:11-25

TITLE: TRAINING GROUND FOR GOD'S DELIVERER

BIG IDEA:

**DEVELOPING LEADERS FIRST EXPERIENCE FLESHLY FAILURE
BEFORE LEARNING TO SUBMIT TO GOD'S TIMETABLE AND TRUST IN
GOD'S EMPOWERMENT --
3 KEY LESSONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

INTRODUCTION:

Before God's people even cry out for a deliverer, the sovereign plan is in place to prepare Moses for that role. He begins identifying with his oppressed people rather than holding on to his privileged status of Egyptian royalty. But he starts out presumptuously rather than waiting for God's timing and trusting in God's empowerment. The process of leadership development can be a slow one and Moses must learn some key lessons before God formally calls him to assume that key role of deliverer.

**I. (:11-15a) FLEEING EGYPT BECAUSE DELIVERANCE CAN'T COME
FROM THE HAND OF MAN –
LEARNING THE LIMITATIONS OF FLESHLY POWER AND RESOURCES**

**A. (:11-12) Presumptuous Moses -- Moses the Murderer -- Heroic Intervention –
Killing the Egyptian Oppressor**

1. (:11) Examination

a. Open-Minded Observation

*“Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up,
that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors;”*

“brethren” – shows the close tie Moses felt to his Jewish race despite his assimilation into the Egyptian culture; probably an indication as well that Moses had a sense of God's hand on his life to benefit the Hebrew nation

Bruce Hurt: The Septuagint translates *looked* here in **Ex 2:11** with the verb *katanoéo* (*kata* = down [*kata* can be used to intensify the meaning] + *noéo* = to perceive or think) means literally to put the mind down on something and so to observe or consider carefully and attentively. This is what Moses was doing, fixing his eyes and mind upon the situation and perceiving it clearly. *Katanoéo* means to look carefully, cautiously, observantly. The idea is to think about something very carefully or consider closely which denotes the action of one's mind apprehending certain facts about a thing so as to give one the proper and decisive thought about the thing considered.

John Hannah: The events described in these verses took place 40 years after Moses' birth (cf. **Acts 7:23**); the year was about 1485 B.C. in the reign of Hatshepsut. By this

time Moses was highly educated (**Acts 7:22**) and probably spoke fluently in both Egyptian and Hebrew.

b. Outrageous Oppression

“and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.”

2. (:12) Execution

a. Acting Alone – No Witnesses

*“So he looked this way and that,
and when he saw there was no one around,”*

Constable: Moses’ desire to help his brethren was admirable, but his methods were deplorable (**Exodus 2:12**; cf. **Acts 7:23-29**). He trusted in his own ability to liberate the Israelites and sought to bring this about by natural means. He even resorted to sinful means and seized authority rather than waiting for God to bestow it on him.

Walter Kaiser Jr: Calvin thought Moses acted by the Spirit of God, but Augustine was surely correct when he stressed that Moses had no legal authority to do what he did. His own conscience likewise agreed, for he first looked *“this way and that”* (**vs. 12**) and then buried the corpse in the sand. But the very impulse that led Moses to avenge wrongdoing apart from due process of law was developed to do the work of God when God finished seasoning him through the experiences of life!

b. Attack and Concealment

“he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”

Bruce Hurt: He buried him so as to conceal what he had done, lest it be discovered. God had other plans and allowed it to be discovered because God knew it was now time for Moses to take his "graduate class" in shepherding sheep for 40 years! This would be good preparation for delivering Israel, which all too often would act like dumb sheep!

Mattoon: There are several lessons we can learn from untempered, uncontrolled zeal.
Zeal that is Out of Control:

1. It leads to hasty actions: It is uncontrolled, impulsive, and impatient.
2. It makes one unfit for God's service: It relies too much upon self and takes matters in one's own hands without the leading of the Lord. The key words of **verse 11-12**, looked and saw, reveal this truth. Moses walked by sight. Nothing is mentioned about getting direction from God at this point in his life.
3. The hasty actions of uncontrolled zeal retard accomplishments rather than furthering God's purposes. It makes a mess.

Steven Cole: Apparently Moses learned his lesson. Years later, he warned the tribes of Gad and Reuben, who wanted to settle across the Jordan, but promised to help the other tribes conquer Canaan, that if they did not keep their promise (**Num. 32:23**), *“... be sure your sin will find you out.”* We can’t hide anything from God!

B. (:13-14) Rejected Moses -- Moses the Meddler -- Hebrew Inquiry – Fearing Egyptian Reprisal

1. (:13) Critical Confrontation

a. Incident

*“And he went out the next day, and behold,
two Hebrews were fighting with each other;”*

b. Inquiry

*“and he said to the offender,
‘Why are you striking your companion?’”*

2. (:14a) Rebellious Rejection

*“But he said, ‘Who made you a prince or a judge over us?
Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?’”*

3. (:14b) Petrified Panic

*“Then Moses was afraid, and said,
‘Surely the matter has become known.’”*

C. (:15a) Fugitive Moses -- Moses the Meanderer -- Homicidal Intimidation -- Fleeing Pharaoh

*“When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses.
But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh”*

Wearing out his welcome in Egypt

Walter Kaiser Jr: Pharaoh’s wrath was not so much to avenge the death of an Egyptian as it was to deal with his discovery that Moses was acting as a friend and possible champion of his sworn enemy, the oppressed Israelites.

**II. (:15b-22) SERVING GOD PATIENTLY IN OBSCURITY BECAUSE
FAMILY FAITHFULNESS IS THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE
LEADERSHIP --
LEARNING TO PATIENTLY SUBMIT TO GOD’S TRAINING PROCESS AND
TIMETABLE**

A. (:15b) New Location for Moses in Midian

1. Settled in Midian

“and settled in the land of Midian;”

John Hannah: The Midianites lived in southeastern Sinai and northwestern Arabia on both sides of the Gulf of Aqaba. This desert land differed greatly from Goshen in Egypt.

2. Sat Down by a Well

“and he sat down by a well.”

[think of how many significant meetings at a well we see in Scripture]

David Guzik: Moses, fleeing for his life, probably felt that God's plan for his life was completely defeated. He probably believed that every chance he ever had to deliver his people was now over and there was nothing he could do. At this point, Moses was right where God wanted him. Moses probably had little idea of it at the time, but he was too big for God to use. Moses tried to do the Lord's work in man's wisdom and power and it didn't work. After 40 years of seemingly perfect preparation, God had another period of preparation for both Moses and the people of Israel, to make them ready to receive Moses.

B. (:16-17) New Opportunity to Combat Oppression

1. (:16) Vulnerable Women

*"Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters;
and they came to draw water,
and filled the troughs to water their father's flock."*

2. (:17) Victory Over Oppressors

*"Then the shepherds came and drove them away,
but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock."*

Third time that Moses attempted to play the role of deliverer – anticipating his role in the later exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt

C. (:18-20) New Invitation to Integrate into a Prominent Household

1. (:18) Investigation of Fortuitous Circumstances

*"When they came to Reuel their father, he said,
'Why have you come back so soon today?'"*

2. (:19) Testimony to Egyptian Assistance

*"So they said, 'An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds;
and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock.'"*

3. (:20) Invitation Extended to Moses

"And he said to his daughters, 'Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat.'"

D. (:21-22) New Family Unit

1. (:21a) Acquiring a Household

"And Moses was willing to dwell with the man,"

John Hannah: For 40 years (**Acts 7:30**) Moses undertook the toilsome life of a shepherd in the Sinai area, thus gaining valuable knowledge of the topography of the Sinai Peninsula which later was helpful as he led the Israelites in that wilderness land.

Mattoon: Lessons from this period of Moses' life:

1. He developed a servant's attitude. At the well, he took the first steps of becoming a servant.
2. He developed a willingness to be obscure, dwelling in a barren desert, away from the limelight. He was also a shepherd which was considered the lowest rung on the ladder of the Egyptian social scale. God was developing humility in Moses' life. In this desert, he gained valuable knowledge of the topography of the Sinai Peninsula which would come in handy later in his life.
3. Moses learned the ability to rest and rely upon God. The desert gave him time to think and reflect upon past mistakes and learn from them. Our problems arise when we make mistakes and fail to learn from them

2. (:21b) Acquiring a Wife

“and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses.”

3. (:22) Acquiring a Son

“Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, ‘I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.’”

**III. (:23-25) CRYING OUT TO GOD BASED ON COVENANT
RELATIONSHIP FOR RELIEF FROM SUFFERING AND BONDAGE --
LEARNING TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR DELIVERANCE**

A. (:23a) Change in Circumstances in Egyptian Government

“Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died.”

B. (:23b) Cry for Help by the Sons of Israel Because of Their Bondage

1. Lament

“And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage,”

2. Loud Cry

“and they cried out,”

3. Leveraging Their Relationship to God

“and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God.”

C. (:24-25) Compassion of Covenant-Keeping God

1. (:24a) Heard

“So God heard their groaning;”

It might seem in the midst of suffering and oppression that God has forgotten His people or is unconcerned with their plight.

Bruce Hurt: “groaning” – Only 4 uses in the OT:

1) **Exodus 2:24** *So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

2) **Exodus 6:5** *Furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.*

3) **Judges 2:18** *When the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them.*

4) **Ezekiel 30:24** *For I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; and I will break the arms of Pharaoh, so that he will groan before him with the groanings of a wounded man.*

2. (:24b) Remembered

“and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Constable: The prayers of the Israelites in their bondage touched God’s heart, and He began anew to act for them (cf. Exodus 3:7-9). This is another of the many references in Scripture that indicate that prayer affects some of God’s actions. Remembering His covenant with the patriarchs, God acted for the Israelites by commissioning Moses.

Steven Cole: The important phrase is, “*God remembered His covenant with Abraham.*” That was the main point of **chapter 1**. God’s gracious faithfulness to His covenant promises is the basis for hope for His people when they are oppressed.

In our case, He doesn’t remember our sins and lawless deeds. He deals with us on the basis of the new covenant in Christ’s blood (**Heb. 8:8-13**). That doesn’t mean that we’re free to sin. Rather, we can know that our failures cannot thwart His covenant faithfulness.

3. (:25a) Saw

“And God saw the sons of Israel,”

4. (:25b) Took Notice

“and God took notice of them.”

John Hannah: **Exodus 2:24-25** is a hinge in the narrative. Suppression, slavery, and death were dominant themes in **1:1 – 2:23**. Now deliverance and triumph will be major emphases. God in His sovereign power was ready to act in accord with His promise to deliver and preserve His people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is your conscience telling you when you are looking around to see if anyone is watching before you take action?
- 2) Why did the Hebrews not appreciate Moses' intervention in striking down the Egyptian oppressor?
- 3) When have you felt that God was hiding Himself and not showing concern for your suffering?
- 4) What type of counsel would you give to someone who has experienced a significant spiritual or ministry failure?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: In equipping Moses for service, God took several approaches:

- Education
- Failure (:11-14)

These two incidents reveal Moses as a compassionate man who was sincere in his motives but impetuous in his actions. Knowing this, you would never suspect that later he would be called "*the meekest man on the earth*" (**Num. 12:3**). Moses' failure to help free the Jews must have devastated him. That's why God took him to Midian and made him a shepherd for forty years. He had to learn that deliverance would come from God's hand, not Moses' hand (**Acts 7:25; Ex. 13:3**).

- Solitude and humble service (:15-25)

God's delays aren't evidence of unconcern, for He hears our groans, sees our plight, feels our sorrows, and remembers His covenant. What He has promised, He will perform, for He never breaks His covenant with His people. When the right time comes, God immediately goes to work.

David Guzik: Moses seemed to act like a prince given his royal background. He acted like a judge in that he determined that one of these men did the wrong. He seemed to be the perfect prince and judge for Israel, but they did not want him. A prince has the right to rule and expects your loyalty. A judge has the right to tell you what to do, and to punish you if you don't do it. In rejecting Moses they said to him, "We don't want you to rule over us or tell us what to do." People reject Jesus on the same thinking, and just like Moses Jesus was rejected at His first coming.

Both Moses and Jesus were:

- Favored by God from birth
- Miraculously preserved in childhood
- Mighty in words and deed
- Offered deliverance to Israel
- Rejected with spite
- Rejected in their right to be prince and a judge over Israel

Just like Jesus after him, Moses could not deliver when he lived in the palaces of glory. He had to come down off the throne, away from the palace and into a humble place before he could deliver his people. Moses planned the deliverance of Israel the way any man would, and logically saw himself as the key man—because of his royal background, education, success, and sympathy for his people. Moses had his plans, and they made sense from his perspective. Yet God's plan was radically different. 40 years later, God led Moses and his brother Aaron to Pharaoh with a special stick that turned into a snake. Moses asked Pharaoh to let Israel go back to Canaan; Pharaoh said no, so God brought plagues of blood, frogs, mosquitoes, flies, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. Finally God judged stubborn Pharaoh and Egypt with a plague on the firstborn of Egypt, Israel escaped across the Red Sea. The waters of the Red Sea came back and killed the Egyptian army, and the Israelites crossed the wilderness and came to Canaan. Such an unlikely plan would never come from man.

Mattoon: Important Lessons from Moses

Lesson 1-Hiding the wrong does not erase it.

Moses tried to literally cover up his sin and it failed. It almost always does fail. The natural tendency of men is to hide what they have done wrong. Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves with fig leaves and hide from God. Cain tried to bury Abel, but Abel's blood cried from the ground to the Lord. The cardinal law of the Bible is sin cannot be covered by men.

Numbers 32:23 - *But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.*

Ecclesiastes 12:14 - *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Luke 12:2 - *For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

Proverbs 28:13 - He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Moses did not prosper because he tried to cover his sin.

Lesson 2-Timing is as important as action.

Moses failed because he got ahead of God. He pushed his way into leadership prematurely. The result was rejection. No one followed him. Whoops! Ouch! God's timing is important. Jesus responded more than once, "My time is not yet come." God's work must be done God's way in God's time. As a pastor, you need to be in the Word, in prayer, and sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading in your life. The problem in this situation is the nation of Israel is not ready for deliverance. Moses is not ready either for he has lessons that he needs to learn in the desert. Both the nation and Moses have forty years to go before they are ready to exit Egypt and attend the University of the Sinai Desert.

Lesson 3-Spiritual leadership is God appointed, not self-assumed.

Moses had a great resume. He was a leader and physically attractive. Yet, one cannot lead God's people unless one is a consistent follower of the Lord. Are you following the Lord? If not, you should not be pastoring or teaching the Word.

Steven Cole: How God Uses Failure

God is in the business of using people who have failed. The Bible doesn't paper over the failures of its heroes. Noah got drunk and exposed himself. Abraham lied twice about his wife being his sister. Isaac did the same. Jacob deceived his father and cheated his brother out of the birthright. David sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered. The disciples all abandoned Jesus at His crucifixion and then doubted the resurrection. Peter denied Jesus and later waffled on the gospel out of fear of the Judaizers. Mark bailed out on the first missionary journey. And in our text, Moses murders an Egyptian, is rejected by his countrymen, flees for his life, and lives in the desert for the next forty years. This story gives us hope that God can use us even after we've failed. . .

So Moses' intentions were right when he went out to help his suffering Hebrew people. He had given up position, pleasure, and prosperity to take his stand with God's people (Philip Ryken, Exodus [Crossway], p. 62). But he went about his mission in the wrong way, resulting in a forty year detour. From a prince in the palace of Egypt, Moses became a shepherd in the barren wilderness of Midian. From being in the limelight of Pharaoh's government, Moses went into isolation and obscurity. From being a "somebody," he instantly became a "nobody." The text does not tell us what he felt, but he must have battled depression and confusion. His first attempt at leadership had been a dismal failure. . .

Our failures cannot thwart God's gracious covenant faithfulness toward His people.

Our text breaks into three main sections:

1. God uses imperfect instruments who fail in their attempts to serve Him (Exodus 2:11-15a).

Someone has observed that one reason life is so difficult is that unlike school, you get the test first and the lesson later. The board of directors at a bank recognized that a young cashier had the abilities they were looking for in a successor to the bank president, who was about to retire. One day this young man went to the president and said, "As you know, I'm to follow you as president of this bank. I'd be grateful for any advice you might have."

The older man said, "Son, sit down. I've got two words for you: Right decisions!" The young man thought for a moment and replied, "That's helpful, sir, but how does one go about making right decisions?" "One word—experience!" "That's also helpful, sir, but how does one go about gaining experience?" "Two words," said the older man, "wrong decisions." (*"Our Daily Bread,"* 9/77)

There is only one kind of Christian: those who have failed God. We've all struck out, maybe at a crucial point in the game. Moses' failure reveals six ways we fail:

- A. We fail when we impulsively act on right commitments based on emotions.
- B. We fail when we attempt to do God's work by human strength.
- C. We fail when we are more concerned about what others think than about what God thinks.
- D. We fail when we impetuously attempt to do God's work at the wrong time.
- E. We fail when we try to cover up our sin and hide it from God and others.
- F. We fail when we assume that others' hearts are receptive when they are not.

2. God shapes and prepares imperfect instruments before He uses them (Exodus 2:15b-22).

3. God's gracious covenant faithfulness prepares His servants for His people and His people for His servants (Exodus 2:23-25).

J. Ligon Duncan: God Remembered His Covenant

But we also saw last week, as we looked at the first event in Moses' recorded adult life, wherein he attempts to save one of the Hebrew slaves from a taskmaster who is attempting to beat him to death. We see there the necessity of divine deliverance. Moses is perfectly sincere in what he attempts to do in attempting to deliver that Hebrew slave from a cruel taskmaster, but Moses does not have the power in and of himself to bring deliverance to Israel. In fact, the next day when he goes out and attempts to judge lightly between two contesting Israelites immediately he is accused of murder by one of

those Israelites, and he fears. And then soon thereafter Pharaoh seeks his life, and he has to flee the land. He is God's chosen deliverer, but human deliverance is in vain. And God even in that incident in the life of Moses lets us know that it's not just going to be an exalted, profound, intellectual, energetic, zealous reformer that's needed in order to bring about the salvation of Israel. It's going to take God Himself. The Lord will use Moses. The Lord will graciously use him in His plan, but it's going to take God to deliver Israel out of Egypt. . .

I. God's providence often works out in and through ordinary human events.

The first thing that you'll find in the first part of **verse 23**. "*Now it came about in the course of those many days, that the king of Egypt died.*" We see here that God's providence often works out in and through those seemingly ordinary human events. God's providence often works out in and through the seemingly ordinary course of human events.

This is a new stage in God's plan of redemption. And it begins with the death of the king. And then hold this in the back of your mind; just like in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, this new stage in God's dealings with Israel begins with a very important event in secular terms, the death of a king. Now this is a seemingly mundane observation to say, well, then the king of Egypt died. The Pharaoh died. That would have been big news in Egypt, just like it would be big news if Queen Elizabeth were to die in England. But, it doesn't seem to have any spiritual consequences. It might have been thought to be, initially by the people of God, good news, because often times in the ancient world when monarchs die, then a new monarchs came to the throne certain liberties were given to slaves. But it's made clear in this passage and in chapter 3 and in chapter 4 that the death of this one king of Egypt and the succession of a new king of Egypt didn't mean anything good for the children of Israel. It didn't bring them any relief, it didn't bring them any freedom, it didn't bring them any relief from the bondage that they were experiencing. So it's interesting here. The death of this king, though it was a big news kind of event in Egypt, didn't seem to have any spiritual consequences to the people of God in the first place. . .

the death of this king lets us know that it is now possible for Moses to return. If you look at Exodus, **chapter 4, verse 19**, specifically God says Moses go back now. The people who wanted to kill you are dead. So this is letting you know that God is setting the stage to be able to send the deliverer of His people back into Egypt. . .

God acts prior to the prayers of His people. We're going to read in the rest of this verse how the sighing and the crying of God's people have come up to Him. They rose up to God. But you are not to think that those cries were what caused God to act in redemption. He had been working out His plan of redemption long before those cries ever came to Him. In fact, it would be more proper to say that those cries themselves are the result of God's work of redemption as He works in the heart of His people. God is often working out His plan to glorify His Son and to save His people even when we don't realize it. God in His mercy is often doing things in our experience, and we don't

even detect His hand, but His hand of mercy is at work. And that's the case here. God's already setting into place events that will lead to the deliverance of the children of Israel before they ever turn to Him and lift up their cries.

That's the first thing that I'd like you see, and the second thing is this. This event clearly parallels the prologue to Jesus Christ's ministry. And any Jewish Christian and any Gentile Christian in the days of the early church huddled with some group of believers reading a scrap of the gospel of Matthew would have recognized this. I mean, can you imagine the Jewish Christian hearing his minister or one of the elders read to him from Matthew, **chapter 1 and 2**, and he hears about Herod attempting to kill Jesus, and then Jesus and His family fleeing into Egypt, and then coming back out of Egypt immediately they would have thought, 'well, that's just like Moses.' And can you imagine a Gentile Christian hearing the book of Exodus read to him from a parchment for the first time, and he hears the story at the end of Exodus, chapter 2 and he would have immediately said, "Well, that's just like Jesus." And God intends this passage to strike us in just that way. . .

II. God's people cry out for relief.

Secondly, if you look at the second half of **verse 23**. I'd like you to see this. God's people here finally cry out to God because of their slavery and misery. Israel turns to God almost as their last recourse, and they sigh and cry aloud for relief. . .

III. God saves not because of His people's merit, but because of His covenant.

And so to the Israel of old, the whole course of the history of salvation can be summed up in promise and fulfillment. The promise of God, the fulfillment of that promise. My friends, you see then why pleading the promises is the basic pattern of biblical prayer. O Lord, do what You've already promised. We're not going to move God to do something that He is unwilling to do. We do that which He is more willing to do than we are to receive it. We lift up that prayer before Him, and we say, "Lord, do what You have promised to do."

TEXT: Exodus 3:1-12

TITLE: CALL TO MOSES TO LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE OUT OF EGYPT

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S DRAMATIC CALL TO MOSES DETAILS HIS COMMITMENT TO DELIVER FLOWING OUT OF HIS COMPASSION FOR ISRAEL'S BONDAGE

INTRODUCTION:

The burning bush theophany ranks right up there as one of the greatest attention-grabbers of all time. No surprise that Moses stepped out of his ordinary daily activities to pay special attention to God's call that would determine his role in redemptive history. What a marvelous sight – a bush burning in the middle of the desert that was not consumed. The compassion of the Lord for His people flows out of His covenant promises to the patriarchs and is stoked by the brutal affliction suffered by the Hebrews at the hands of their Egyptian oppressors. Moses is called to return to the throne of Pharaoh (now that a new king is in place) and demand that the Israelites be released to go worship their God. Again, no surprise that Moses should express some hesitancy at this bold mission.

I. (:1-6) THE DRAMATIC CALL OF GOD IS UNUSUAL AND IMPACTFUL

A. (:1-3) Natural Observation -- God Intervened in Moses' Life and Got Moses' Attention

1. (:1) Serving Faithfully in Normal Daily Activities

“Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

Mt. Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai; Moses chose this day to take the flock over to a different area to find pastureland; the providence of God directs him to just the right location for his divine appointment

Philip Ryken: We were introduced to Jethro back in **chapter 2**, where he was called Reuel. It is possible that the man had two names, which was common in ancient times. It is also possible that Reuel was the name of Jethro's father, which would actually make him Moses' grandfather-in-law (see **Num. 10:29**). But perhaps the most likely explanation is that Jethro, which means “his excellency,” was a formal title indicating the man's status. In any case, he is called Jethro throughout the rest of Exodus.

Application: we need to be faithfully serving God in our normal daily activities; and we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit to stepping out of our comfort zone to perform special services for God's kingdom; How difficult is it for God to get our attention?

2. (:2) Startling Theophany (Christophany)

a. The Optics

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush;”

The angel of the Lord is the preincarnate second person of the Trinity

Application: We are dealing here with a very special moment in redemptive history; do not expect that God’s call in your life will be so dramatic; God deals with Moses in very unusual fashion; that does not mean that God does not intervene in our lives to lead us to perform specific ministries in harmony with His overall kingdom agenda. But God’s calling to us will usually be in line with the spiritual gifts He has granted us and the opportunities He opens up for us, and the preparation He affords us, and the counsel He makes available to us.

b. The Oddity

“and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.”

Constable: Because Israel has frequently been in the furnace of affliction throughout history, though not consumed, Jews have identified the burning bush as a symbol of their race. This symbol often appears on the walls of synagogues or in other prominent places not only in modern Israel but also in settlements of Jews around the world.

Walter Kaiser Jr: The fire, then, symbolized God’s powerful, consuming, and preserving presence (cf. **19:18; 24:17; Judg 13:20; 2 Chron 7:1-3; Ezek 1:4-28; Dan 7:9-10; Heb 12:29**). When Moses went over to inspect this unusual sight, God issued his call by repeating Moses’ name to express the urgency of the message (cf. **1 Sam 3:10** for this same type of urgent summons).

Philip Ryken: The miraculous sign pointed as well to God’s eternity and self-sufficiency. Like the burning bush, God never runs out of fuel. His glory never dims; his beauty never fades. He always keeps burning bright. This is because God does not get his energy from anyone or anything outside himself. He is completely self-existent and self-sufficient in his eternal being. According to **Gregory of Nyssa** (330-c.395), what Moses saw in the burning bush was nothing less than “the transcendent essence and cause of the universe, on which everything depends, alone subsists.” The burning bush revealed the power and the glory, the eternity and the self-sufficiency of God.

3. (:3) Seeing But Having Difficulty Believing

“So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’”

Natural investigation is not going to be able to figure out a scientific explanation for this remarkable phenomena; divine revelation will be the key; but there can be no arguing the facts which Moses observed – this was not some type of hallucination

B. (:4-6) Divine Revelation – Understanding God’s Holiness and His Covenant Connection Essential to Responding to God’s Call

1. (:4) Repeated Call – for Emphasis

*“When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look,
God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’
And he said, ‘Here I am.’”*

Bruce Hurt: Notice the repetition **Moses, Moses**, which in Scripture generally indicates a message of special importance. Other examples include: Abraham (**Ge 22:11**); Moses (**Ex 3:4**); Samuel (**1Sa 3:10**); Jerusalem (**Mt 23:37**) Martha (**Lu 10:41**) Simon (**Lu 22:31**), Saul (**Acts 9:4 Acts 22:7 Acts 26:14**).

2. (:5) Revelation of Holiness – Transcendence of God

*“Then He said, ‘Do not come near here;
remove your sandals from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’”*

Bruce Hurt: It was not that the actual ground on which Moses stood was holy; rather, **it was the presence of the holy God that made it holy**. The direction to Moses to remove his shoes was in conformity with what was well known to Moses, for, having been brought up in Egypt, he would have known that the Egyptian priests observed the custom in their temples. Today it is observed in all Eastern countries where the people take off their shoes or sandals before entering mosques and synagogues as a confession of personal defilement and conscious unworthiness to stand in the presence of unspotted holiness.

3. (:6a) Reminder of Covenant Connection and Purposes – Immanence of God

*“He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham,
the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’”*

We always find in Scripture this balance between the Transcendence and Immanence of God. There is a sense in which God is so far above us that He is unapproachable; yet there at the same time is the sense in which God is so near us that relationally we can approach Him with a sense of intimacy and family familiarity.

4. (:6b) Response of Fear

“Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”

Tim Chester: God is awful and terrible in the old meaning of those words – he evokes awe and terror. You don’t treat him lightly. God is not your “mate”. Indeed, if you were to meet God, your instinct would be to hide your face. Even the sinless, glorious seraphim cover their faces in the presence of God (**Isaiah 6:2**). God is above us. The theological term for this is “transcendence”.

II. (:7-12) THE DETAILED CALL OF GOD – COMMITMENT TO DELIVER FLOWS OUT OF COMPASSION FOR BONDAGE

A. (:7-9) Deliverance by the Personal Involvement of God

1. (:7) Compassion for the Bondage of the Hebrews

“And the LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.’”

2. (:8) Commitment to Deliver Them – Personal Involvement

a. Bring Them Out of Bondage in Egypt

“So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians,”

b. Bring Them Into Prosperity in the Promised Land – Currently Occupied by Powerful Pagan Nations

“and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.”

John Hannah: Canaan was ideal for raising goats and cows. Feeding on good pastureland the goats, sheep, and cows were full of *milk*. Flowing with *honey* means that the bees were busy making honey. Milk and honey suggested agricultural prosperity.

Bruce Hurt: The mention of these people groups makes it clear exactly which land they were to inhabit. And yes, it was a land of **milk and honey**, but these 6 nations serve as a warning that it is also a land of **idolatry and immorality**, both of which would eventually ensnare many of the sons of Israel. Unfortunately, they had received good "training" in idol worship in Egypt (which Israel was still clinging even after they entered the promised land - see the aged Joshua giving a strong warning to the nation - **Joshua 24:14-15** - note their answer in **Joshua 24:16** just like they said in **Ex 24:3,7!** Good intentions, but weak wills). They had "*tears at the altar*" but there was no obedience in the crucible of the temptations and testings in everyday life!

B. (:9-10) Deliverance by the Agency of the Leadership of Moses

1. (:9) Compassion for the Bondage of the Hebrews

“And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.”

Philip Ryken: When God’s people suffer, they sometimes wonder whether God even cares. But the story of Israel in Egypt is a dramatic example of what is always the case: God knows exactly what his people are going through. He is well aware of what is

happening to us. He sees our suffering. He also cares about it, which is why he responds to our cries for help. God is full of pity and compassion for the people he loves.

2. (:10) Commitment to Deliver Them – Sending Moses to Pharaoh

*“Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh,
so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”*

John Hannah: Interestingly while God promised the people two things (deliverance from Egypt and entrance into a new land), He commissioned Moses to accomplish only the first. God knew Moses would not enter the Promised Land (**Deut. 32:48-52**).

S. Lewis Johnson: God is truly concerned over the condition of Israel. One might say, why did not he come much earlier? Why wait all of these years, it has been 40 years since Moses left Egypt, what does he wait for forty years? Well, because there has to be a moral preparation of Israel as well. Their hearts must be prepared to receive the leadership of a man like Moses and follow him.

C. (:11-12) Hesitation on the Part of Moses Addressed --

Hesitation #1 – I Lack Confidence / Significance

1. (:11) Hesitation Expressed -- Based on Moses' Insignificance

*“But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh,
and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?’”*

2. (:12) Hesitation Answered – Based on the Significance of God

a. Presence of God – Sufficiency of God's Favor

“And He said, ‘Certainly I will be with you,’”

b. Promise of Deliverance – Victory is its Own Confirmation

*“and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you:
when you have brought the people out of Egypt,
you shall worship God at this mountain.”*

MacArthur: A second divine promise signified the future success of the mission, suggesting that Israel would not be delivered simply out of bondage and oppression, but rescued to worship (cf. **Ac 7:7**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What value do you place on faithfulness in your everyday, ordinary activities?
- 2) Why should the character of God motivate us to perform our high calling as believers?

- 3) How do God's promises and assurances to Moses apply to us today?
- 4) What are some of the implications that the purpose of Redemption is not just forgiveness of sins but freedom to worship and serve God as God desires?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Oswald Sanders: His inventory of disqualifications covered lack of capability (**Ex 3:11**), lack of message (**Ex 3:13**), lack of authority (**Ex 4:1**), lack of eloquence (**Ex 4:10**), lack of special adaptation (**Ex 4:13**), lack of previous success (**Ex 5:23**), and lack of previous acceptance (**Ex 6:12**). A more complete list of disabilities would be difficult to conjure up. But instead of pleasing God, his seeming humility and reluctance stirred His anger. "*The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses*" (**Ex 4:14**). In point of fact, the excuses Moses advanced to show his incapacity were the very reasons for God's selection of him for the task.

Steven Cole: How God Saves His People – Part 1

When we study a story like this, we need to remember that this is a historical account of God's deliverance of suffering people from slavery and oppression. From that perspective, the story is relevant to many situations in the world today. God is concerned about injustice and the oppression of people by evil dictators. Yet at the same time, because the rest of the Bible refers to the exodus as a picture of God's spiritual salvation of people enslaved to sin under the cruel dominion of Satan, we can apply this story on that level. It's showing us how God saves His people:

Salvation is from the Lord for His chosen people through His chosen servants who know Him, know themselves, and know His power and promise for their mission.

In this message, I can only develop the first part: **Salvation is from the Lord for His chosen people through His chosen servants who know Him.**

1. Salvation is from the Lord for His chosen people.

A. God sovereignly chooses to save His people.

B. Salvation comes from the Lord to His chosen people who feel their need for salvation.

When Moses had tried to assert himself as a leader over the people forty years earlier, they rejected him. It was only after Moses had been hiding in the desert for some time that the people cried out to God for deliverance (**Exod. 2:23**). Then we read (**Exod. 2:24-25**), "*So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of*

[lit. knew] them.”

C. The purpose of God’s salvation is so that His people will worship and serve Him.

2. Salvation is from the Lord through His chosen servants who know Him.

A. God’s servants need to know His holiness.

B. God’s servants need to understand His faithfulness to His covenant promises.

C. God’s servants need to understand that His silence never implies indifference to human needs.

D. God’s servants need to understand His intended blessing for His people.

In **verse 8**, God rehearses how He intends to bless His people by delivering them from the Egyptians and bringing them to dwell in a land flowing with milk and honey, an expression for a bountiful land. The gospel is God’s free blessing for all sinners who deserve His judgment (**Eph. 1:3**). Although as His people we may suffer persecution or even martyrdom now, He promises eternal life with Him when He will take away all sorrow, pain, and death (**Rev. 21:4**). But even now in our trials, we need to see His grace, goodness, and love (Rom. 8:28-39).

E. God’s servants need to know God more deeply.

David Thompson:

GOD SOVEREIGNLY SELECTS AND CALLS MOSES TO THE MINISTRY OF DELIVERING HIS PEOPLE FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE.

SOVEREIGN REALITY #1 – When God called Moses, he was shepherding a flock of sheep. **3:1**

Moses’ job was nothing glamorous, he was a shepherd. At this point he has been doing this job for about 40 years, so he is now nearing 80. This is a time when most people are thinking about their retirement. This is a time when most people are thinking about calling it quits. But that was not going to be the case with Moses. Moses had no inclination that at 80-years-old, God would use him in a most amazing way. He was simply doing his job which was shepherding sheep. He was not fasting or praying; he was not meditating or studying; he was doing a job that was not too exciting and lonely—he was shepherding sheep.

SOVEREIGN REALITY #2 – When God calls Moses, God visibly appeared to Him in a miraculous way. **3:2**

SOVEREIGN REALITY #3 – When God called Moses, the non-burning bush drew

him to take a close look at it. **3:3**

SOVEREIGN REALITY #4 – When God calls Moses, God takes all the initiative for the calling and the conversation. **3:4-12**

There are seven historical facts we want to observe:

Fact #1 - God called Moses from the middle of a burning bush.

3:4a It was the bush that drew Moses, but it is the calling of God and the Word of God that becomes the whole point of the bush burning and drawing Moses. Moses is not looking for God to speak to him and he is not looking for the call of God on his life. God sovereignly used the bush to draw Moses to Himself. It is His election and His choosing. You cannot know the will of God without the Word of God.

Fact #2 - God identified Moses by name twice.

3:4b This is a very personal and individual and specific call of God. God knows each of us individually. God knows each of us intimately. He knows us by name. He calls each of us to do different assignments for Him. Your assignment is not mine and my assignment is not yours, and Moses assignment is not ours.

Fact #3 - God reveals to Moses that He is holy.

3:5 One of the first lessons that Moses needed to learn about God was that He is a Holy God. This point will become a major theme for the rest of the book of Exodus. Every true leader of God must start at this point. God is holy. Our feet have walked in the filth of this world and God will not greatly use or fellowship with anything dirty.

In the book of Genesis, there are some glimpses of the holiness of God, but not much data on the subject. In fact, the word “holy” (*qados*) does not even show up. God sanctified the seventh day (**Gen. 2:3**); Noah was called righteous (*saddiq*) and blameless (*tamim*), but not holy. But now we see that God reveals Himself as a Holy God, who is capable of making the ground holy by virtue of His presence. This is a very important biblical point; because God is able to make ground into holy ground, He is able to make the city of Jerusalem holy (**Is. 52:1**) and He is able to make the Promised Land a holy land habitation (**Ex. 15:13**). He is also able to make a mountain a holy mountain by virtue of His presence (**Is. 11:9**).

Now if God can make dirt holy, think what He is capable of doing with an unholy and dirty life. If God can transform unholy places into holy places, He can certainly transform unholy people into holy people. God is a Holy God and because of that there are two things He demands Moses do:

(Demand #1) - “Do not come near here.”

3:5a There is a vast chasm between God and the best of his servants. This was an important lesson for Moses to learn and one that would stick with him the rest of his life (**Ex. 40:35**). God is totally separate in His holiness in a very unapproachable way.

(Demand #2) - “Remove your sandals.”

3:5b The sandals were made of animal skins and were worn on the feet and they literally walked through the dirt of this world. Before God would even speak to someone and have fellowship with someone, the dirt and filth of this world must be removed and the sandals illustrate that.

Fact #4 - God identified Himself as the God of four Hebrew men.

3:6 Don’t miss this fact. God is the God of Israel. He identifies Himself as that. By saying that “*I am*” the God of these men named, it means He is still their God, which implies these men are still alive because God is the God of the living, not the dead. . .

The response of Moses to this encounter with God and His Word is seen at the end of **verse 6** in that Moses immediately sensed his own unworthiness and sinfulness. He hid his face and did not even dare look at God. Moses was a sinner like all of us, plus he had actually killed a man. So the moment he came into the presence of God, he realized how far short of God’s glory he truly was.

Fact #5 - God informs Moses what He has seen happening to His people in Egypt.

3:7-9 Now God had always seen and known everything, so this is not new news to God. What God means by the fact that “*I have seen*” and “*I am aware*” is that this has all reached the time for Me to respond. God has a timing for everything and one of the lessons we need to learn is that “God’s delays in answering us are not necessarily God’s denials.” Things happen in His time and are answered in His ways. God reveals to Moses exactly what He has observed:

(Observation #1) - God has seen the affliction of His people in Egypt. **3:7a**

(Observation #2) - God has seen the affliction of the Egyptian taskmasters. **3:7b**

(Observation #3) - God has seen the suffering of His people in Egypt. **3:7c**

(Observation #4) - God has come down to deliver His people from the Egyptians. **3:8-9**

God has “*come down*,” which means “Some member of the Trinity has literally left the splendor and glory of heaven to come down here to deliver My people from the Egyptians.” When God deals with man, it is always a descent to Him. God comes down to us before we can ever go up to Him.

But do not overlook this; God calls the Hebrew nation “*My people*.” All nations of the world better see this. God reveals Himself to be the God of the nation Israel. He will always honor those who honor Israel and He will curse those who curse Israel. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God says I am going to bring them geographically out of Egypt and bring them up north to a Promised Land that is spacious and blessed. It is a land that is flowing with milk

and honey. This statement concerning the land being wonderful, plush fertile land shows up about 20 times in the Bible. Now has Israel's land ever looked like this? Not yet. But you have God's Word on it that one day it will.

But then He informs Moses at the end of **verse 8** that this land that I am going to give you is presently occupied by six godless powers. These powers are all anti-God and they are all opposed to God's Word and will and people. The implication is I have already given this land to My people and the godless powers are eventually going to leave this land one way or another. In fact, what Moses would see God do in delivering Israel from the Egyptians would mean it would be nothing for God to futuristically deliver them from all opposing powers in their land.

Now in **verse 9**, God reinforces the fact that Israel had cried out to Him and He has seen the oppression.

Fact #6 - God informs Moses that He is going to use him to deliver Israel.

3:10-11 God was going to do something great, but as is the case in anything God does, He will use a person in the process. In other words, God was going to do the delivering, but Moses would be the agent He would specifically use to get the job done. God uses people to do His will.

Now at this point, Moses responds to God and basically says, "Who in the world am I that I should do this big job?" Moses did not consider himself to be adequate for this job. Now 40 years prior to this, he fought against an evil taskmaster without consulting God, but now that he is 80-years-old, he is fully aware that he cannot do anything in and of himself. It is interesting that when Moses tries to come up with the first of five excuses why he cannot do the job (**Ex. 3:13; 4:1; 4:10; 4:13**), God does not rebuke him or tell him to stop talking in a foolish way.

Fact #7 - God responds and informs Moses that He will be with him and gives him a sign.

3:12 Moses felt totally insecure so God reveals two things to Moses to eliminate the fear:

- 1) He would be with him and help him and guide him (**3:12a**)—realizing God's presence is a great way to cope with things that make you afraid. The key to doing things for God is not to be self-focused, but God-focused.
- 2) He would fulfill a sign (**3:12b**).

Deffinbaugh: The Burning Bush

Chapter 3 introduces a significant change in the drama of the deliverance of God's people from Egypt. From God's providential dealings in the life of the nation Israel, we move to God's direct intervention through Moses and the miracles performed by Him. We move from the silence of God over the past 400 years to God's speaking directly to Moses from the bush, and later on, from the same mountain.

Chapter 3 then is a very significant point of transition. It begins with the revelation of God to Moses from the midst of the burning bush. It develops with the commissioning of Moses to go back to Egypt and the Pharaoh and to deliver God's people from their oppression and bondage. It ends with the beginnings of Moses' reticence and resistance toward the task which God has given him. . .

The first half of **chapter 3** describes the character of the God who is calling and commissioning Moses. This is the basis for Moses' faith and obedience. There are several dimensions to the description of the God of the burning bush which we will briefly consider. These will give us some mental hooks with which to remember the message of this passage.

The God of the burning bush is a holy God. At first, the burning bush was but a curiosity, something novel to which Moses was drawn. Now, the bush (or rather, God, who was manifested in the flames encompassing the bush) was an object of fear and reverence. . .

the holiness of God is a significant factor in the exodus. The sins of the Egyptians must be dealt with. In addition, the possession of the land of Canaan by the Israelites (**Exod. 3:8, 17**) is a judgment on these peoples for their abominations in the sight of God (cf. **Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24-28**).

The God of the burning bush is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In **verse 6**, God identified Himself to Moses in this way:
"I am the God of your father, [https://bible.org/seriespage/3-burning-bush-exodus-31-15 - P348 108239](https://bible.org/seriespage/3-burning-bush-exodus-31-15-p348-108239) the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"
(**Exod. 3:6**).

The God in the burning bush is the God of Moses' forefathers, the God of the patriarchs, Israel's God. He is the God who made a covenant with Abraham and reiterated it to Isaac and Jacob. It is not a new and different God who is here made known to Moses, but the God of his forefathers, the God of Israel. There is no new plan, but simply the outworking of the old plan, revealed to Abraham in **Genesis 15**. . .

The God of the burning bush is a compassionate God. God's intention to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is not only motivated by His holiness, or by His covenant with Abraham and the patriarchs—God's deliverance of His people is also based upon His compassion for them in the midst of their affliction:

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..." (Exod. 3:7-8a).

The God of the burning bush is an imminent God. For 400 years, God appeared to

be distant and removed as far as the Israelites must have thought. They would probably have thought of God as more transcendent (distant, removed, uninvolved in the world), rather than imminent (directly concerned with and involved in the affairs of men). This was not the case, for we have seen God's hidden hand working providentially to preserve His people and to prepare for their release (**Exod. 1 and 2**). Lest Moses not appreciate the involvement of God in the lives of His people, God emphasizes that He is taking a personal interest in the release of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage:

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. ... So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..."
(**Exod. 3:7a, 8a**).

The God of the burning bush is a God who commissions people to participate in His purposes. While God is going to be directly involved in the deliverance of His people, He will do so through human instruments. Specifically, God has manifested Himself to Moses because He intends to manifest Himself through Moses. God's first words to Moses were, "*Moses, Moses*" (**v. 4**). Although God indicated His personal involvement in the exodus ("*I have come down to rescue them,*" (**v. 8**), it is Moses through whom these things will be accomplished. Thus, we find Moses commissioned by God to return to Egypt, to confront Pharaoh, and to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

TEXT: Exodus 3:13-22

TITLE: WHAT IS HIS NAME?

BIG IDEA:

**THE FULL WEIGHT OF GOD'S AUTHORITY STANDS BEHIND THE
DIVINE CALL TO MOSES**

INTRODUCTION:

It is significant that before issuing the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20**, Jesus points to His all-encompassing authority as the motivation to take courage and tackle the daunting mission: *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore . . ."* Moses needed a similar assurance of God's authority before embarking on his daunting mission.

Hywel Jones: Four objections are advanced by Moses and each is answered by God. (:11-12) – First, there is the problem of **complete unfitness for the task described**. This is met by a promise of constant accompaniment and thus complete provision, with added assurance that the liberated slaves (for the deliverance would come to pass) would join him in worship on the very mount on which he stood. The sign, in that it lacked a present fulfilment, was a further incentive to faith in the promises of God.

(:13-22) Second, Moses raises the obstacle of the people's **ignorance of the character of God** and hints that thereby they will not believe the message he brings. Moses is not here asking for the bare name of God which has not been made known to them, but rather for the inner significance of a name already known.

**I. (:13-15) MESSAGE TO MOSES – "I AM WHO I AM" –
HESITATION #2 – I LACK CLOUT / AUTHORITY**

A. (:13) Hesitation of Moses: Validation Needed for the Authority of the Divine Call

1. Claim of Authority by Moses for His Divine Call

"Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.'"

2. Clarification of Authority Needed for His Divine Call

*"Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?'
What shall I say to them?"*

Alan Cole: To ask the question, 'Under what new title has God appeared to you?' is equivalent to asking, 'What new revelation have you received from God?' Normally, in patriarchal days, any new revelation of the ancestral God will be summed up in a new title for him (**Gen. 16:13**) which will in future both record and recount a deeper

knowledge of God's saving activity. We may therefore assume that, in asking this question, they were expecting a **new title** for the patriarchal God.

Walter Kaiser Jr: What does that name **mean** or **signify** in circumstances such as we are in?

Douglas Stuart: Knowing the name of God would be for Moses both a comfort and a credential in his dealing with the Israelites, and for the Israelites in turn it would become a first means of designating true faith and worship. . .

since the true God was known by various names and titles in the patriarchal era (e.g., El Elyon, "*God Most High*" in **Gen 14:18–22**; Pahad Yitshaq, "*Fear of Isaac*" in **Gen 31:42, 53**; El Shaddai, "*God Almighty*" in **Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3**; El Ro'i, "*The God Who Sees Me*" in **Gen 16:13**; El Bethel, "*God of Bethel*" in **Gen 31:13**) specificity was desirable. Perhaps most importantly, however, was the assumption in that culture that to call on a god—that is, to pray to and worship him—involved calling on his **name**, specifically naming him in prayer and worship (cf. **1 Kgs 18:24–26**).

Ryken: Before faulting Moses too much, however, we should put ourselves in his place for a moment. God had made such large promises and placed such heavy demands on him that Moses wanted more information. In particular, he wondered what God's people were going to say when he went back and told them he was going to lead them to the Promised Land. Moses had been raised as an Egyptian, which meant that he had never fully shared in their sufferings. Nor had he been back to Egypt for forty years. Even worse, the last time he was there, the Israelites had rejected his leadership. They were hardly likely to believe Moses when he said he was sent to be their savior. He wasn't even sure himself that he was the right man for the job. So why would anyone else think he could do it? The only thing he could appeal to was **God's authority**, but how could he persuade people that he had been in the presence of the Lord? He could hardly believe his own eyes and ears, let alone convince anyone else. So he imagined going back to Egypt and saying, "Look, I was out in the desert watching these sheep, you see, and there was this bush, and it kept burning without burning up. Well, anyway, then I heard this voice telling me to lead you out of Egypt."

Moses knew how skeptical people would be, and it was not hard to guess how they would react. They would tell him that he had been seeing things and hearing things out under the hot desert sun. Then what was he going to say—"Well, I guess you just had to be there"? It is easy to see why Moses felt like he needed something more. **He wanted the full weight of divine authority behind him.** So he asked God to reveal his very name.

B. (:14-15) Validation Provided by the Name of God – the Self-Existent God of Unchanging Covenant Relationship to the Hebrew People

1. (:14) Name of God = I AM

a. Significance of the Name

"And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM';"

Douglas Stuart: the generation after Jacob and all subsequent generations up to his own had lost at least a measure—and probably, over time, a greater and greater measure—of the knowledge of the true God and therefore, presumably, of the practice of praying to him and worshiping him regularly and properly, by his name.

“I am” statements of Jesus:

- **John 6:35** *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.*
- **John 8:12** *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*
- **John 10:9** *I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*
- **John 10:11** *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*
- **John 11:25-26** *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”*
- **John 14:6** *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*
- **John 15:5** *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*
- **John 8:58** *Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”*

Motyer: ‘I AM WHO I AM’ is without doubt an enigmatic statement and conceals at least as much as it tells. It is an open-ended assertion of divine sufficiency: ‘Whatever circumstance may arise, I will be there and I will be sufficient.’

Constable: Moses had asked, "Who am I?" implying his complete inadequacy for his calling. God replied, "I am who I am!" implying His complete adequacy. The issue was not who Moses was but who God is. I believe God meant, I am the God of your forefathers who proved myself long ago as completely adequate for all their needs, so it really doesn't matter who you are, Moses. Moses would learn the complete adequacy of God Himself in the events that followed. Later, Pharaoh would say, "Who is the LORD?" (**Exodus 5:2**), and God's response was, "I am the LORD!" (**Exodus 6:2; Exodus 6:6; Exodus 6:8**). Pharaoh, too, then learned God's complete adequacy. The real issue, then, was, and is, who God is.

b. Authority Invested in the Name

“and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel,

I AM has sent me to you.”

Davis: If the simple Qal sense is maintained, it carries the fundamental idea of the self-existence of God, and simply means “*I am the One who is.*” This has long been the view of most conservative scholars. . . Alternative viewpoint = “*He who causes to be.*”

Youngblood: When used by God in the Bible, “***I am***” never refers merely to His existence or inscrutability or changelessness or sovereignty. . . God’s “*I am*” is always an expression of relationship to His people (see especially **Exod. 34:5-7**). The same Hebrew word is used in **Exodus 4:12, 15**, where the text says, literally, “*I will be with your mouth.*”

Gispén: The Lord is the God of the covenant. As such He remains the same, is consistent. What He is in general comforts His people through its application to the specific situation (Israel’s oppression) and the special relationship (covenant) that already existed between Him and Israel’s ancestors, and now (“*I am*”) will also exist between Him and the descendants “*from generation to generation.*”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The formula used in **v. 14** is the Hebrew syntactical construction known as *idem per idem*, where the same root with the same sense is repeated both in the principal clause and also in what is here the dependent relative clause. . . Often this construction is used to express a totality, intensity, or emphasis to the form so highlighted by repetition . . . “I am truly he who exists and who will be dynamically present then and there in the situation to which I am sending you.”

2. (:15) Name of God = the LORD -- Jehovah/YHWH

a. Significance of the Name

“And God, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’”

Motyer: It is intriguing, and though improbable not too fantastic, to wonder if the name *Yahweh* was a closely guarded secret among the Hebrews in Egypt and could, therefore, have been used as a proof of veracity if anyone claimed to come in the name of Israel’s God (cf. **Deut. 13:1**). This would explain why Moses expected the question about the name, why he would not have been able to answer it and why without it there would have been no progress with his mission. A claim to have received a word from God carries no weight unless tested and found to be valid (cf. **1 Thess. 5:20–21; 1 John 4:1**), and the test of a secret name would have been determinative.

b. Permanence Invested in the Name

*“This is My name forever,
and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”*

II. (:16-18a) MESSAGE TO ELDERS OF ISRAEL – “GOD CARES FOR HIS COVENANT NATION AND HE WILL DELIVER”

A. (:16a) Target Audience = Elders of Israel

“Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them,”

Mackay: We here come across for the first time a major group in Israelite society, who are to play a significant role in the following narrative (Ex. 3:16, 18; Ex 4:29; Ex 12:21; Ex 17:5, 6; Ex 18:12; Ex 19:7; Ex 24:1, 9, 14; Nu 11:16, 24, 25; 16:25).

The **elders** (the word originally signified ‘*the bearded ones*’) were a well-known institution in society at that time. Through age and experience they were looked up to as those who were capable of leading the community. It was not the role of the **elders** to frame legislation or establish legal precedents, but to administer the agreed standards of the community and to arbitrate in disputes. By accepting the authority and judgments of the **elders** society could live harmoniously without having to resort to violence to settle disputes between individual and families. The institution of **elders** did much to promote the cohesion and solidarity of Israelite and other similar societies.

B. (:16b) Assurance of God’s Compassion -- Covenant-Keeping and Concerned God

“The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, ‘I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.’”

Douglas Stuart: The different wordings are all variations of an idiom that is essentially a synecdoche—a part for the whole—in which because of God’s nature, his own overt mention of his being aware automatically implies additionally his determination to act. Thus God’s announcement of awareness of a problem was at the same time an announcement that he would attend to that problem—because it could not be solved by human means, not even “*by a mighty hand*” (v. 19).

C. (:17) Assurance of God’s Deliverance -- Promise-Keeping God

1. Deliverance From Affliction in Egypt

“So I said, ‘I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt’”

2. Deliverance To the Promised Land of Challenges and Prosperity

a. Challenges

“to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite,”

b. Prosperity

“to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

D. (:18a) Assurance of Successful Mission -- Sovereign God Who Controls the Future

“And they will pay heed to what you say;”

III. (:18b-22) MESSAGE TO KING OF EGYPT – “LET MY PEOPLE GO”

A. (:18b) Target Audience = King of Egypt

“and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt, and you will say to him,”

B. (:18c) Request

1. Divinely Authorized Request

“The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.”

2. Daring Transformational Request

“So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.”

Douglas Stuart: “Three-day journey” was an idiom in the ancient world for “a major trip with formal consequences.” Pharaoh would have heard it that way and would also have heard it as meaning “We want to leave Egypt for however long we choose.” Moreover, the demand for the people to “offer sacrifices to the Lord our God” was yet another way of implying—without quite saying so in so many words—that the people would leave Egypt since, as develops later in the actual event (**10:25–26**) the Israelites expected to worship Yahweh far from Egypt at Mount Sinai, completely out of and free from any Egyptian oversight, having taken all their possessions with them. Pharaoh’s continuing resistance to the demands of Yahweh must be read in this light. He knew from the start that the Israelites were not merely asking for three days off from work; they were asking to migrate from Egypt. Thus his resistance: what they were asking for was the very sort of thing that could create the situation his predecessor feared, namely, an Israelite movement of separate national identity, dissociating itself from Egypt and heading out into Asiatic reaches where the Israelites might join with anti-Egyptian forces and become effective enemies of Pharaoh and his people.

Ryken: These solutions have some merit, but there is another answer that brings out the true spiritual intention of the elders’ request. What was more important than the journey’s **length** was its **purpose**. What the Israelites were requesting was permission to go out and meet their God. In particular, they needed to worship him, to restore their covenant relationship with him by offering sacrifices for their sins. Remember that from the very beginning, the exodus was for the glory of God. Thus the real question was not how long the Israelites would be gone, but whether or not Pharaoh was willing to let them glorify God at all. Ultimately God intended to lead his people out of Egypt altogether; but by beginning with a more modest request, he was able to expose Pharaoh’s deep hostility to his glory. Even if it would have been unreasonable to expect the king of Egypt to let his entire labor force leave the country, it was hardly unreasonable to ask for a few days of religious freedom. Yet Pharaoh was unwilling to give God even three days of glory. He wanted to keep all the glory to himself, and he knew that if he granted even this one simple request, it would show that the glory did not really belong to him at all.

C. (:19-20) Retribution / Pressure / Compulsion

1. (:19) Stubbornness of King of Egypt

“But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion.”

Mackay: Here, however, the Lord is pointing to a feature of the king’s character, indeed of the whole political and religious system of which he was the embodiment. They would stubbornly refuse to let the Israelites go. It was not just that they were determined not to lose a valuable economic resource. Yielding to the religious claims embodied in the Israelites’ request would undermine the whole religious and social philosophy on which Egypt had been founded. Only force—overwhelming external compulsion—would lead Pharaoh to act in the way the Lord required.

2. (:20) Sovereign Intervention of All-Powerful God

“So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.”

D. (:21-22) Reparations

1. (:21a) Granting of Favor

“And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians;”

Motyer: It is not just that the Lord has power over all the power of the enemy, but even people’s hearts are his to sway, direct, change and command. In **chapter 1** we saw how the Egyptians’ feelings towards the Israelites changed first to fear and then to loathing (**1:9, 12**), and it is against this background that we must now see the transformation sketched in **verses 21–22** and fulfilled in **12:35–36**. It was this wealth that later would provide for the beauty and richness of the tabernacle (**chapter 25** onwards). The Lord brought about a transformation of relationships (**21a**), conditions (**21b–22a**), and status (**22b**) whereby the hated became the favoured, slaves were enriched and the erstwhile victims triumphed over their erstwhile masters.

2. (:21b-22a) Gifting with Valuables

a. (:21b) Stated Negatively

“and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed.”

b. (:22a) Stated Positively

“But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters.”

Guzik: God promised to arrange things not only to move Pharaoh’s heart, but also to move the heart of the Egyptian people so that when Israel did depart, they would be showered with silver and gold and clothing. This was not stealing or extortion, it was the appropriate wages for the years of forced labor.

Mackay: Although the word ‘*clothing*’ is a general term, here it conveys the idea of valuable clothing, not just ordinary wear.

3. (:22b) Plundering the Egyptians
“*Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.*”

Gispen: The plundering of Egypt accentuates the fact that the king would declare war on the God of the Hebrews by his refusal; and the hand of the Lord would triumph so brilliantly that women and children would carry away the spoils.

Ryken: Plundering the Egyptians would demonstrate many of God’s perfections. It would prove that he keeps all his promises. Centuries before, when he made his covenant with Abraham, God specifically promised that his people would come out of their captivity “*with great possessions*” (**Gen. 15:14**). It would also show God’s power. Ordinarily a defeated nation was plundered by mighty warriors. But in this case Egypt would be plundered by women—a complete triumph! Furthermore, claiming these trophies of war would demonstrate God’s providence, for the silver and gold would eventually be used to build the tabernacle. Thus the Egyptians were plundered for the glory of God. . .

Later, when God gave his people the law, he decreed that Hebrew slaves were never to be sent away empty-handed but always compensated for their labor: “*If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free. And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you*” (**Deut. 15:12–15a**). One of the deep principles of divine justice is that the redemption of a slave requires the payment of a gift. The same thing happened when the Israelites were freed from Babylon: They were given gold and silver for their return trip to Jerusalem (see **Ezra 1**).

There is an echo of this principle in the New Testament. When Jesus Christ liberated us from our bondage to sin, he lavished us with gifts—spiritual gifts to enrich our new life of freedom in Christ. As the Scripture says, “*When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men*” (**Eph. 4:8**). Jesus despoiled the devil through the cross, and now the gifts of the Holy Spirit serve as the bounty of our liberation.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) As you witness to others and teach them God’s commandments, do you have a sense of God’s authority validating your ministry?
- 2) What comfort and encouragement do you take from the way in which Jesus revealed

Himself in the great “*I AM*” statements in the Gospel of John?

3) How can you increase your appreciation for how the Holy Spirit has granted spiritual gifts to the body of Christ?

4) When faced with the evil practices of wicked world governments, how does God’s victory over stubborn Pharaoh give you hope?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Motyer: Moses needed tons of reassurance. He was chronically uncertain about himself. That episode in Egypt all those years ago (2:11–17) must have really knocked the stuffing out of him. All the old bounce was gone, and the man who was now not the prince of Egypt but the shepherd of Midian needed crowds of reassurance, tender loving care and hand-holding. This is the way his conversation with the Lord went—

‘Who am I?’ (3:11)

‘What shall I tell them?’ (3:13)

‘What if they do not believe me’ (4:1)

‘I have never been eloquent’ (4:10)

‘Please send someone else’ (4:13)

We can feel Moses’ almost overwhelming insecurity. How uncertain he was. First, there is his sense of personal inadequacy (3:11). Is this the same man who once thought he could solve everything by simply making his presence felt? It is, but his self-confidence has been deflated by the experience of failure and the forty long years of relegation which followed. Then there is his desperate attempt to plead ignorance and incompetence (3:13), lack of the personal stature and authority that would command attention and commend the message (4:1) and of any natural abilities that would suit him to the task (4:10). Finally, he came to that place where we too so often find ourselves and said, ‘Here am I, send someone else’ (4:13). . .

Again we are not here pausing on details, but simply observing the flow of the narrative.

A1 - I am not the person you need: unfitness (3:12)

B1 - I have not the necessary gift: knowledge (3:13)

C - I have not the required effectiveness (4:1)

B2 - I have not the necessary gift: eloquence (4:10)

A2 - I am not the person you need: unwillingness (4:13)

Deffinbaugh: In verses 16-22 the task which Moses has been commissioned to accomplish is outlined, along with an outline of the events which will take place due to Moses’ ministry. Essentially, there are three general categories covered in these verses:

(1) Moses was commanded to assemble the elders of Israel to reassure them of God’s

covenant promises, and to convey God's plan for delivering His people from their bondage, and to bring them into the land of Canaan (**Exod. 3:16-17**). In effect, Moses was to repeat the words which God had spoken to him from the burning bush.

(2) Moses was told to go to Pharaoh with the elders of Israel and to request a three-day "leave" to worship God in the desert (**Exod. 3:18-20**). This request would be denied, and only by compulsion (the plagues) would the king of Egypt release the Israelites. It is important to observe that the resistance of Pharaoh was foretold, thus preparing Moses for the hard times ahead. The release from Egypt would not come quickly or easily, but it would come.

(3) Finally, God instructed Moses to "collect," as it were, the wages the Israelites had earned in Egypt (**Exod. 3:21-22**). This was to be accomplished by asking the Egyptian women for articles of silver and gold and putting them on their children.

Ryken: God's message to the Israelites contains many wonderful truths about his attributes and activities. Although we have studied them before, they are well worth repeating. God identified himself as "*the Lord*" (v. **15**). This special divine name ("*Yahweh*") meant that he is the One who is, the eternal and self-existent God. God also identified himself as "*the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" (**Exod. 3:15**). He was the God of the eternal covenant, who established a personal, saving relationship with his people. He knew them by name and had a history of loving and caring for them.

All of that was in the **past**. In the **present**, God was at work to save his people. This is why he appeared to Moses at the burning bush, revealing himself as the holy God. When Moses returned to Egypt, he was supposed to tell the Israelites that he had seen a theophany, a visible manifestation of the invisible God. He was also supposed to tell them that God knew and cared about what was happening to them and was ready to do something about it. The Israelites had been enslaved for so long that they feared they were forgotten. But God paid close attention to their suffering. He knew how grievously they had been sinned against, for he said, "*I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt*" (v. **16b**).

Yahweh was the God of the **past** who promised salvation to the patriarchs. He was the God of the **present** who sent Moses to save his people. And he was the God of the **future** who would bring them into the Promised Land: "*I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey*" (v. **17**). As we have seen, salvation is not only from something but also to something. When God rescued his people from slavery and captivity, he did not leave them in the wilderness but brought them into the land of milk and honey. After the exit from Egypt, there was the entry into Canaan. The God who spoke to Moses is the God who is active in history—**past, present, and future**.

We have come to know this same God through Jesus Christ, who is "*the same yesterday*

*and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Jesus Christ is the God of the **past**, who entered human history to save sinners by dying on the cross and rising from the grave in real time and space. Jesus is also the God of the **present**, who is watching over us and who knows our suffering, including the ways that we are sinned against. The Christ of **past** and **present** is also the Christ of the future, who has promised not simply to save us from sin but also to bring us to glory. One day he will return to take us home forever.*

John Mackay: Above all other considerations, faith is able to persevere because it grasps the reality that is encapsulated in the divine name, the Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah. This points to the Lord’s presence with his people, not on an occasional, almost fortuitous, basis, but as a matter of commitment, covenant commitment. Despite the shortcomings of the citizens of his kingdom, they have a promise from him that he will never renege on: *“I will be with you.” “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour” (Isa. 43:2–3).*

Oswalt: In God’s response, he emphasized two things about his character. They are the two unchanging essentials, the two irreconcilable factors that have driven philosophers crazy for centuries (**Isa 44:25**): God’s **transcendence** and his **immanence**. How can God be absolutely other-and-good and yet be fully, directly, and immediately participating in the life of this sinful world? While the Bible helps us to answer that question, most especially in the doctrine of the Incarnation, it never does so fully. It simply asserts that both are so, and we can either accept the facts and build our lives accordingly, or we can refuse to accept them until we can reconcile them.

God’s response was that he is the *I AM*. That is, he is the one eternally self-existent being in the universe, the one upon which all other beings depend for their existence. He is the one being who is absolutely noncontingent. He is complete in himself and does not depend on any other thing for his being. He is utterly other than his creation. Furthermore, he is the one for whom all time is now. The book of Revelation signifies this truth by saying that he is *“the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come” (Rev 1:4, 8)*. When Jesus applied the *“I AM”* to himself, the Jews knew exactly what he was saying and tried to stone him for blasphemy (**John 8:58–59**). So the one who offers deliverance to his people is also the one who is without any of the limitations of creation.

In contrast to Plotinus’s “One” or Aristotle’s “Unmoved Mover,” he who is *“I AM”* is so much without limitation that he can intervene in his creation at any point without affecting or altering his eternal being in any way. His *“eternal name” (3:15)* is such that he can become intimately, personally involved with individual humans. He can stoop to become *“the God of (i.e., “who belongs to”) Abraham” (3:15)* and, in fact, delights to do so. But God’s immanence goes farther than that. He does not only involve himself in the “inner-personal” world of religious encounter. He acts in the outer, interpersonal world of history. That is what **3:16–22** establish in this “name” context. Is he really God, the one God, the saving God, great enough to be the Creator, near enough to be the Savior? Yes! But how do we know? We may say, “I have met him in the secret

places of my heart, and I know.” That is vitally important, but it is not enough. It is not enough because that is the same authority that the insane appeal to. “I am a tomato,” says the poor wretch. We ask, “How do you know?” and he replies, “Why, I just know in my heart!” How do we verify truth? Truth is what conforms to the shared experience of many people in areas external to their own psyches, that is, in the realm of history. Is God immanent? Yes! How do we know? Because he has broken into history and “*has met with us*” (3:18). He has bent a pharaoh to his will and brought his people out of Egypt, not as slaves, but as conquerors. What is his name? He is the *I AM* who delights to be called the *God of Abraham*.

TEXT: Exodus 4:-1-17

TITLE: HOW TO ANGER GOD

BIG IDEA:

PERSISTENT HESITATION AND OBJECTIONS REGARDING OBEYING GOD'S CALL (DESPITE DIVINE ASSURANCES) END UP ANGERING GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Our life as a believer should be all about pleasing our Lord Jesus Christ. But if you want to learn how to anger God, this account of Moses' feeble excuses and hesitation to obey provides the perfect pattern. God's Call to Moses had been clear and specific. We have already studied two earlier objections that Moses offered (I lack Confidence and Clout). We have seen how the Lord patiently encouraged His servant. He provided abundant assurances regarding the positive response he could expect from the Jewish elders as well as the ultimate victory that would be achieved as God delivers His people out of Egypt and brings them into the Promised Land. But Moses was not fully persuaded. He was still living in doubt and fear and unbelief.

Motyer: simple statements of inadequacy (3:11), inability (3:13), ineffectiveness (4:1), incompetence (4:10) and grudging submission (4:13)

I. (:1-9) HESITATION #3 – I LACK CREDIBILITY

A. (:1) Credibility Smokescreen

"Then Moses answered and said, 'What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, The LORD has not appeared to you.'"

Alan Redpath: Fear is always the enemy of faith; this is the battleground of Christian experience. A man grows and triumphs as his faith overcomes his fear. To believe God, to rest in the Word of God, to enjoy the promises of God is to conquer our fear.

B. (:2-9) Confirming Signs

1. (:2-5) First Sign – Turning Staff into Serpent

a. (:2-3) Presentation of the Sign – Using Something Ordinary to Accomplish Something Extraordinary

"And the LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' And he said, 'A staff.' Then He said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it."

J Ligon Duncan: -- "*What is that in your hand?*" - He already knows what is in Moses' hand. But Moses, and the people of God need to be reminded of something. By asking Moses what is in your hand, he is confirming as Moses writes it down and as Moses retells it to the people of God, that all that Moses has in his hand is an ordinary

staff. This isn't a secret voodoo stick. This isn't a mighty powerful something or other. It's just a staff. It's a shepherd's staff, and God wants Moses to say it out loud. And he does. "Well, Lord, it's a rod." Just like the one that David talks about in **Psalm 23:4**, it's the rod, the staff that comforts him. It's a shepherd's staff. That's all it is. There's nothing magical, supernatural or powerful about that staff that's important to know. Because God is going to use that very ordinary staff to conquer Egypt. God asks Moses, what is in your hand, in order to confirm that that staff is ordinary, and then God tells him to throw the staff on the ground, and suddenly the staff transforms itself into a serpent; or God, by His own might, transforms the staff into a serpent. And Moses flees away. Now you just learned something else. Moses is not a trickster. Moses is scared to death of the serpent on the ground. He throws the staff down, it turns into a snake, and he beats it, like any normal human being with an inkling of sense. In other words, God is telling you that Moses is not a magician. You see the people of God lived in a culture in Egypt where magic was rife. Egyptian magicians did these kind of tricks. Egyptians believed in these kinds of methodology and magic. And God is confirming to you that His leader is no magician.

Dan Duncan: suggests the following meaning of this staff/serpent "**sign**" (**Ex 4:8-9**) - In Egypt that snake was a symbol of Royal and divine power the Pharaoh possessed, the Pharaoh being considered by the Egyptians to be a god. And the serpent that he wore on his crown was the testimony to his divinity. The scepter he held in his hand was emblematic of royalty and power. So Moses threw down a simple shepherd's staff in contrast to the Pharaoh's royal scepter and it turned into a serpent. And then it returned to his staff when he simply picked it up and picked it up by the tail, of all places. It would seem that it was signified that Moses had divine authority and divine power over what that serpent represented, Pharaoh himself. He had been given God's power over the Pharaoh.

Steven Cole: By miraculously changing Moses' staff into a snake and back again into a staff, the Lord was showing Moses that as he, the lowly shepherd, obediently depended on God's power, he would have dominion over even this fearful Egyptian tyrant. And, of course, the serpent goes back to the garden as the enemy of God and those made in His image. Ultimately, the seed of the woman (Christ) would crush the head of the serpent, who would bruise Him on the heel (**Gen. 3:15**). The shepherd's staff also showed Moses that that which is common and impotent in itself becomes powerful when yielded in obedience to the Lord. This is a foundational lesson for all who serve the Lord. He taught it to the disciples in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. After giving the disciples the impossible command, "*You give them something to eat!*" (**Mark 6:37**), Jesus asked them (**Mark 6:38**), "*How many loaves do you have?*" That's parallel to the Lord's question to Moses, "*What is that in your hand?*" After telling Jesus that they had five barley loaves and two fish, Andrew asked the obvious question (**John 6:9**), "*But what are these for so many people?*" The point is, the ordinary and impotent becomes sufficient and powerful when we yield it in obedience to the Lord.

Motyer: The kings of Egypt wore crowns adorned with the ‘uraeus’, a cobra with raised hood threatening Egypt’s enemies. The cobra crown was also associated with the sun god Re, the ‘Living King’, who, when united with Amon, was the most powerful deity in Egypt. Victory over the serpent was, therefore, a comprehensive motif for challenging and overthrowing the central realities of Egyptian religion and sovereignty, and thus by this sign, Egypt’s power, whether divine or royal, is shown to be under the Lord’s sovereign sway. Moses may well have fled from it in the past, but by obedience he can also subdue it.

b. (:4) Possession of the Sign

“But the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail’ -- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—“

It required faith for Moses to obey God and possess back the staff – taking ownership of the performance of this sign

Bruce Hurt: This is fascinating, for when snake handlers pick up snakes, they pick them up by the neck, right behind the head, so that the snake cannot swing around quickly (which they can easily do) and inflict a fatal bite. And despite this seemingly illogical, even potentially dangerous command, Moses obeyed. This time there was no arguing with God, no objecting, no excuses. This took faith, faith that he would not be bitten and die. Faith is obeying God in spite of the consequences. While Moses clearly had many objections regarding his role as the designated "deliverer," he does manifest trust by grasping the snake. Trust is not demonstrated by fearlessness but by obedience. God called Moses to obey, and to discover that when he focused on obedience, God would deal with his fear. God was teaching Moses that he was to obey what God commanded him to do even when it was uncomfortable.

Ryken: If God could do all that with a stick, imagine what he could do with Moses! And imagine what he might be able to do with you! In a wonderful sermon entitled “*No Little People, No Little Places*,” **Francis Schaeffer** pointed out that in order for it to become an instrument of divine power, the staff of Moses had to become the rod of God (see **Exodus 4:20**, where it is called “*the staff of God*”). Schaeffer went on to say: “Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. ‘God so used a stick of wood’ can be a banner cry for each of us. Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy, and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me must become the *me of God*. Then I can become useful in God’s hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God.” What Moses learned from the stick was that in order to be used for God’s glory, he had to place his life in God’s hands. To use Schaeffer’s expression, when we become the we of God in every aspect of our being, in every area of our lives, then God will use us for his great glory.

- c. (:5) Purpose of the Sign
“that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

2. (:6-8) Second Sign – Turning Healthy Hand into Leprous Hand

- a. (:6) Presentation of the Sign
“And the LORD furthermore said to him, ‘Now put your hand into your bosom.’ So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.”
- b. (:7) Possession of the Sign
“Then He said, ‘Put your hand into your bosom again.’ So he put his hand into his bosom again; and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.”
- c. (:8) Purpose of the Sign
“And it shall come about that if they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.”

Youngblood: The term “*miraculous sign*” (v. 8), applicable to all three signs, is a specific Hebrew word referring to a supernatural phenomenon or event intended to encourage faith, demonstrate authority, provide assurance (**Josh. 2:12-13**), bear witness (**Isa. 19:19-20**), or give warning (**Num. 17:10**).

Motyer: If anything could be said to sum up Moses’ unworthiness before God and his unfitness for divine service this outbreak of leprosy did. Moses’ low estimation of his qualification for divine service had all been true, but the Lord made him go lower still and discover a contagion within himself. This was so that the Lord could make the very place of contagion the place of renewal and restoration. The old Moses could become the new - Cf. **Exod. 15:26; Deut. 28:27, 60**. In the Bible ‘*leprosy*’ was a general term for various skin diseases and could well have been used to represent the afflictions listed here. Moses, not imprisoned by what he had been, and indeed still was. The power of the Lord is a power of regeneration, making people new.

3. (:9) Third Sign – Turning Water from Nile into Blood

- “But it shall be that if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”*

Wiersbe: If God can turn rods into serpents and serpents into rods, if He can cause and cure leprosy, and if He can turn water into blood, then He can enable Moses to speak His Word with power. Moses was making the mistake of looking at himself instead of

looking to God (6:12). The God who made us is able to use the gifts and abilities He's given us to accomplish the tasks He assigns to us.

Motyer: The third sign, the corruption of the Nile, struck at the very heart of Egypt's existence. It is estimated that the Nile basin received as much as thirty feet of mud in the river's annual inundation, making it 'the black land' in contrast to 'the red land' of the surrounding desert. Every year the Nile waters washed, cleansed, renewed and increased Egypt's soil and were the reason for Egypt's famed fertility and so her great wealth and power. The Nile also abounded in fish and fowl. 'The river was endless in its bounty, and the people sang its praises continually ... [It] was "the Father of Life" ... "the Mother of All" ... the manifestation of the god HAPI, the divine spirit that unceasingly blessed the land'. To threaten and destroy the Nile was to destroy Egypt itself—and this, too, the Lord showed he could do.

Douglas Stuart: This third proof-of-commission sign is of a grander sort: it anticipates the first plague (7:14–24) in which water—mainly from the Nile in the case of the plague—is turned into blood, hinting at the fact that God had in store some serious threats to unleash upon the Egyptians, which he would first demonstrate, through this sample, to his own people. The third sign, in other words, was not so much about Moses as it was about Egypt, and specifically the Nile. For God's servant Moses to demonstrate through this simple act God's power over the Nile would be to demonstrate God's power generally over Egypt and the Egyptians *a fortiori*.

Ryken: Each of these signs verified Moses' credentials and authenticated his ministry as a true prophet. Like most Biblical miracles, the rod, the hand, and the blood served to confirm the truth of God's word. Whenever Moses performed these signs, he was proven to be a divinely empowered prophet. However incredible the report of his encounter with God may have sounded, his ability to perform miraculous signs would strengthen people's faith, convincing them to trust his testimony. In much the same way, the miracles of Jesus served to authenticate his teaching and to prove that he was the Christ.

II. (:10-17) HESITATION #4 – I LACK CAPABILITY

A. (:10-12) Pushing the Envelope of God's Patience

1. (:10) Protestation of Moses

"Then Moses said to the LORD, 'Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.'"

Deffinbaugh: Look at what Stephen has to say about Moses' abilities: *"When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was **powerful in speech and action**" (Acts 7:21-22).* Moses did not have a speech problem, as some might suppose. Neither was he ungifted in speech. According to Stephen, Moses was eloquent. Moses is not only doing a disservice to God (by refusing to believe Him and

obey in faith), but to himself. Moses should not trust in his own abilities, but neither should he deny the abilities which God has given him.

Mackay: *‘Eloquent’* (literally, ‘a man of words’) and *‘slow of speech and tongue’* (literally ‘heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue’) do not point to a physical speech impediment, but to someone to whom words did not come easily. It does not seem to refer to the fact that after 40 years in Midian Moses no longer had the command of the Egyptian language he once had. This was something that had been true ‘in the past’. It would seem that Moses did not think himself sufficiently quick in thinking up counter-arguments to deal with objections as they arose. This view of himself may have been intensified by the fact that after the relative quiet of his life as a shepherd in Midian he would find it difficult to adjust to the cut and thrust of the debate in the Egyptian court. Moses was afraid that in the intense negotiations that would undoubtedly take place with Pharaoh he would not be quick or persuasive enough to present the case adequately before Pharaoh.

Whatever the precise difficulty Moses had, from experience he knew this had affected him *‘in the past’*. However, in the additional words *‘since you have spoken to your servant’*, it seems there is an element of complaint, as well as one of contradiction. During the course of his conversation with the Lord, Moses has continued to be aware of his previous difficulty in expressing his thoughts quickly and clearly. The call he has received has not changed him in that respect. So he pleads that he is not up to the task that has been assigned him, implying that the Lord has done nothing to change the situation.

2. (:11-12) Response of God

a. (:11) Trust in God’s Sovereign Design and Equipping

“And the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The gifts of speech, sight, and hearing are from the same Lord who was sending this hesitant leader. While God was not to be blamed for directly creating any defects, his wise providence in allowing these deprivations as well as his goodness in bestowing their ordinary functions mirrors his ability to meet any emergency.

b. (:12) Obey the Divine Call – Relying on Divine Enablement

“Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.”

B. (:13-17) Provoking God Finally to Anger

1. (:13) Anybody but Me

“But he said, ‘Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever Thou wilt.’”

Ryken: Moses' rebellion is evident from the way he addressed God: "*O Lord.*" This may sound respectful enough, but it lacked genuine reverence. Notice that *ord* in the word "*Lord*" are left uncapitalized. This is because Moses did not use the name that God had revealed to him, the special divine name *Yahweh* ("*Lord*"), and thus he failed to acknowledge God's full sovereignty and majesty. This shows how important it is to worship God properly. The God we praise is the God we serve. If we are not consistent and reverent in our worship, we will be inconstant and reckless in our obedience. . .

But for all the similarities between these two men [Moses and Christ], there are also some crucial ways that Jesus is not like Moses. One of the most obvious is that he was ready and willing to do God's will. He said to his Father, "*Here I am ... I have come to do your will, O God*" (**Heb. 10:7**). True, Jesus agonized over the pains of the cross, but he did not refuse to endure them. He said to his Father, "*may your will be done*" (**Matt. 26:42**). And then he went out and freely offered his life for our salvation. He did not say, "Send someone else," for he knew that there was no one else! He and he alone could make perfect atonement for our sins.

Davis: it now became apparent that Moses was not speaking out of weakness, but out of a lack of obedience.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Moses' groundless opposition angered God (**v. 14a**). Moses could think of no more good objections, for God had met every one point by point. So God's unwilling servant revealed the true nature of his heart.

Deffinbaugh: Here is the bottom line. Moses does not want to go. It is not that he lacks the assurance or the authority; he simply lacks the courage to act. No reason is stated here as to why God should send someone else, because Moses is all out of excuses. And so Moses pleads with God for someone else to go.

God is longsuffering and patient, but now He is angry. I do not know precisely what physical manifestations evidenced the anger which Moses mentions in **verse 14**, but my own impression is that this must have scared Moses half to death. Can you imagine making God mad and then having to stand there faced with His anger? If Moses was afraid of the presence of God in the burning bush before (**Exod. 4:6**), one can hardly imagine the fear which Moses had at this point.

God's anger was not only reflected in some visible way (did the burning bush suddenly flare up?), but it was evident in the answer which God gave to Moses (**vv. 14-17**). Aaron could speak fluently, so let him speak for Moses. As later events will indicate, the presence of Aaron was a burden for Moses and a stumbling block for others. Among other things, Aaron fashioned the "golden calf" and led Israel in false worship (**Exod. 32:1-6**). Aaron was, at best, a mixed blessing.

2. (:14-17) Introducing Role of Aaron

a. (:14-15) Reaction of the Lord = Anger

"Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses,"

b. (:14b-15) Resource of Aaron Provided

“and He said, ‘Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. And you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do.’”

Constable: Unable to excuse himself, Moses finally admitted that he did not want to obey God (**Exodus 4:13-16**). God became angry with Moses because he refused to obey. However, the sovereign Lord would not let His reluctant servant go (cf. Jonah). Instead He provided a mouthpiece for Moses in his older brother by three years, Aaron (cf. **Exodus 7:7**). This act was both an aid to Moses and a discipline for his disobedience. On the one hand Aaron was an encouragement to Moses, but on the other he proved to be a source of frustration as a mediator (e.g. **ch 32**).

Mackay: He is not remote and unaffected by our perverseness and rebellion. He reacts with due displeasure against all that contravenes his holy will. When Moses had presented reasoned arguments against what he was required to do, God gave reasoned responses. Now that he is simply being insubordinate to the one he recognizes as ‘Lord’ the conversation is broken off. There must be no more attempts to get round what he has been told to do.

c. (:16) Relationship between Moses and Aaron

“Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him.”

Wiersbe: When God in His anger give us what we selfishly want, that gift rarely turns out to be a blessing (**Num. 11:33; Hosea 13:11**). One of the most painful judgments God can send is to let His people have their own way.

Douglas Stuart: **Verse 15** makes clear that both Moses and Aaron would speak for God, and this was in fact the case. Moses eventually did the vast majority of the speaking, with virtually no mention made of Aaron’s public speaking beyond the early chapters of Exodus—but at first Aaron was either speaking for him or with him (**4:30; 5:1**). Presumably, as Moses’ courage and faith increased, the need for Aaron’s close collegial support and/or public representation of his brother lessened. **Verses 15 and 16** together also suggest that, from the first, Moses was the true prophet (the one into whose mind God placed his words with the intent that they be passed on to others) and that Aaron was Moses’ spokesperson rather than a direct recipient of God’s revelation. Thus God was the revealer; Moses, the prophet; and Aaron, the public repeater. . .

Oswalt: The relationship between Moses and Aaron is clearly supposed to be a model of the relationship between God and his prophets. This is underscored when it is said,

“you will stand in the place of God for him” (4:16; lit., “you will be God to him”). The message comes from God, and the prophet is God’s mouthpiece. But this does not mean that the Hebrew prophets were merely mindless conduits, mechanically repeating words that had no real meaning for them. This extended dialogue between Moses and God shows the extent of the interaction that God was willing to engage in to make his message clear. The prophets spoke as “stand-ins” for Yahweh himself.

d. (:17) Responsibility for Moses Remains

*“And you shall take in your hand this staff,
with which you shall perform the signs.”*

Mackay: Moses was therefore left to carry out the task assigned to him with the knowledge that God would authenticate his calling and would be with him to ensure the success of what is done. The reluctance Moses has displayed shows that he was not someone seeking power for his own ends. He was not fomenting a rebellion against the state authorities in Egypt because of the advantages and status that might accrue to him as a result. He is not self-seeking, but compelled by his divine calling he tries to be true to it so that the Lord might receive the glory and his people the blessing.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How patient have we found God to be with our doubts and fears and hesitancy and reluctance to fully and immediately obey Him?
- 2) How convinced are you that God can take ordinary things (like a staff) or ordinary people (like us) and accomplish extraordinary things?
- 3) What are the purpose of signs and miracles in the Bible? What does that tell you about the self-professed miracle workers of today?
- 4) What does this passage teach about the potential for God’s servants to glorify Him with their disabilities?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: God probably intended the **first miracle**, of the staff and serpent (**Exodus 4:2-5**), to assure Moses and the Israelites that He was placing the satanic power of Egypt under his authoritative control. This was the power before which Moses had previously fled. Moses' shepherd staff became a symbol of authority in his hand, a virtual scepter. The serpent represented the deadly power of Egypt that sought to kill the Israelites, and Moses in particular. The Pharaohs wore a metal cobra around their

heads. It was a common symbol of the nation of Egypt. However the serpent also stood for the great enemy of man behind that power, Satan, who had been the foe of the seed of the woman since the Fall (**Genesis 3:15**). Moses' ability to turn the serpent into his rod by seizing its tail would have encouraged the Israelites. They should have believed that God had enabled him to overcome the cunning and might of Egypt and to exercise authority over its fearful power. This was a sign that God would bless Moses' leadership.

The **second miracle**, of the leprous hand (**Exodus 4:6-7**), evidently assured Moses that God would bring him and the Israelites out of their defiling environment and heal them. But first He would punish the Egyptians with crippling afflictions. Presently the Israelites were unclean because of their confinement in wicked Egypt. Moses' hand was the instrument of his strength. As such it was a good symbol of Moses, himself the instrument of God's strength in delivering the Israelites, and Israel, God's instrument for blessing the world. [Note: For an explanation of the Septuagint's omission of "*leprous*" from **Exodus 4:6**, see **C. Houtman**, "A Note on the LXX Version of Exodus 4, 6," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97:2 (1983):253-54.] Moses' hand would also have suggested to Pharaoh that Yahweh could afflict or deliver through His representative at will. The wholeness of Moses' hand may have attested to God's delegation of divine power to him.

The **third miracle**, of the water turned into blood (**Exodus 4:9**), provided assurance that God would humiliate the Egyptians by spoiling what they regarded as a divine source of life. The Egyptians identified the Nile with the Egyptian god Osiris and credited it with all good and prosperity in their national life. Blood was and is a symbol of life poured out in death (cf. **Leviticus 17:11**). Moses possessed the power to change the life-giving water of the Nile into blood. The Israelites would have concluded that he also had power to destroy the gods of Egypt and punish the land with death (cf. **Exodus 7:14-24**).

Deffinbaugh: for the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, these signs were evidence of the "*finger of God*" (cf. **Exod. 8:19**). Not only did they emphatically prove the existence of the God of the Hebrews, but they gave evidence of His superior power. More than this, these three signs were of a similar kind. At the word of Moses, a staff could become a serpent, leprosy could be inflicted, and water contaminated. In other words, Moses had the power to inflict injury and to destroy. Pharaoh had tried, in vain, to destroy Israel. Moses could easily destroy Egypt. The signs were all "plague-like," and Pharaoh would do well to take heed. He had been warned, not only of the power of God, but also of the nature of the divine judgment which he could and would inflict on Egypt. Finally, since Moses had the power to reverse the adverse plague, Pharaoh was also instructed as to Moses' power to restore, once a plague was brought to pass. The three signs were therefore very significant, both to the Israelites, and to the Pharaoh.

Motyer: In reply to Moses' qualms, the Lord, in effect, said to him—and this is reflected throughout **3:11–4:17**—'But what about me? Are you taking me into account? Where are your eyes fixed?' The Lord did not take away—or even promise to take

away—Moses' nervousness, or to impart boldness to him. He did, however, call him to a position of trust. Consequently, the proposed solutions to Moses' problems involved him resting in the Lord's presence (3:12), bearing simple testimony to the Lord's revelation of truth about himself (3:14), doing what God commanded on the assumption that God himself would produce the results (4:8–9), receiving the Lord's help to overcome inadequacies, expecting abilities to match needs (4:11–12) and trusting the Lord's promise that help was on its way (4:14). God proved himself to be trustworthy in the event, but in prospect Moses was called to '*the obedience of faith*' without seeing any actual change in himself or his situation. We can put it another way. When Moses was faced with his vocation to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt (3:10), his reaction was, 'I can't, therefore I won't.' The Lord sought to bring him to the point where he would say instead, 'I can't, but HE can, therefore I will.' That is the obedience of faith—doing the will of God because he will always do what he has willed; trusting the promises of God because he will always keep his word; acting on the assumption of divine provision because he will never fail to provide.

David Thompson: There is a very fine line between not believing in you and not believing in God. In any thing we are called by God to do, the real issue is not whether we doubt ourselves and our own abilities, it is whether we doubt God and His ability. Do we actually trust God enough to do what He wants us to do?

God had called Moses from a burning bush to go and get the Hebrew nation and lead them out of Egypt. He told him exactly who to contact and what to say. He told him exactly what was going to happen. Now Moses has spent the past 40 years leading sheep in a wilderness. So I am sure that this was quite an intimidating and unexpected calling. So it is natural that he would have some doubts. But the problem here is that Moses' unbelief in himself was beginning to become unbelief in God and that made God angry (Ex. 4:14). In fact, the anger of the LORD started to burn against Moses. The point to see here is this:

WHEN GOD GIVES CLEAR EVIDENCE OF WHAT HE WANTS US TO DO AND WE DISBELIEVE AND MAKE EXCUSES FOR NOT DOING WHAT HE WANTS US TO DO, IT ANGERS HIM AND ULTIMATELY COSTS US.

He said what if I go to the people and tell them that God appeared to me and told me to come get you and they do not believe me? It appears to be a reasonable response. That is until you remember what God told him in **Exodus 3:18**. God told Moses they will listen to you. They will believe you. They will follow you. So this is, in all reality, a question of disbelieving God and His Word. The real issue here is whether or not you can believe the Word of God and take it at face value. Moses is challenging God and he is questioning the very Word of God. So God responds to Moses' doubts and fears by demonstrating His miraculous power (4:2-9). . .

God is a Divine person and He is getting **angry**. In fact, His anger burned against Moses. This is very serious language because when God got angry with Uzzah for

touching the ark, He terminated his life (**II Sam. 6:7**). You never want to have God's anger burning against you. Now God is a God who is slow to anger, but after this statement, God is getting to the point where He was done fooling around with Moses. But even with Moses' doubts and fears, he was still God's choice. Basically God says you are going to do this job.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1) It is not wrong to doubt your own abilities to accomplish things, but it angers God when you doubt His ability.
- 2) Our perspective of God needs to be what God's Word reveals Him to be, not what we want Him to be.
- 3) You don't need much in your hand to be greatly used by God. You may think you don't have anything to offer God. What did Moses have? A shepherd's staff. It is not about what we have, it is all about the power God has. We all have handicaps, but those handicaps should never be excuses for not doing God's will.
- 4) We are all leprous with sin and we have all been snake-bitten by Satan, and the only way to be clean is to turn, by faith, to Jesus Christ.

TEXT: Exodus 4:-18-31

TITLE: 4 KEYS TO FULFILLING GOD'S MISSION FOR YOUR LIFE

BIG IDEA:

FINAL PREPARATION FOR SUCCESSFULLY FULFILLING GOD'S MISSION FOR YOUR LIFE INVOLVES:

- **COMMITMENT TO OBEY**
- **CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S LOVE**
- **CONSECRATION (INCLUDING NECESSARY REPENTANCE)**
- **COLLABORATION (WITH OTHER LEADERS AND WITH GOD'S PEOPLE)**

INTRODUCTION:

Moses has received the Divine Call. God has dealt with his areas of hesitation and finally with his reluctance to even assume his role as deliverer. Now we see the final areas of preparation as Moses makes the transition from Midian back to Egypt and starts to tackle the mission of leading the Hebrews out of bondage. Think of all the last minute instructions that Jesus communicated to His chosen band of leaders before His ascension. He wanted to make sure that they were adequately prepared to carry out the Great Commission. How are we responding to the call of God in our life?

I. (:18-20) COMMITMENT TO OBEY THE CALL OF GOD – RETURN OF MOSES TO EGYPT

A. (:18) Obtaining the Blessing of Jethro to “Go in Peace” – Appropriate Transition

1. Request Made out of Renewed Concern for the Welfare of His Hebrew Brethren

- a. Showing Respect to Jethro – his father-in-law and employer
“Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, ‘Please, let me go.’”

Sensitivity on the part of Moses to handle this transition with respect and grace;

The call to take up our cross and follow Jesus in genuine discipleship will always involve leaving and cleaving – just as in the marriage relationship

Ryken: Once Moses had received God's call, he went back to take leave of Jethro, the man who had given him a home in Midian. It is not hard to understand why Moses had to do this. Obviously he could not stay with Jethro any longer. He had a higher calling—a call to ministry that came from God himself. But he still needed to treat the man with **respect**. For one thing, Jethro was his father-in-law, and in those patriarchal times family members needed permission from the head of the household before leaving. For another thing, Jethro was his employer, and Moses needed to return the sheep that he had taken to Mount Horeb.

b. Showing Concern for His Hebrew Brethren – whom he had abandoned 40 years ago

“that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.”

The motivation of love and compassion for God’s people must always be uppermost in our hearts

Oswalt: Commentators have debated the reason why Moses did not disclose his full purpose for going to Egypt when he asked his father-in-law for permission to go (4:18). Most have concluded that it was out of fear that if Jethro knew the real reason, he would think it foolhardy and refuse permission (so Sarna 1991:22; Enns 2000:127). **Houtman** (1993:1.419) offers a more nuanced suggestion that it may betray some continuing uncertainty on Moses’s part about his mission. Yes, he was going to go; it seemed he had no real choice, but he was still not entirely certain what he would do when he got there. In 4:19 Yahweh assures him that the death warrant hanging over him from the past is no longer in effect. Then in 4:21–23 Yahweh seems to repeat what he had already said about the real reason for Moses’s going, although he gives further theological depth to it. Moses is to “*perform all the miracles*” before Pharaoh. But they will have no immediate effect upon him because God will “*harden his heart.*” That will serve to highlight the real nature of what is taking place. It is a contest between Yahweh and Pharaoh to see who is God. Yahweh’s “*firstborn*” must be allowed to go, “*so he can worship me.*” Pharaoh’s refusal to permit that is going to cost him his own “*firstborn son.*” This trip is not about checking up on the Hebrew people; it is about nothing less than the nature of reality—the identity of the one true God, his relationship to his creation and to his people.

2. Request Granted

“And Jethro said to Moses, ‘Go in peace.’”

God, in His providence, is able to smooth the way before us and open the necessary doors so that we can move forward to accomplish His will

Constable: This section makes it possible for us to gain great insight into Moses’ feelings about God’s promises to his forefathers and about his own life. Moses had become thoroughly disillusioned. He regarded himself as a failure, the objects of his ministry as hopeless, and God as unfaithful, uncaring, and unable to deliver His people. He had learned his own inability to deliver Israel, but he did not yet believe in God’s ability to do so. Even the miraculous revelation of God at the burning bush and the miracles that God enabled Moses to perform did not convince him of God’s purpose and power.

David Thompson: However, what Moses did want was the blessing of his father-in-law to leave. Notice he uses the word “*please.*” Doing God’s will and doing God’s work should always have a grace and decency to it. Jethro told Moses to go in peace, which

means Jethro gave Moses his blessing. His leaving Jethro did not put him in war with Jethro; the relationship was one of peace. This is the last time we hear of Jethro until **chapter 18** when he and Moses' family will be reunited. . .

There are a couple of things we want to observe:

- 1) When God calls us to do something other than what we are presently doing, we do have the responsibility to see to it that we end our present responsibilities with integrity.
- 2) When God calls us to do something other than what we are presently doing, there will usually be some form of positive human confirmation.

B. (:19) Opportunity to Return to Egypt in Peace – Appropriate Encouragement

*“Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian,
‘Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.’”*

Douglas Stuart: Moses' life would not be in danger upon arrival in Egypt. He was no longer sought as a fugitive criminal. It was common practice in the ancient world, as it is in the modern, for a new government to cancel criminal penalties imposed by a previous government, thus granting general amnesty to prisoners and those sought by the law. Thus for God to say to Moses *“all the men who wanted to kill you are dead”* would likely represent news that the pharaoh in power when Moses killed an Egyptian (**2:15**) was now himself dead, along with any others, such as immediate survivors of the deceased who might have had both the legal standing and the desire to press the case.

C. (:20) Obeying the Divine Call to Return to Egypt – Appropriate Support

1. Support of His Family

*“So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey,
and he returned to the land of Egypt.”*

This story is all about family relationships – especially within the larger context of the household of God

2. Support of the Power and Authority of God – Taking the Staff of God with Him

“Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.”

God had previously dealt with Moses' different areas of hesitation – now Moses carries with him the assurance of God's authority and power to grant him success in his mission

Ryken: Not only did Moses have his family at his side, but he also had his staff in his hand. Except that it was no longer his staff at all—it was *“the staff of God,”* **the symbol of divine authority**. Moses was going to deliver Israel by God's power. With God's

staff he would perform miraculous signs to convince the Israelites that he was God's true prophet. Later God's staff would accomplish even greater wonders. It would bring disease and death upon the Egyptians, part the waves of the Red Sea, and draw life-giving water from a rock.

II. (:21-23) CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD'S COVENANT LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE (HIS FIRST-BORN) WHO ARE DESTINED FOR FREEDOM – RESISTANCE OF PHARAOH WILL BE DEALT WITH DECISIVELY

A. (:21) Objective of Freedom Will Meet with Resistance

1. Performance of the Wonders of God's Power and Authority

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power;’”

2. Resistance of Pharaoh

“but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.”

Ryken: Taken together, what these statements show is that Pharaoh's heart was doubly hard. He hardened his own heart; nevertheless, God hardened his **heart** for him. Both of these statements are true, and there is no contradiction between them. Pharaoh's will was also God's will. God not only knew that Pharaoh would refuse to let his people go, but he actually ordained it. This is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which is not a puzzle to be solved but a mystery to be adored. As human beings made in the image of God, we make a real choice to accept or reject God, but even the choice we make is governed by God's sovereign and eternal will. The Old Testament scholar S. R. Driver rightly observed, “The means by which God hardens a man is not necessarily by any extraordinary intervention on His part; it may be by the ordinary experiences of life, operating through the principles and character of human nature, which are of His appointment.” The writer of Exodus understood this, which is why he described the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as both the will of Pharaoh and the will of God.

Douglas Stuart: With the statement in v. 21, “*I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go,*” God introduced a new detail into the assignment, that of his own divine causation of Pharaoh's stubbornness, but not a new expectation. He had already warned Moses that Pharaoh would be highly resistant (3:19–20). The reader might at first blush think that God was here announcing to Moses that he was going to frustrate Moses' efforts. In fact, it was just the opposite. By indicating that he would control Pharaoh's resistance to the exodus, God assured Moses that he was totally in control of Pharaoh in every way, able to make him resist as long as necessary even during a buildup of increasingly painful plagues and then make him give up and let the Israelites go at the moment of God's choosing (which was already the essential message of 3:19–20).

B. (:22-23) Objective of Freedom Will be Achieved by God Liberating His First-Born at the Expense of Egypt's First-Born

1. (:22) God's Love for His First-Born Son = Nation of Israel

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is My son, My first-born.'"

Wiersbe: God also assured Moses of His special love for Israel, His firstborn son (**Jer. 31:9; Hosea 11:1**). In the ancient world, the firstborn in every family had special rights and privileges, and God would see to it that Israel, His firstborn, would be redeemed and rewarded, while the firstborn of Egypt would be slain.

MacArthur: To the ancient Egyptians, the firstborn son was special and sacred, and the Pharaoh considered himself the only son of the gods. Now he heard of a whole nation designated as God's firstborn son, meaning "declared and treated as first in rank, preeminent, with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of being actually the firstborn." The Lord pointedly referred to the nation collectively in the singular in order to show that He was a father in what He would do, i.e., bring a nation into existence, then nurture and lead him (cf. **Dt 14:1, 2**). Divine sonship, as in the pagan world's perverted concept of a sexual union between the gods and women, was never so much as hinted at in the way God used the term to express His relationship with Israel, who were His people, a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (cf. **Ex 6:7; 19:4-6**).

2. (:23a) God's Demand of Freedom for His First-Born Son

"So I said to you, 'Let My son go, that he may serve Me';"

3. (:23b) Pharaoh's Stubborn Refusal

"but you have refused to let him go."

4. (:23c) God's Judgment Against Egypt's First-Born Sons

"Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born."

Alan Cole: If Pharaoh will not give God's first-born up to God, to whom all first-born belong in any case, then Pharaoh's own first-born must die instead. Since 'Israel' is collective here, it is reasonable to suppose that 'Pharaoh' is also a collective term; thus 'your first-born' includes all the first-born in the land.

III. (:24-26) CONSECRATION INCLUDING DEALING WITH ANY KNOWN SIN --

REPENTANCE REGARDING OBSERVING THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION

A. (:24) Sin Has Serious Consequences and Must be Addressed

"Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death."

There can be no effective serving of the Lord apart from prior consecration that deals with known sin problems; Moses must obey this preeminent covenant obligation before he could effectively lead God's covenant people

B. (:25) Severing the Foreskin (with attitude on the part of Zipporah)

"Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.'"

Perhaps Moses, who must have been incapacitated, gave verbal instructions to his wife to perform the circumcision which she had resisted and found distasteful.

Bruce Hurt: Obviously the son's failure to obtain circumcision was not his fault but was Moses' fault, so it may have been Moses who would be punished, not his son. Moses surely must have known the divine command to circumcise every male of one's household, thus this represents clear disobedience! Somehow Zipporah grasped the gravity of the situation and immediately grasped her son's foreskin and carried out the circumcision.

Steven Cole: We have to read some things between the lines here. Apparently Moses, in deference to Zipporah's objections, had not circumcised their second son in obedience to God's covenant with Abraham (**Genesis 17**). Now, whether it was the angel of the Lord with His sword drawn, or through a sudden illness, God threatened to kill Moses. I think Zipporah circumcised their son and spoke in anger, perhaps because she thought that if she didn't do it, her son would be next to die after her husband. Through this incident, God was teaching Moses that if he was going to serve the Lord, he had to obey His commandments, even over the objections of those closest to him. Some think that at this time Moses may have sent his wife and sons back to Midian (**Exod. 18:2**). But at the least, Moses learned that to serve God effectively, you've got to obey Him, even if it means going against your loved ones.

David Thompson: It would appear to me that Zipporah is not happy about the fact that she has to circumcise her son. If we read between the lines a little bit, it appears that Moses had not demanded that his son be circumcised and probably gave into the request of his wife in not doing it. Gershom had probably been circumcised and Zipporah didn't like it and didn't want Eliezer to have to go through it.

Alan Cole: Circumcision is a symbol of putting away all that is displeasing to God, and of dedication to God for the task ahead. But this dedication to God is only man's response of obedience to God's prior grace and calling (**Gen. 17:10**). True circumcision is an inward, not an outward, matter (**Jer. 9:26; Rom. 2:29**). It had of course, like much of the Mosaic law, great hygienic value, although this was presumably unknown to the original recipients. That circumcision was widely practised in other surrounding countries need not disturb us: not the nature of the sign, but the thing signified, is important.

John Mackay: Perhaps some of the obscurity with which this is recorded stems from Moses' own shame at his failure to circumcise Eliezer. A situation of tension and disharmony seems to have developed between Moses and his wife. The next we hear of her is when her father brings her and her sons to rejoin Moses in the wilderness (18:5). We are told there (18:2) that Moses had sent her away, and it seems probable that this occurred in the aftermath of this incident.

C. (:26) Saving Moses so that He Could Fulfil the Divine Mission = a Higher Priority than Zipporah's Distaste of Practicing Circumcision

"So He let him alone. At that time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood' -- because of the circumcision."

Deffinbaugh: If God takes the "hardness of Pharaoh's heart" so seriously as to kill his firstborn son (Exod. 4:21-23), then He must likewise deal with the sin of Moses who by not circumcising his son has endangered him greatly. According to the word of the Lord recorded in Genesis 17, his son should have been "cut off from his people." The holiness of God is clearly manifested in the near fatal illness of Moses. God does not look lightly on any sin.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Thus for one small neglect, apparently out of deference for his wife's wishes, or perhaps to keep peace in the home, Moses almost forfeited his opportunity to serve God and wasted eighty years of preparation and training! To further underscore this connection between Moses' grave condition and the circumcision of his son, Zipporah took the excised prepuce and touched Moses' feet . . . The Lord let Moses go, and the grip of death was lifted.

Ryken: circumcision was the distinguishing mark of God's people, a sign indicating membership in the covenant community, and thus it served as the proof of sonship in Israel, as Zipporah seems to have understood. Furthermore, circumcision was a covenant sign that went all the way back to the patriarchs (see Gen. 17). Therefore, if Moses intended to serve the God of Abraham, he had a covenant obligation to circumcise his sons. This was also an important part of his preparation for the exodus. Later, when the Israelites celebrated their first Passover, every male would be required to be circumcised (Exod. 12:43-49). Moses had to set the example. If he was going to lead the people out of Egypt, he himself had to keep the covenant. How could he be Israel's prophet if he neglected his spiritual responsibility to his own family by failing to include them in God's salvation?

**IV. (:27-31) COLLABORATION WITH OTHER LEADERS AND WITH GOD'S PEOPLE --
REUNION WITH AARON TO RALLY THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL**

A. (:27-28) Reunion with Aaron

1. (:27) Partnership in Serving the Lord

"Now the LORD said to Aaron, 'Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.' So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him."

2. (:28) Communication Aimed at Fulfilling the Mission

“And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do.”

Deffinbaugh: By divine revelation God instructed Aaron to meet Moses in the wilderness (4:27). They met on the holy mountain of God. What a happy reunion that must have been. At least 40 years would seem to have passed since they had seen each other. Most of all, Moses had to share the most recent events of his life, especially his encounter with God at the burning bush, the commission he had been given to deliver Israel, and the part which Aaron was to play in it all. One can only surmise what Aaron’s response to this might have been.

Oswalt: All of this speaks to the deadly danger of attempting to serve the holy God in a half-hearted way. God wants a close relationship with us, and we were created for such a relationship. But in our sinfulness, we want God’s way and our own ways at the same time. That can never be. Death may not come suddenly as it did with Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–2) or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), and as it almost did with Moses, but it is nonetheless sure. We cannot be instruments of God’s life when our lives are contaminated with self-serving. We will only kill the work of God and ultimately ourselves. We must come to God on his terms or not at all.

One cannot help but feel that Moses came out of this encounter a deeply chastened man. Thus the encounter with Aaron (4:27–28) was of a very different kind. It can hardly be an accident that their meeting was at *“the mountain of God.”* This was another confirmation to Moses that this entire experience was from God. Not only did Aaron come, as Yahweh said he would, but they met at the very place where God had revealed himself to Moses. Then Moses told Aaron *“everything the Lord had commanded him to say”* and all about *“the miraculous signs the Lord had commanded him to perform”* (4:28). Here now, finally, Moses had fully embraced the call from God.

B. (:29-30) Rallying the Elders of Israel and All the People

1. (:29) Assembling the Elders

“Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel;”

2. (:30) Authenticating the Divine Mission in the Sight of the People

a. Declaring the Mission Verbally

“and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses.”

b. Demonstrating the Divine Power and Authority Behind the Mission

“He then performed the signs in the sight of the people.”

Douglas Stuart: There is an underlying assumption in this part of the story of a special aspect of Aaron’s role: his ability to provide immediate credibility with his fellow

Israelite elders in Egypt. Moses was an outsider, someone most of them probably had never met, even if they had heard of him, and someone they may even have been afraid of, based on the tenor of the incident described in **2:11–14**. Aaron, on the other hand, was almost surely an Israelite elder himself (how else would he have had the means and the freedom to leave Egypt and take a trip to meet Moses while most of the people were working seven days a week?), in a position to introduce Moses to the leadership of the people much as Barnabas did for Saul (**Acts 9:26–28**). Thus Aaron did the talking, told the whole story of Moses' call, and performed at least two of the three signs (**4:1–9**) before the people (v. **30**). He may have needed to perform only two signs, the staff-to-a-snake and the leprous hand, since v. **31** says that the people believed (the Heb. making it clear that the people, not merely the elders, believed) whereas **4:9** would seem to imply that the changing of water to blood was a backup sign in case of refusal to believe.

C. (:31) Response of the People

1. Faith

“So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction,”

2. Worship

“then they bowed low and worshiped.”

Deffinbaugh: The conclusion of **chapter 4** serves as a divine commentary on the five-fold objection of Moses to the call of God. The last verses of the chapter, which report the belief of the people and their worship of God, inform us that Moses' fears were unreal and unreasonable. All of his fears and all of his objections as reported in **chapters 3 and 4** were groundless, based more on Moses' fears than on reality.

Verses 24–26 then identify the underlying problem with Moses' fears: **unbelief**. If one were to summarize the objections of Moses to his commission to return to Egypt, it would be this: “But God, they won't believe me.” But Moses' fears about Israel's unbelief are rooted in his own unbelief. The basis for God's redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage is the Abrahamic Covenant. Consequently, God repeatedly identifies Himself as the “*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*” (cf. **3:6,15,16,18; 4:5**). The reason why Moses was not ready to return to Egypt is that he did not have sufficient faith in the covenant which God had made with his fathers. And since he did not have great faith in God's covenant promises, he did not expect the Israelites to have it either. The evidence of Moses' lack of faith is here, in his failure to circumcise his son as an evidence of his trust in God's covenant promises.

Ryken: **Exodus 4** ends with a doxology: “*And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped*” (v. **31**). This was the right response. Even while they were still waiting for their liberation, the Israelites began to give God the glory. Moved by divine compassion, they knelt in the sands of Egypt to praise the Lord. They understood that the God of Moses is a God to be worshiped and adored. He is a God who rules every heart by his

sovereign will. He is a God who loves us the way a good father loves an only son. He is a God who gives what his justice demands: a perfect sacrifice for sin. He is a wonder-working God, a God who keeps every last promise of salvation. He is also our God who has seen our misery and is concerned about our suffering. Will you bow down and worship him?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the resources and assurances from God that relate to His mission or call upon your life?
- 2) How much importance should Christians place on the two ordinances of baptism and celebrating the Lord's Supper?
- 3) Are there any areas of disobedience that may be hindering your effectiveness in serving the Lord and that require repentance?
- 4) Are we operating as a Lone Ranger in Christian service or acting in collaboration with other spiritual leaders and God's people?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Deffinbaugh: One of the catch concepts of Christianity (and, significantly, of the world) is that of one's self-concept or self-image. We seem to find a "poor self-image" the basis for crime, improper behavior, marital failures, and who knows what all. Now I do not wish to be understood to say that "self-image" is all hogwash. Much of it is, but not all of it. I am not saying that we should never consider the area of self-concept. I am saying that it is, at best, a symptom, more than it is a cause. Moses, we might say, had a bad self-image, but God did not work to change his self-image. Instead, God focused Moses' attention on Himself, by revealing Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the "*I AM*." When Moses grasped the greatness of the God who called him, then his self-image began to revolve around God, not man. The greatness of Moses is to be found in the greatness of the One who called him and who sent him. God listened to Moses' objections founded on his self-concept, but He corrected Moses by focusing his attention elsewhere. . .

In this brief glimpse of the life of Moses covering 80 years, let us recognize that that are two equally dangerous extremes with regard to leadership. The first is that of self-confident, self-assertiveness. Moses presumptuously set out to deliver his people and ended up running for his life. That is because he was neither called nor commissioned to lead at this point in his life. Many are those who would like to lead and who assert

themselves as leaders, whom God has not commissioned to lead. Presumption in leadership is deadly.

Second, there is the danger of self-conscious passivity. This is what we see in Moses at the time when God did commission him to go to Egypt. Now Moses is full of all kinds of excuses why he is not the man for the job. There are many Christian men who seek to step away from leadership which God has thrust upon them. In the final analysis, it is because they do not trust God enough to believe that He can achieve His purposes through them.

David Thompson: MOSES NEEDS TO LEARN THAT TO DO GOD'S WILL ONE MUST LITERALLY BELIEVE GOD'S WORD AND OBEY GOD'S WORD.

Now as this epoch journey begins, there were two things Moses learned:

- God is totally and completely sovereign over everything.
-
- Moses learned that he needed to completely obey God's Word because that would literally save his life.

This is the same lesson we need to learn.

Motyer: (:14-26) Besides this, the passage offers itself as a self-contained unit, marked off by the *inclusio* of the promise of Aaron as a colleague (14-16) and the humanly 'undesigned coincidence' of the arrival of Aaron on the scene (27). We shall discuss this further later. Within this *inclusio* there are three sections. First, the providence of God in having Aaron already to hand to meet Moses' need (14-17); secondly, the guidance of God, who prompted Moses when the moment of his fateful journey had arrived (19-23); and thirdly, the law of God as a serious factor in the life of the commissioned servant (24-26). . .

Only by returning to the way of obedience could Moses continue to walk in the way of service. The divine assault was really an exceedingly kind work of grace. Taking his first steps back towards Egypt, Moses was fortified by the providence of God (the promise of Aaron, 14-16), equipped with and assured of the power of God (the staff, 17), directed and comforted by the word of God (19, 21-23) and brought within the embrace of the promises of God (the assault and the circumcision, 24-26).

Ryken: The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is an important theme in the book of Exodus, and it has much to teach us about the sovereignty of God's will. We will encounter this theme again, because Exodus mentions Pharaoh's hardness of heart some twenty times, describing it in one of three different ways. Sometimes the Bible says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart: "When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses" (Exod. 8:15). Other times the Bible says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, without specifying who did the hardening: "*Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen*" (Exod. 7:13). There are also instances—like the

one here in **Exodus 4**—where God identifies himself as the one who hardens Pharaoh's heart.

Taken together, what these statements show is that Pharaoh's heart was doubly hard. He hardened his own heart; nevertheless, God hardened his heart for him. Both of these statements are true, and there is no contradiction between them. Pharaoh's will was also God's will. God not only knew that Pharaoh would refuse to let his people go, but he actually ordained it. This is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which is not a puzzle to be solved but a mystery to be adored. As human beings made in the image of God, we make a real choice to accept or reject God, but even the choice we make is governed by God's sovereign and eternal will. The Old Testament scholar **S. R. Driver** rightly observed, "The means by which God hardens a man is not necessarily by any extraordinary intervention on His part; it may be by the ordinary experiences of life, operating through the principles and character of human nature, which are of His appointment." The writer of Exodus understood this, which is why he described the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as both the will of Pharaoh and the will of God.

From beginning to end, the entire exodus was the result of God's sovereign decree. The whole agonizing and then exhilarating experience of slavery and freedom was part of his perfect will. It was God's will to bring his people out of Egypt. It was also his good pleasure to keep them there as long as he did, which is proved by his hardening of Pharaoh's heart. **Peter Enns** writes, "The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is entirely God's doing and under his complete control. The impending Exodus is a play in which God is author, producer, director, and principal actor." Even when Pharaoh took his turn on stage, God received all the applause. Like everything else that God has ever done, the exodus was all for his glory.

Scott Grant: Last Minute Gifts [quoting this sermon extensively because it is so good]

Important instructions

On the verge of his departure out of this world, Jesus gave his disciples last-minute instructions. He told them everything they needed to know to move ahead into all that God had prepared for them (**John 13-17**). Similarly, the Lord in **Exodus 4:18-31** gives Moses everything he needs to return to Egypt.

It's that way with us as well. The Lord gives us everything we need to enter into life - to follow Jesus in moving toward people, to involve ourselves with them, to serve them. If we've dropped out of life for a while, as Moses has, the Lord gives us everything we need to re-enter life. The Lord doesn't command us without encouraging us. Often we hear the command but not the encouragement, because the command frightens us and we close our ears to additional information, assuming that it will be threatening. But the Lord doesn't threaten; he challenges, and he encourages.

Even after Moses makes the decision to depart, the Lord continues to bless him with encouragement. We can see these, then, as last-minute gifts. But they are thoughtful, for the Giver knows the receiver well, as he knows us well. He gives Moses four gifts: the gift of hope, the gift of God's own heart, the gift of divine ownership and the gift of fellowship.

The gift of hope (4:18-20)

Moses, fresh off his encounter with God at Mount Sinai, decides to obey the Lord and return to Egypt. He asks Jethro, his father-in-law, for permission to leave. His reason for returning is to see if his "*brethren*," the Hebrews, are still alive. This seems like a strange reason. The Lord told Moses many wonderful things on the mountain, none of which included, "Go back to Egypt and see if your brethren are still alive." In fact, the Lord in no uncertain terms told Moses that they were alive and that he had plans to take them to a "*good and spacious land*" (**Exodus 3:6-7**). If they weren't alive, God would not have asked Moses to deliver them.

Where does Moses' question come from? Does it come from out of the blue, or is there a reason for it? What is driving Moses' desire to find out whether his brethren are still alive?

When Moses last saw his people, they were being harshly treated by the Egyptians. This disturbed him, and he tried to do something about it. He killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew (**2:11-12**). He thought that his brethren would understand that God was using him to deliver them from the Egyptians, but they didn't, and he fled in fear (**Acts 7:24-29**).

Obviously, Moses cares deeply about his people. But he failed them. He failed to deliver them. Worse than that, he failed them by fleeing in fear. They were being afflicted, subjected to hard labor, and he abandoned them. He took the easy way out, the back door to Midian, and left them to suffer.

The guilt he felt the day he fled and soon after must have been excruciating. But he probably did what most of us do with painful information: He repressed it. Now it's back again. He has fled Egypt, but Egypt has not fled him. It's been there all along, smoldering. Now the Lord mentions the word "Egypt," and it's a raging inferno. All the guilt returns, fiercer than ever, burning up his insides. And he wonders: "Are they all dead because I abandoned them?"

Jethro, of course, understands none of this. But he honors Moses' request and says, "*Go in peace*." Little does he know that peace is far from Moses.

But God knows. Moses wants to go back to see if his brethren are still alive. The Lord gives him a different reason for going back: All those who wanted to kill him are dead. When Pharaoh found out that Moses had killed an Egyptian, he put out a death warrant against Moses (**2:15**). The Lord now tells Moses that Pharaoh and those commissioned

with arresting Moses are dead. If Moses' reason for wanting to return to Egypt seemed out of the blue, God's reason seems off the wall. Moses wants to know if his Hebrew brethren are still alive; God tells him that his Egyptian antagonists are dead.

The two viewpoints are not unrelated. Moses is wracked by guilt from the past. The Lord offers hope for the future. In saying that his Egyptian antagonists are dead, the Lord is telling Moses that the way is clear for him to return to Egypt. Moses wants to talk about the past; the Lord wants to talk about the future. It's not that the Lord is insensitive to Moses' feelings of guilt; it's that he addresses them by offering hope for the future. It's as if he's telling Moses, "Stop dwelling on the past; think about the future." He addresses guilt from the past by preparing a way for the future. The future is wide open with possibilities. . .

We want to dwell on the guilt of the past; God wants to offer hope for the future. The first last-minute gift that the Lord gives Moses is hope for the future. The second last-minute gift he gives is the revelation of his own heart for his people.

The gift of God's heart (4:21-23)

Moses hears an incredible thing - something no one else has heard up to this point: "*Israel is my son, my first-born.*" Moses is instructed to tell this to Pharaoh, but before he ever tells Pharaoh, he hears it himself. The pagan nations would never claim that any of their gods was their father. They lived in abject fear of their gods, trying to appease them or excite them. But the Lord says, "*Israel is my son, my first-born.*"

On a human level, we can see the depth of a good father's love for his son. The first-born son received a special blessing (**Genesis 27:1-4, 35-37**) and twice the inheritance of any other son (**Deuteronomy 21:17**). As the Lord's first-born son, Israel stood in intimate and privileged relationship to him.

The New Testament applies the same terminology to Jesus Christ, who is God's first-born son, and his only son (**Mark 1:11, Hebrews 1:6**). Because believers are placed in Christ, they too constitute God's first-born son (**Hebrews 12:23**). Here, then, in **Exodus 4:22**, is one of God's most precious statements regarding his attitude toward the church of Christ. . .

We also see a small picture of the Father's love for his son, the church of Christ. Waves of fatherhood arise within him and demand that he act for his son. And act he did, in a way that defies description. If a human child can inspire the kind of human love that arose within Don Hudson, imagine the kind of love that arises within the Father for his Son, Jesus, with whom he has an eternal relationship. It's off our scale. The Father did more than lay down his life for us; he gave us his Son to lay down his life for us. Imagine: To him we are worth the life of his Son, whom he has loved and adored for all eternity. He gave up his Son for ... his son.

Moses sees the lengths that the Lord will go on behalf of Israel, his son. His son is so valuable that he will exact from Egypt its first-born. It is a strong statement regarding Israel's value to the Lord. Pharaoh thinks of Israel as a slave nation. The Lord says, "*No, Israel is my son, my first-born.*" Like a proud father, he wants the world to know the way he feels about his son. The Apostle Paul says that the church is a message of God's grace even to the spiritual world (**Ephesians 3:10**).

God reveals his heart for his people, and Moses sees it. What does this do for him? If he is to return to Egypt in order to deliver God's people in the face of fierce opposition, not only from Pharaoh but from the people he's trying to help, he needs to know God's heart for the people. The fact that God views Israel as his precious son will help Moses view them properly and still seek to serve the nation, though Pharaoh and his own people threaten him.

How do we view the church? Is it God's first-born son, or God's bastard son? For all its problems, it is still the church of the first-born, the bride for whom Christ died. How we view it and its people influences our encounters with it. Seeing the church as God's first-born son and its members as sacred vessels of the Holy Spirit means we are to move into the lives of others. It encourages us to engage members of the body instead of withdrawing from them in fear. Each encounter, in fact, is sacred. Each person is to be served, not used. . .

The third last-minute gift God gives Moses is the reminder that he belongs to God.

The gift of God's ownership (4:24-26)

Evidently, Moses had failed to circumcise his son, in accordance with **Genesis 17:10-12**, inasmuch as the narrative tells us that his wife ended up doing it. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham's seed. It was an important recognition on the part of God's people that they belonged to God. It was a sign of ownership - God's ownership.

If this is so, why didn't Moses circumcise his son? The narrative doesn't say directly but gives us one important clue. Zipporah herself carried out the circumcision but was not happy about it, declaring to Moses, "*You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.*" She was not a Hebrew but a Midianite, and evidently she thought circumcision to be a barbarous act. This would be the primary clue in the text as to why Moses didn't circumcise his son. He listened to the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God. What Zipporah thought of him was more important than what God thought of him. Pleasing his wife, and not making waves on the home front, was more important than pleasing God and not making waves in heaven.

But his refusal made some serious waves in heaven, and God responded with judgment that was leading toward the death of Moses. Perhaps this judgment somehow incapacitated Moses so that he could not circumcise his son, and Zipporah, recognizing

the urgency of the hour, reluctantly carried out the act despite her convictions. This would explain why she threw the foreskin at Moses' feet when she completed the task. This act of judgment is an act of grace as well. God is telling Moses in no uncertain terms, "You follow me." When he returns to Egypt, he will hear thousands of voices, both from Hebrews and Egyptians. Through this gracious act of judgment, the Lord is telling Moses, "If you listen to those voices, it means death." Because Adam listened to the voice of his wife, not the voice of God, death entered the world (**Genesis 3:17-19, Romans 5:12**). What an act of grace on God's part to show him, before he enters the arena, the importance of listening to his voice, not the voices of others.

If we choose to enter the arena of life, we'll hear thousands of voices. Each will have an opinion on what we should do. In our insecure proclivity to not disappoint others, we're inclined to follow the other voices. But we must follow the Lord. It may look crazy to others, even other believers. We will disappoint them. But the opposite is far worse. Resisting the will of God has more consequences than resisting the will of others. When we listen to others and not the Lord, it's like dying. . .

We are owned by the Lord, and we must follow him. He has given us the gift of his ownership, and there will be times in our lives when he makes it clear - painfully clear at first. But when he makes it painfully clear, it's so that he can lead us into the arena listening to his voice.

Finally, the Lord gives Moses the gift of fellowship.

The gift of fellowship (4:27-31)

Moses is afraid that the people won't believe him (**4:1**). These verses record progressive belief: First Aaron believes Moses, then the elders and finally the people. But it all begins with Aaron, God's gift to Moses. The Lord sent Aaron to Moses. Moses is still in the wilderness, but now he has a friend. They meet at "*the mountain of God*," the place of revelation. More than Moses and Aaron are present; God is present as well. Before it is recorded that Moses said even one word, Aaron kissed Moses - he rejoiced to see him. How sweet this reunion must have been. Moses, Aaron and God.

Moses then tells Aaron what the Lord had told him. This is a very vulnerable, precious thing for Moses to do. Aaron might think he's nuts. It's not every day that God appears to someone in a burning bush. But Moses takes the risk. Aaron, who was sent by God and was obviously prepared by God to receive Moses, believes him, inasmuch as they returned together to assemble the elders. Aaron gives Moses a precious gift: He believes him. Forty years earlier, when Moses tried out his hand as a deliverer, no one believed him (**2:14**). Moses draws strength and encouragement from this friend God gives him. They enjoy sweet fellowship on the mountain of God, and then they return to face the terror of Egypt - together.

It helps to have a friend. It's encouraging to know someone who is happy to see us and believes us. And if we can share with that person what God has shown us, as Moses

shared with Aaron, we are doubly blessed. We can draw strength from God's gift of friendship to enter into life - to engage the world, to engage people, to encourage and to challenge. .

God gives us the gift of fellowship to encourage us to enter life.

Encouragement to move

God gives Moses four last-minute gifts to encourage him to return to Egypt, and he gives us everything we need to encourage us to enter into life. God gives us hope for the future, he shows us his heart for his people, he reminds us that we belong to him and he gives us fellowship with others. All of this encourages us to move toward people, to proactively love them, challenge them and serve them. The steps we make may be tentative at first, but they are steps nonetheless. Steps that God is thrilled with.

https://cdn.pbc.org/Main_Service/1995/01/04/exo004b.html

TEXT: Exodus 5:1 – 6:1

TITLE: RESPONDING TO SETBACKS IN SERVING THE LORD --
WHEN DOING THE RIGHT THING SEEMS ONLY TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE

BIG IDEA:

**DESPITE OPPOSITION AND FRUSTRATION, THE SERVANT OF GOD
MUST CONTINUE TO LOOK TO THE LORD FOR ULTIMATE SUCCESS**

INTRODUCTION:

When the divine mission is clear and the commitment has been made to boldly step out in faith and obey, the expectation is that God will grant success. When instead you are faced with increased opposition and the situation actually deteriorates it is easy to become frustrated and question whether God is really committed to the mission. Our problem is one of timing and perspective. Only God sees the big picture and understands how He is sovereignly working to accomplish His kingdom agenda. We need to continue to look to God for the ultimate success of the mission. We need to trust Him to remain faithful to His covenant commitments even when the immediate circumstances look bleak. We need to learn how to properly respond to setbacks in serving the Lord – because there will be opposition and tough times.

**I. (:1-14) OPPRESSION (BY PHARAOH AND HIS TASKMASTERS)
INTENSIFIES AS INITIAL REQUESTS TO LEAVE EGYPT ARE DENIED**

**A. (:1-5) Two Requests of Pharaoh: “Let My People Go” –
Issue = Ultimate Authority**

1. (:1-2) First Request Directed to Pharaoh

a. (:1) Reason: Celebrate a Feast to the Lord

*“And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh,
‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Let My people go
that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’”*

b. (:2) Response: The Lord is Nobody to Me

*“But Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey His
voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I
will not let Israel go.’”*

Wiersbe: This was a reasonable question because the Egyptian people considered Pharaoh to be a god, and why should their king obey a strange god that neither Pharaoh nor the Egyptians know? Furthermore, what right did this new god have to call the Israelites “My people” when the Jews were the slaves of Pharaoh? If Pharaoh obeyed the edict, he would be acknowledging a deity greater than himself, and he wasn’t about to do that. In his pride and false security, Pharaoh wouldn’t listen to the words of the living God.

Constable: Thus as the plague narratives begin, the purpose of the plagues is clearly stated: "*so that the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD*" (**Exodus 7:5**). Throughout the plague narratives we see the Egyptians learning precisely this lesson (**Exodus 8:19; Exodus 9:20; Exodus 9:27; Exodus 10:7**). As the narratives progress, the larger purpose also emerges. The plagues which God had sent against the Egyptians were "*to be recounted to your son and your son's son ... so that you may know that I am the LORD.*" [Note: **Sailhamer**, *The Pentateuch . . .*, pp249-50.]

Ryken: First, the unbeliever is ignorant of God's identity. Pharaoh confessed his ignorance by raising a question. It was not an honest question but a rhetorical one, asked with sneering sarcasm: "*Who is the Lord?*" Far from seeking to find out who God really was, Pharaoh denied that God had any claim on his life: "I do not know the Lord." . . .

In the second place, Pharaoh was resistant to God's authority. Unbelief is not merely an intellectual problem but also a spiritual problem. It affects the heart as well as the mind. After Pharaoh admitted his ignorance (saying, "*Who is the Lord ...?*"), he went on to assert his defiance: "*... that I should obey him?*" (**Exod. 5:2**).

Oswalt: Pharaoh clearly understood the nature of the contest (**5:2**); it was one of ultimate authority. Was there someone superior to him who had the right to tell him what to do with his slaves? There could not be. He refused to acknowledge any such authority, and he would not bow to it. It was not a question of knowledge but of recognition of authority.

2. (:3-5) Second Request Directed to Pharaoh

a. (:3) Reason: Divine Authority and Avoidance of Judgment

"Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.'"

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Perhaps stunned by Pharaoh's insolence and arrogance, Moses and Aaron recast their request in somewhat milder terms. . . Acting now as representatives of the people (rather than ambassadors . . .) the demand is changed to a humble request
Wiersbe: Moses mentioned that the Israelites might be in danger of being killed if they failed to obey the Lord. Why bring that up? Perhaps Moses was hinting that Pharaoh's stubbornness might cost him his slaves and that he'd be better off to give the Jews a week off and thereby protect his cheap labor. However, there's another factor involved: Moses was telling Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews was a powerful God who could kill the Egyptians as well as the Jews. Pharaoh needed to understand that the demands Moses and Aaron were making were not to be taken lightly, for this was a matter of life and death.

b. (:4-5) Response: Avoidance of Distractions

1) (:4) Get Back to Work

“But the king of Egypt said to them, ‘Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!’”

2) (:5) Their Work is Needed Even More Now that They are Many

“Again Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!’”

John Hannah: Pharaoh reacted in three ways:

- 1) He repudiated the God of Israel as having no authority (5:2).
- 2) He was calloused to the possibility of any harm that might come on the Israelites for disobeying their God (5:2-3).
- 3) He was concerned for his own loss of labor productivity (5:4-5).

B. (:6-9) Increased Workload = Response of Pharaoh

1. (:6-7) Increase Their Workload by Making Them Get Their Own Straw

“So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, ‘You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves.’”

2. (:8-9) Increase Their Workload by Maintaining Their Same Quota of Bricks

a. Maintain the Previous Level of Output

“But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it.”

b. Recognize Their Propensity to Laziness

“Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’”

c. Increase the Workload so There is No Time for Distractions

“Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it that they may pay no attention to false words.”

Douglas Stuart: The remedy proposed by the king was predictable: if work was the way to keep the Israelites quiet and obedient (a method that had worked well for decades), more work was the way to restore quiet and obedience. According to 1:14, the forced labor burden on the Israelites was related mainly to brick making (*“brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields”*). Presumably the *“work in the fields”* was not originally focused on gathering the straw for the bricks but on planting, tending, and harvesting crops. The Egyptians must have used some other group for the straw. Now, ratcheting up the workload, Pharaoh ordered the Israelites to gather their own straw.

C. (:10-14) Increased Oppression = Role of the Taskmasters

1. (:10-11) Passing on Pharaoh's Increased Demands

a. Get Your Own Straw

"So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, 'Thus says Pharaoh, I am not going to give you any straw. You go and get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it;'"

MacArthur: When combined with "foremen of the sons of Israel" (v. 15), a 3-level command structure is seen to have been in place – Egyptian section leaders and labor gang bosses, and Israelite foremen.

b. Maintain Same Quota of Bricks

"but none of your labor will be reduced."

2. (:12-13) Pressing the People to Work Harder

"So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, 'Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw.'"

Oswalt: The system of "Egyptian slave drivers" (5:13) overseeing "Israelite foremen" (5:14) is a pattern that has worked in a variety of tyrannies across the centuries right up to the present. It is reminiscent of the system the Nazis used in the death camps between 1938 and 1945. The pressure flows inexorably down from the top, with the immediate enforcers of the oppression being members of the oppressed group itself. **Houtman** (1993:1.457) observes that the entire structure, from Pharaoh on down, was based on **fear**. Neither was Pharaoh himself exempt, for he was living in deadly fear of losing his power.

3. (:14) Punishing the Hebrew Foremen for Missing Daily Quotas

"Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, 'Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?'"

Douglas Stuart: Thus the situation had transformed from one of hopefulness and faith (4:31) to resentment and doubt. Why? Because of Pharaoh's intransigence. He clearly is portrayed here as unyielding, determined to put the Israelites in their place, suggesting that the Israelites were going to need something much stronger than words to convince him to change his mind. As v. 20 indicates, Moses and Aaron did not attempt to return to the royal court to handle this appeal, suggesting that they saw no hope in it or realized that they would not have been welcome. Pharaoh was the final court of appeal, the equivalent of the supreme court of his country. Thus his final verdict had been rendered to Moses and Aaron already, and they may even have been barred from seeing him so soon again on essentially the same issue. Someone else, however, might have had the opportunity to address the king on the topic of the impossibility of fulfilling a

royal edict (making a full quota of bricks without straw) under the court rules of that time (assuming the ancient Near Eastern general right of access; and it was perhaps thus that the Israelite foremen tried themselves to appeal the penalty assigned in response to Moses' and Aaron's representation of Yahweh's demand.

II. (:15-21) FRUSTRATION BUILDS AS THE JEWISH FOREMEN RAISE COMPLAINTS

A. (:15-19) Complaint to Pharaoh

1. (:15-16) Impossible Expectations

a. What's Going on Here?

*"Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying,
'Why do you deal this way with your servants?'"*

b. Your Demands Don't Make Sense

*"There is no straw given to your servants,
yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!'"*

c. We are Being Punished – But You Have Created the Problem

*"And behold, your servants are being beaten;
but it is the fault of your own people."*

2. (:17-18) Insensitive Demands

"But he said, 'You are lazy, very lazy; therefore you say, Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD. So go now and work; for you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks.'"

3. (:19) Insurmountable Trouble

"And the foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, 'You must not reduce your daily amount of bricks.'"

B. (:20-21) Complaint to Moses and Aaron

1. (:20) Angry Confrontation

"When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them."

2. (:21) Ascribing Blame to Moses and Aaron

"And they said to them, 'May the LORD look upon you and judge you, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.'"

Wiersbe: Alas, during the next forty years, complaining about God's will and criticizing God's leaders would be characteristic of the people of Israel; but are God's people much different today?

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Moses and Aaron had deliberately “*stationed*” themselves so as apparently to be the first to debrief the men as they emerged from their meeting with Pharaoh . . . Instead of earning the respect from these Hebrew foremen for all their labors to alleviate their brutal condition, Moses and Aaron felt, in no uncertain terms, the heat of the foremen’s anger.

David Thompson: This is typically what the people of God do when things don’t work out in a seemingly good way- they blame management who may or may not be responsible for the problem. They blame the God ordained leadership. Instead of the Hebrew leadership saying, we need to get our people to cry out to God for His help; they just start blaming Moses and Aaron for the trouble. This was not Moses and Aaron’s fault.

III. (5:22 – 6:1) LAMENT OF MOSES ANSWERED BY THE LORD

A. (:22-23) Lament of Moses

1. (:22) Asking the Hard WHY Questions

a. Why Are You Increasing the Suffering?

*“Then Moses returned to the LORD and said,
‘O Lord, why hast Thou brought harm to this people?’”*

b. Why Did You Send Me on This Mission?

“Why didst Thou ever send me?”

2. (:23) Analyzing Present Circumstances from a Limited Perspective

a. So Far Nothing But Increased Suffering

*“Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name,
he has done harm to this people;”*

b. So Far No Deliverance

“and Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all.”

B. (:6:1) Response of the Lord

*“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh;
for under compulsion he shall let them go,
and under compulsion he shall drive them out of his land.’”*

S. Lewis Johnson: Now the **first verse** of the sixth chapter should really be the end of the fifth chapter, I think, and notice the reply of the Lord. Now it is for Moses, but I want to tell you something, it's for you too. And it's surely for me. Look at it carefully. Then the Lord said unto Moses, "Now." Now in the Hebrew text, there is a little bit of emphasis on that word. *"Now, at this time, shall Thou see what I will do to Pharaoh for with a strong hand shall he let them go and with a strong hand shall he drive them out*

of the land." Because you see, God loves to bring his people into the condition in which they are unable to cope with their circumstances. Because when they are unable to cope

with their circumstances, then when the deliverance comes as he has promised, they will realize it's really from the Lord.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What transformed Moses into a bold man of faith who courageously was willing to make his case before the Pharaoh of Egypt?
- 2) How do we respond when we do something for the Lord and instead of receiving a good outcome, it looks like matters have become worse?
- 3) Why are God's people so prone to discouragement and assigning blame instead of trusting in the Lord?
- 4) How did the Lord answer the "Why" questions of Moses?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: There are at least nine reasons why God wants this conflict between Himself and Pharaoh:

- 1) It shows God has superior power and sovereignty over Pharaoh and false gods of Egypt.
- 2) God would use this confrontation to strengthen the faith of His people- they would see and trust that God did have a major national plan for Israel.
- 3) God would use this conflict to heighten the anticipation and appreciation for redemption.
- 4) God would use this conflict to show how His will overrules man's will, yet man is still responsible for choices he makes.
- 5) God would use this conflict to show that there are serious consequences for those who persist in sin and rebellion against Him.
- 6) God would use this conflict to show that no one can stop what He wants to do.
- 7) God would glorify Himself through the witness and spread of the facts of this conflict.
- 8) God would use this Egyptian conflict to teach the nations they better give Israel her land (**Josh. 2:9**)
- 9) God would use this Egyptian conflict for evangelistic purposes (i.e. Rahab- **Josh. 2:10-13**)

F B Meyer: Why is it that Thou hast sent me?

Before God can use us, He must bring us to an end of ourselves. When Paul was summoned to the greatest epistles and labors of his life, his strength was drained to utter weakness, and he despaired even of life. So in the case of Moses and Israel.

Moses, for forty years, had been undergoing the emptying process; but perhaps when God called him to this great enterprise, there may have been a slight revival of confidence in himself, in his mission, his miracles, the eloquence of Aaron's speech. So in the rebuff he received from Pharaoh, in the bitter remonstrance of the elders of his people, in the sad consciousness that his efforts had aggravated their condition, the lesson was still further taught him — that of himself he could do absolutely nothing.

Israel also had begun to hope something from his mission. Through the brickfields the story ran of his early years, his uncompromising speech to Pharaoh, of his miracles; and the wretched slaves cherished faith in him and Aaron as their heaven-sent deliverers. They had, however, to learn that all such hopes were vain, and to see that the brothers, at the best, were as weak as themselves. Then the way was prepared to lean only on God.

Ourselves. — By repeated failures all along our life-course God is teaching us the same lesson. We fail to justify and then to sanctify ourselves. Our efforts to serve and please Him only end in increasing perplexity. The tale of bricks is doubled; the burdens augment; the strength of our purpose is broken; we are utterly discouraged; and then, when the soul is utterly desolate, the heavenly Bridegroom draws near and says, "I will do all; I am Alpha and Omega; I am thy salvation."

J Ligon Duncan: The protest of Moses is one of the most amazing passages in all of the Bible. In this passage, **Moses says three things to God.**

Look at **verse 23**. First, he says, "Lord, You are responsible for this evil." Now I know that you are looking for those words. But he says it in a question. He says, "Oh Lord, why have you brought harm to this people, but don't be fooled by the form of the question. You see what Moses is saying. "Lord, you are responsible for this." The very question assumes that God must answer for having done something wrong. Why have You done evil to this people, Moses says.

Secondly, he says, "Lord, You shouldn't have sent me." Again, he does it in the form of a question. "Why did you ever send me?" But behind that question is actually a charge. "Lord, You should never have sent me in the first place." And then it gets worse.

Thirdly, he says, "Lord, You failed on the promise that You made, and you've made things worse than they were. And again, he forms that charge with a question, but here is the language. *"Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he has done harm to this people, and You have not delivered Your People at all."*

Now this is a fascinating exchange. But I want you see two things that are happening simultaneously. One bad and one good. First, Moses is wrong to accuse the Lord. And in accusing the Lord wrongly, Moses is revealing what we often do when we don't like God's providence. Moses accuses God here of being unconcerned for His people. Wait a minute, time out. Who had had to convince Moses to go to Egypt to help his people? Had Moses done so willingly? I heard Your word. Send whomever You want. Not me. Now wait a second. Moses is acting as if he is the one with the heart of compassion. So often, when we face trials or worse, when we see those that we love with all our hearts face trials, our first reaction is to think, Lord God, how could You do this. Because for a moment Satan blinds us to the deviousness and the wickedness of our own hearts, and lets us believe that we are more compassionate than God. And that's precisely what Moses is doing here. "Lord, if I were God, I wouldn't do this. And yet only a few days before, Moses had to be coached to come to the aid of his people. Who cared more about the people of God? God or Moses? There's no comparison. There's no question. God had the heart for His People, and yet Moses thinks he's more loving. Beware when you think that you are more loving than God.....

But there's something else here that just boggles my mind. It's happening at the same time. Do you realize that even though Moses lashes out against God, do you realize that God, even in that, is building His heart in Moses? I mean, Moses just a few weeks before, had had to be coaxed into going to the children of Egypt. Now his heart is genuinely broken when he sees his people being treated in the way they are being treated. You see, it's not that Moses is more compassionate than God. It's that Moses is being brought up to speed, with the pre-existent, with the eternal compassion of God for His People. Moses is being molded into the image, into the heart of His God in compassion for His people; to the point that over and over in the book of Exodus, Moses, at crucial points, because of his heart for God's people, worked in him by God's Grace, will intercede for the people of God, and call on God to show them favor even though they don't deserve it. Though Moses doesn't know it here, as his heart is breaking for his people, he is merely emulating the eternal love and compassion of God for the children of Israel.

The Lord responds mercifully. In mercy, he tell Moses, and you'll see it in **verse 1** of Exodus 6, then the Lord said to Moses, "*Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, for under compulsion he shall let them go. And under compulsion, he shall drive them out of this land.*" The Lord in His mercy tells Moses that Pharaoh will not only let Israel go, he'll drive them out of the land. He will be delighted to be rid of them when the Lord is finished. God is in control, not Pharaoh.

Steven Cole: The Plan Isn't Working (5:1 – 6:30)

Because the Lord is the Lord and He is faithful to His covenant promises, serve Him faithfully even in the face of opposition and setbacks.

1. Serve the Lord faithfully even in the face of opposition and setbacks.

Moses and Aaron were coming off a spiritual high. The people had accepted their testimony and believed that the Lord was concerned about their affliction (**Exod. 4:31**). Moses, Aaron, and the Israelite elders all had worshiped the Lord. Probably the spiritual high made them forget that the Lord had said that He would harden Pharaoh's heart and that he wouldn't let Israel go except under compulsion (**Exod. 3:19; 4:21**). So Moses and Aaron marched boldly into Pharaoh's presence, but hit a brick wall. Pharaoh wasn't sympathetic in the slightest. In fact, he made things more difficult than they already were for the Hebrew slaves.

A. When you serve the Lord you will face opposition both from without and from within.

B. When you serve the Lord you will face setbacks that make it seem like you're on the wrong path.

C. When you face setbacks in serving the Lord, pour out your heart to Him.

So, if you face setbacks in serving the Lord, go to Him and pour out your complaint, but do it submissively, fearing Him. Acknowledge that you don't understand why He isn't working as you thought He should, but don't imply that you know better than He what needs to be done! He is the Lord and you're not! You may not understand the setbacks or delays, but He has His reasons and He's not under obligation to share those reasons. But we still need to keep serving Him. Why?

2. Serve the Lord faithfully in the face of opposition and setbacks because He is the Lord and He is faithful to His gracious covenant promises.

Scott Grant: Birth Pangs of Life (5:1-21)

What does Pharaoh represent to us? In Pharaoh and Egypt, we see a picture of the world, which is opposed to God and his people. Behind the world is the god of this world, Satan (**John 12:31, 2 Corinthians 4:4**). Satan directs the world's opposition to God and his people. Pharaoh, Egypt and the world are unwitting pawns who have no idea that they are being used by Satan. . .

If you were Satan, what would you do? You'd try to crush the hope by crushing the faith. And you'd crush the faith by plugging up the ears of the one who is listening to words that are being believed. That's exactly what Satan does: He hinders us from listening to the truth, which comes to us through the word of God. He even portrays the truth as "*false words*" (**5:9**).

His strategy is rather ingenious. Consider his tactics through Pharaoh. Moses tells the people that the Lord will deliver them from bondage to Egypt. Pharaoh responds by making life more difficult for the Israelites, making the word of deliverance, which is the word of truth, look like nonsense. We look at all this wonderful, liberating, hopeful truth in the word of God; then we look at all the painful, constricting, crushing pain in life. The word of God looks like a lie, a collection of "*false words*."

Satan, then, uses affliction for the purposes of distraction. He wants to distract us from "*paying attention*" to the word of God, which is full of hope, by making life so miserable that the word of hope seems like nonsense. Through affliction, Satan is telling us, "Don't listen to the word. Don't read it. Don't believe it. Don't trust it. Discard it. Forget it. It's a lie! Don't believe God exists. Don't believe he's good. Don't believe he loves you. Don't believe he has good plans to take you to a better place. It's a lie!"

What purpose does all this affliction serve? Why does the Lord do things that make life so painful for us? It's because he wants to liberate us from service to sin and Satan in order that we might serve him. But because sin is so tenaciously comfortable, we need to be made uncomfortable to want liberation from it.

Motyer: It is helpful to read **4:29–5:21** following this outline:

A1 Moses and Aaron accepted by Israel (**4:29–31**)

B1 Fruitless appeal to Pharaoh: refusal to recognize the Lord (**5:1–5**)

C The new and harsher regime (**5:6–14**)

a1 Oppressive conditions (**5:7–8**)

b Aimed at distracting attention from the word of God (**5:9**)

a2 Physical affliction (**5:10–14**)

B2 Fruitless appeal to Pharaoh: refusal to allow worship of the Lord (**5:15–18**)

A2 Moses and Aaron rejected by Israel (**5:19–21**)

For Moses, failure to listen attentively led to failure to obey precisely in the following ways: [not sure I agree that Moses was in error in these areas]

- He took the wrong delegation. He had been commanded to take '*the elders of Israel*' with him (**3:18**), but he took only Aaron.
- He adopted the wrong approach. There is nothing comparable in **3:18** to the This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says of **5:1**.
- He used the wrong terminology. '*Hebrews*' is used in **3:18**, and this was the recognized name for the people (cf. **1:16; 2:6**), whereas Moses spoke of *Israel* (**5:1**). He was told to say that God '*met with*' him (3:18), which **Cassuto** suggests (with evidence) was a recognized way, in non-Israelite circles, of describing a theophany (cf. **Num. 23:3**). Moses had made no allowances for what may or may not have been acceptable to Pharaoh as the Lord had commanded him to do.
- He made the wrong request. Instead of the moderate request for three days leave of absence which the Lord had put into his mouth as his opening gambit (**3:18**), Moses made an absolute demand for national emancipation.

Ryken: A Christian does what God calls him to do, and it makes things worse! Such developments make us start to wonder if we did the right thing, and maybe even to wonder if God cares what happens to us.

This is exactly what happened to Moses. Moses had done everything God commanded him to do. It took him a while to accept God's call, of course, but once he did, he was careful to do whatever God wanted him to do. From the moment he left the burning bush until the day he went to Pharaoh's palace, he did and said exactly what he was told to do and say.

Moses was at the center of God's will. So he was living the victorious spiritual life, right? Wrong! Things could hardly have gone worse than they did. Acting on God's instructions, Moses had told Pharaoh to let God's people go, but that turned out to be a complete fiasco. Not only had Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, but the demand made him so angry that he doubled their workload. Now the Israelites had to find their own straw to make Pharaoh's bricks. Not surprisingly, this setback made Moses Public Enemy #1. Now the only thing he had to show for following God was the contempt of his people, who said, "*May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh*" (**Exod. 5:21a**). The more Moses obeyed, the worse things got, and his worst fears were starting to come true (see **Exod. 4:1–17**). He had been rejected by both the Hebrews and the Egyptians. So this is a story about what happens when we try to do things God's way and it only makes things worse. It is also a story about what to do when that happens. How should we respond when trouble comes for doing what is right?

To know what not to do, just look at the Israelite foremen. When they were in trouble—bloodied and beaten for failing to meet their quotas—they first appealed to Pharaoh. By doing so they were returning to the source of their bondage, foolishly hoping that their taskmaster would set them free. Then they took out their anger on Moses, trying to undermine his God-given authority. We are starting to see that Israel's opposition to Moses is a major theme in the book of Exodus. It is part of a broader Old Testament pattern in which the Israelites repeatedly reject God's prophets, until finally they crucify Christ himself (see **Acts 7:51, 52**). And it all started with their rejection of Moses. This is the way most people respond when trouble comes: They turn back to their sins and away from sound instruction, with the result that they are drawn ever deeper into spiritual bondage.

Moses did something different when he was in trouble. When, in spite of his willing obedience, things went from bad to worse, Moses took his troubles to the Lord: "*Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all'*" (**Exod. 5:22, 23**).

It is not hard to understand why Moses felt so disappointed. Up until the end of **chapter 4**, everything was going beautifully. With Aaron's help, the prophet had performed miraculous signs, and the Israelites had responded by believing his message and worshipping God. Now, just a few days later, the exodus was in a shambles, and the people were letting Moses have it. As far as he could see, God's plan had backfired.

Not only had Moses failed to rescue his people, but their deliverance seemed further away than ever.

Moses should not have been surprised when Pharaoh refused to let God's people go. He knew that Pharaoh would not give up his slaves without a fight, for God had said, "*I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him*" (**Exod. 3:19**). God had also said, "*I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go*" (**Exod. 4:21b**). But God had not said anything about the Israelites gathering their own straw or attacking their spiritual leaders. So Moses couldn't understand what was happening. He did exactly what God had told him to do, but things weren't turning out the way he expected.

In his frustration and confusion, Moses started to question his calling. "*Is this why you sent me?*" he asked; or to paraphrase, "Why on earth did you ever send me?" The prophet's question was more like an accusation. When Moses first heard God's call to lead the people out of Egypt, he said, "*O Lord, please send someone else to do it*" (**Exod. 4:13**). Now he was saying, "See, God, I told you to send someone else!" And given the way things turned out, he had a pretty good point! Anyone who has ever had trouble in ministry knows how Moses felt. Sometimes we do what we thought God is calling us to do and say what we think we are supposed to say, but things don't turn out the way we hope. It makes us wonder if we did the right thing at all.

When trouble comes, it also makes us wonder if God knows what he is doing. This is where it is easy to find fault with Moses, for his protest was not without sin. Moses was guilty of discontentment—of complaining about the ways and means of God. He was guilty of unbelief—of not trusting God to fulfill his promises. He was guilty of impatience—of not waiting on God to bring salvation in his own good time. Moses also came very near the sin of rebellion, for he accused God of being a troublemaker: "*O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people?*" (**Exod. 5:22a**). Notice how many times the prophet uses the word "you": "*you brought trouble,*" "*you sent me,*" "*you have not rescued your people.*" "*You, you, you,*" Moses said reproachfully; "it's all your fault!"

In the same way that the foremen blamed Moses for their troubles, Moses blamed God, and he overstated his case in the process. Moses blamed God for two things in particular. One was causing trouble—the trouble of having to make bricks without straw. The other was breach of promise—failing to save his people. Moses had gone to Pharaoh, but so far God had done nothing at all to accomplish salvation. So Moses did what it is always tempting to do when trouble comes: He blamed God both for what he was doing and for what he wasn't doing. He said in effect, "Why did you get us into this mess, Lord, and why aren't you doing anything about it?"

All of this is a reminder that Moses was a man like us, a sinner in need of salvation. As we study Exodus, we are constantly evaluating this great prophet, trying to learn what he has to teach us about living for Christ. In some ways he is the perfect example, for his ministry reveals the pattern of salvation in Christ. But there are also times when his

words and deeds are corrupted by sin. Thus we see him striving to follow God, but always in need of divine grace, just as we are.

Mackay: There are two main lessons in this chapter. The first is that **God's purposes do not always proceed in the way we expect them to**. Even though we have good reason to anticipate a certain outcome, it does not follow that we can dictate the time or the method that God will use to achieve his stated aim. Secondly, it is clear that **when carrying out God's work, we can expect opposition even from those we are trying to help**. Misinterpretation of the motives of others and a propensity to be discouraged by initial setbacks often poison a situation. But the task is not to be dealt with only by human resources, and Moses as a wise leader brings it before God. Even though he himself is at a loss to understand what is happening, he knows how to have his doubts and perplexities dealt with.

Just as Moses came to the people with a message from God about which there was much that he did not understand, so too the Christian faces a hostile world with the gospel and proclaims the fact of the return of Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead. Both meet with a hostile response. To the Christian the challenge is posed, *"Where is this 'coming' he promised?"* (2 Pet. 3:4). Like Moses, we cannot give an answer that provides the detail requested, but like him also we are required not to deny what has been revealed but to leave the fulfilment of his promised word to God who is in control of all that is happening.

TEXT: Exodus 6:28 - 7:7

TITLE: *RESETTING THE NARRATIVE – OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S CALL*

BIG IDEA:

BECAUSE GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND SUFFICIENT, OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S CALL IS THE ONLY OPTION THAT MAKES SENSE

INTRODUCTION:

Like Moses, we can easily be overwhelmed with a sense of our own inadequacy. But God is unwavering in His commitment to His kingdom agenda. He assures us of His sovereignty and His sufficiency to enable us to fulfil our calling. He rules over the hearts of even the most powerful world leaders. He provides all of the resources we need for any situation. What he demands is that we respond in the simplicity of obedience – trusting only in Him. The bottom line that should silence all objections and eliminate all excuses is the simple declaration: “*I am the LORD*” – therefore obey what I command.

I. (6:28-30) GOD CALLS US TO PERFORM MISSIONS BEYOND OUR CAPABILITY

A. (:28) Resumption of the Dramatic Narrative – Based in the Unique Role of Moses

“Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt,”

Ryken: Since this genealogy was something of a digression, the story now resumes with a brief recap: “*Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt ...*” (Ex 6:28) and so on.

Believer's Study Bible: Seemingly repetitious portions of the text (cf. Ex 4:10-17, 21) are not signs of different documents or different authors. The Bible was written to be read aloud to the people. Repetition clarified and maintained the unity of thought, and is typical of Semitic narratives.

B. (:29) Repetition of the Lord’s Overwhelming Charge – Based in His Kingdom Agenda

“that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you.’”

David Thompson: God is not asking Moses to be a great philosophical orator or communicator, he says you go give this big political leader My Word and I will take care of the rest. Now the emphasis of what God wants Moses to do here is not that he go back to the sons of Israel and try to convince the Hebrews and persuade them that He is going to lead them out of Egypt, both Moses and Aaron were to go directly to Pharaoh and speak to him. . .

Now we do learn here what the job of a prophet actually is and that is to speak the exact words of God. His job is not to invent his own views of things; his job is to speak the exact words of God.

C. (:30) Repetition of Moses' Understandable Objection – Based in Inadequacy

“But Moses said before the LORD, ‘Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?’”

Ryken: What the prophet failed to understand was that Pharaoh's stubborn resistance was part of God's sovereign plan. Moses said, “It will never work, Lord. Pharaoh will never listen.” God answered, “Right! That's exactly what I have in mind. I will harden his heart so that he will not listen to you.” God used Pharaoh's rebellion to prove that God alone had the power to rescue his people.

The reason Moses had the wrong expectation was because he misunderstood his calling as a prophet. Moses was a pragmatist. He had a performance-based approach to prophetic ministry. He assumed that it was up to the prophet to get results. If people listened to him, then he was doing his job; if not, he should find some other line of work. This explains why Moses was always worrying about whether people would listen to him. “*What if they do not believe me or listen to me ...?*” he would say (**Exod. 4:1**). Or, “*Why would Pharaoh listen to me?*” (**Exod. 6:12, 30**).

The problem with this approach to ministry is that spiritual results are always beyond human control. No matter how eloquent he is, and no matter how persuasive, there is nothing a prophet can do to make people believe God's Word. It takes faith for someone to believe, and faith is a gift of God's grace. The only thing that matters to God, therefore, is whether or not the prophet is faithful. The prophet is not responsible for the way the people respond to his message, but only for getting the message right. This is why he does not have the liberty to add anything to God's message or to leave anything out. As God said to Moses, “*You are to say everything I command you*” (**Exod. 7:2**). And as long as the prophet communicates God's message accurately, he is faithful in his calling, whatever the outcome.

John Mackay: This chapter ends with Moses' self-doubt. He does not present himself as the typical hero who launches into bold exploits without any hesitation. Moses is well aware of the magnitude of the task facing him and of his own limitations. By stating the matter so clearly and repeatedly, he emphasizes the fact that the deliverance that follows is the work of God alone. No explanation for it can be found in Moses' personal ability. The one who was really at work was God himself.

II. (:1-7) OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S CALL IS THE ONLY OPTION THAT MAKES SENSE

In light of:

A. (:1-2) The Sufficiency of God's Enablement

1. (:1) Right Players in Place

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.’”

2. (:2) Right Message for the Mission

“You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land.”

B. (:3) The Sovereignty of God’s Control Over Pharaoh’s Heart

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.”

David Thompson: Most people in their theology want to change that word “*that*” to an Arminian “*because*.” In other words, most people want to say God would harden Pharaoh’s heart because Pharaoh hardened his own heart. But that is not what this text says. We are not faithful to the Word of God if we say that. This text says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart that He might multiply His own signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.

We cannot water this down to make it say what we want it to say. God is taking full initiative here for the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. He does not apologize to Moses or us, nor does He debate this point like Arminius wanted to with Calvin. God gives one reason why He is going to harden His heart; “*so that*” He can show Himself to be the only true, all-powerful God through His signs and wonders.

Warren Wiersbe: The miracles and plagues were also God’s way of judging the gods of Egypt and proving them false and futile. “*Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord*” (Ex 12:12; and see Ex 18:11 and Num. 33:4). More than eighty different deities were worshiped in Egypt, but they could do nothing to deliver the land and the people from the terrible judgments Jehovah sent. **If nothing else, the Egyptians learned that Jehovah was the true and living God. But the people of Israel also needed to learn this lesson.** According to Ezekiel 20:1–9, some of the Jews had begun to worship the Egyptian gods; and when they were delivered from Egypt, they took their gods with them! Did they compromise their faith in an attempt to please their captors and receive better treatment? But how could they forsake Jehovah after seeing all the demonstrations of His power? “*Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of Your mercies.*”

John Mackay: *But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart (7:3).* The interpretation of this statement has caused much theological controversy. ‘Heart’ in Scripture is a broad term used to describe the entire inner life of an individual, including his thinking and decision-making as well as his emotions.

The concept of ‘hardening’ is conveyed by three different Hebrew roots.

(1) The first of these occurs in two different verb forms: ‘to be/become strong’

(4:21; 8:19; 9:35) and ‘to make strong’ (7:13, 22; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17). Although all the roots are used with very similar meanings, it is perhaps possible to detect in this verb the idea of characteristically unyielding inner attitudes of heart and mind.

(2) The second root is associated with the idea of ‘to be/make heavy’ (8:15, 32; 9:34; 10:1; ‘unyielding’ 7:14; 9:7), and suggests slowness to move in response to external stimuli.

(3) ‘To be severe’ (7:3; ‘stubbornly refused’ 13:15) is the form found in this verse, but it occurs less frequently than the others overall.

All three point to an individual whose spiritual reactions are not as they should be. Rather than joyfully obeying the commands of God and learning the lessons he would teach, the hard heart is spiritually insensitive and so not able to function properly. It will not listen; it will not obey; it stubbornly goes on its own way. The more such behavior is engaged in, the less inclination is there to do otherwise. Eventually in the sovereign determination of God the power to change and reform is lost altogether. That is the Scriptural presentation of the resolute inner defiance of humanity in their rebellion against God.

C. (:4-5) The Severity of God’s Judgments to Accomplish His Purposes

1. (:4) Promise of Plagues

“When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments.”

2. (:5) Purpose of the Plagues

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

MacArthur: This purpose of the Exodus finds repeated mention in God’s messages to Pharaoh and in God’s descriptions of what He was doing (cf. **Exodus 7:16; 8: 10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 14:4, 18**). Some of the Egyptians did come to understand the meaning of the name Yahweh, for they responded appropriately to the warning of the seventh plague (**Ex 9:20**), and others accompanied Israel into the wilderness (**Ex 12:38**). In the final analysis, Egypt would not be able to deny the direct involvement of the God of Israel in their rescue from bondage and the destruction of Egypt’s army.

Constable: The ultimate purpose of God’s actions was His own glory (**Ex 7:5**). The glory of God was at stake. The Egyptians would acknowledge God’s faithfulness and sovereign power in delivering the Israelites from their bondage and fulfilling their holy calling. God’s intention was to bless the Egyptians through Israel (**Ge 12:3+**), but Pharaoh would make that impossible by his stubborn refusal to honor God. Nevertheless the Egyptians would acknowledge Yahweh’s sovereignty.

D. (:6-7) The Simplicity of Obedience

1. (:6) Actions Must Conform to the Lord's Commands

*“So Moses and Aaron **did it**; as the LORD commanded them, thus they **did**.”*

Not enough to have good intentions; you must do the will of God.

2. (:7) Age Grants No Exemption

“And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.”

Why do people think when they grow older that they are somehow excused from obeying or serving the Lord?

Guzik: This is retirement age for many, but Moses knew that God's will was more important than retirement. We also see from this that Aaron was Moses' older brother, so God went against the conventional customs of that day by making the younger brother more prominent.

John Hannah: After 40 years in the wilderness wanderings Moses died at age 120 (**Deut. 34:7**) and Aaron at 123 (**Num. 33:38-39**).

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When has God called you to obey in some area that seemed overwhelming to you?
- 2) How had God provided grace to show Himself strong in the very area of your weakness and inadequacies?
- 3) Why should we be anxious about world turmoil when we understand the sovereignty of God over the details of every situation and His power over the hearts of even the greatest world leaders?
- 4) What is your expectation regarding how God can use you for productive ministry in your so-called “retirement years”?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Davis: The thread of historical narrative broken off at **verse 13** is again resumed in **verse 28** and continued through **7:7**; therefore, **6:28-30** provide an important introduction to the material of **Chapter 7**. The verses again remind the reader that the

essence of Moses' message and ministry is to be found in Jehovah himself and was not the result of religious self-discovery. With the encouragement of Jehovah and the promise of success, the first major encounter was about to occur. Pharaoh challenged the God of Israel and apparently was unwilling to accept the demand of Moses as previously presented. The hardness of his heart and the hardening of his heart by Jehovah worked to provide the means by which God displayed His awesome power both to Israel and to the Egyptians.

F. B. Meyer: In God's dealings with his people He purposed to reveal Himself to Egypt: so that when He led forth Israel's hosts, in redemption power, from the brickfields of slavery on to resurrection ground, there might be afforded such a display of his love, and pity, and power, as the world had never before witnessed. Egypt and all surrounding nations should know the character of God in the Exodus, as the Lover and Redeemer of his own.

So with the Church. — The Apostle tells us that redeemed men are to be the subjects of angelic contemplation and wonder. In the Church, principalities and powers shall discern the manifold wisdom and grace of God. When God has brought all the ransomed hosts up from the Egyptian bondage of the world to stand in the radiance of the eternal morning, then the universe shall ring with the ascription, "*Great and marvelous are thy works. Righteous and true are thy ways.*"

So with each individual believer. — Each one of us has been formed for Jesus Himself, that we might show forth his praise. In growing purity and sweetness, in our deliverance from the clinging corruptions of the world and flesh, in our patience under tribulation, our submission and steadfast hope, in our willingness to sacrifice ourselves for others, let us be revelations of what Christ is, and of what He can make sinful men become.

Believers are the world's Bibles, by studying which men may come to know the Lord Himself. Let us see to it that we be clear in type, unmistakable in our testimony, pleasant to behold, thoughtful and helpful towards all, commending the blessed Bridegroom whom the world sees not.

Motyer: Simply concentrating on the broad outline, **6:28–7:7** runs as follows:

A1 Moses, transmitter of the Lord's word (**6:28–29**)

B1 The Lord, sovereign over Moses' speech (**6:30–7:2**)

B2 The Lord, sovereign over Pharaoh's heart (**7:3–5**)

A2 Moses, obedient in deed and word (**7:6–7**)

Douglas Stuart: **Exodus 6:28–7:7** is largely summational material, reminding the hearer/reader of key issues in the story so far, with a focus on the confrontation with Pharaoh and Egypt. The plagues are about to begin, and this is an appropriate place in

the narrative to be sure that the hearer has the key characters and the essential themes in mind in preparation for the great conflict story. Such a reminder has value to hearers, however, who must keep everything in mind because they cannot go back and look at it in print. Ancient readers were few, full literacy was relatively rare, and even partial literacy the exception, so many readers probably read haltingly and benefited from the reorientation a passage such as the present one provided to them.

The passage concentrates especially on Moses' need for reassurance. The hero of the story, in other words, is Yahweh, not Moses. Moses openly admitted repeatedly in Exodus that he lacked confidence in his ability to carry out God's orders and reminded us in each case that God sustained him through the entire process. Even the note about his and Aaron's age in 7:7 is instructive: The two of them were called upon to lead a great movement at an age when most people have already died (**Ps 90:10**). Their contribution to the exodus was not their genius or their experience (what experience had they in leading an exodus?) or their credentials (Moses' were essentially negative as far as most Israelites were concerned) or their vitality, or any such thing. What made them successful leaders was the fact that they "*did just as the Lord commanded them*" (7:6).

Oswalt: In response to Moses's objection, God reminded Moses that he had already made provision for Moses's speech problem. Just as Aaron had been Moses's "*spokesman to the people*" (4:16), so now he would be Moses's spokesman to Pharaoh (7:2). But the language used here is more direct. At Sinai, Moses was to be in the place of God to Aaron (4:16). Here Yahweh says he will make Moses God to Pharaoh ("*make you seem like God,*" 7:1, NLT). This exile who had gone over to the Semites, the contemptible "*sand-dwellers,*" would speak as God to this one who considered himself to be God incarnate.

But even with Aaron's fluency, Moses was not to expect that Pharaoh would simply accede to their requests. What lay ahead would be a long road of rejection and defiance. Pharaoh might have thought he had complete freedom, as a god, to act in any way he wished, but that was not so. He had chosen a way of life and of thinking that now left him no freedom at all. He could not permit the Hebrews to leave his realm now. To do so would be to admit that there was an authority superior to his own. That he could not do. God had "*hardened his heart*" in the same sense that it might be said that God makes it impossible for the person who has defied gravity and jumped off a tall building to decide not to hit the sidewalk. In this world of cause and effect, Pharaoh had set in motion a train of events long ago, the results of which had now become inexorable.

The only way the Hebrews would be able to leave the servitude of Pharaoh in Egypt and enter into the servitude of Yahweh in Canaan was if Yahweh was powerful enough to force Pharaoh to let them go. That Yahweh had such power was exactly what he intended to demonstrate. He was going to do "*signs and wonders*" (7:3). That is, he was going to provide convincing evidence of his complete power over the entire world of nature and humanity. He was going to reveal himself. But even then Moses should not expect to be listened to. These events were not about Moses's and Aaron's fluency or persuasiveness. These events were about Yahweh, and the only issue was whether these

men were willing to be used for the display of his character and nature. It was Yahweh who would “*bring down his fist*” (7:4); it was Yahweh who would “*rescue [his] forces*.” It was Yahweh who would raise his powerful hand and bring out the Israelites. Then this pharaoh, who had so contemptuously said, “*I don’t know this Yahweh*,” (cf. 5:2), would know him very well indeed (7:5). As Fretheim comments (1991:94), this knowing involves both positive and negative aspects. From the Israelites’ perspective, they came to know a God who was forever faithful, endlessly compassionate, and unlimited in power for those who would recognize his covenant lordship. But for Pharaoh, and for all those who refuse to recognize Yahweh’s absolute right as creator to determine what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, to know Yahweh was to discover pain, horror, and humiliation (cf. 1 Pet 5:5–7). How blessed are those who come to know him as Covenant Lord early in their days.

TEXT: Exodus 6:2-27

TITLE: RENEWED COMMISSION

BIG IDEA:

ADDITIONAL COVENANT ASSURANCES SUPPORT THE RENEWED COMMISSION TO FORTIFY THE LEADERSHIP OF MOSES AND AARON

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes you just have to revert back to the old axiom: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!” The Lord knew that Moses and Aaron as well as the people of Israel needed a renewed focus on the blessings of the covenant promises in order to commit to such a formidable mission.

I. (:2-9) RENEWED COVENANT PROMISES

A. (:2-5) Identity and Immanence of God Support His Covenant Commitment

1. (:2-3) Identity and Immanence of God

a. (:2) Authoritative Self-Declaration Formula

“God spoke further to Moses and said to him, ‘I am the LORD;’”

S. Lewis Johnson: God considers his word to be of the greatest significance in delivering his servants from discouragement.

John Mackay: The divine speech begins and also ends in **verse 8** with the royal formula of self-announcement, *I am the Lord*. The same form of words is also found in verses **6 and 7**. This was a typical way for a king to express his authority and exert control. It is to misunderstand its function to assume that this is another account of the Lord revealing his name as he had done earlier (**3:14**). It is only because the name Lord is already known that it authenticates the message that is to be given. Such an introductory announcement is characteristic of covenant language, and it is the identity and purpose of the covenant king that is now set out.

b. (:3) Significance of Progressive Revelation

“and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.”

Matthew Henry: The patriarchs knew this name, but they did not know him in this matter by that which this name signifies. God would now be known by his name *Jehovah*, that is,

- (1.) A God performing what he had promised, and so inspiring confidence in his promises.
- (2.) A God perfecting what he had begun, and finishing his own work.

In the history of the creation, God is never called *Jehovah* till the heavens and the earth were finished, **Gen. 2:4**. When the salvation of the saints is completed in eternal life, then he will be known by his name *Jehovah* (Rev. 22:13); in the mean time they shall find him, for their strength and support, *El-shaddai*, a God all-sufficient, a God that is enough and will be so, **Mic. 7:20**.

John MacArthur: The same self-existent, eternal God, *Yahweh*, had been there in the past with the patriarchs; no change had occurred in Him, either in His covenant or promises. Since the name *Yahweh* was spoken before the Flood (**Ge 4:26**) and later by the patriarchs (**Ge 9:26; 12:8; 22:14; 24:12**), **the special significance of *Yahweh*, unknown to them**, but to be known by their descendants, must arise from what God would reveal of Himself in keeping the covenant and in redeeming Israel.

Steven Cole: In the Lord's reply to Moses (**Exod.6:2-8**), "*I am the Lord*" ("*Yahweh*") occurs four times (plus again in **6:29**). We need to know that He is the great "*I AM*," only living and true God. He is the only self-existent One, who has neither beginning nor end. He is the covenant-keeping God, whom we can know personally. Sometimes it is through our failures and setbacks that we come to know Him more deeply. We come to realize that He is the only one who can really do something about impossible problems. We need to fix our eyes on who it is that we serve. We need to let skeptics know that they are defying the only living and true God.

2. (:4) Covenant Commitment

"And I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned."

3. (:5) Covenant Faithfulness

"And furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant."

B. (:6-9) Immutability of the Covenant Promises

1. (:6a) Credibility for the Covenant Promises

"Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD,'"

I am the Lord and I will do what I said I would do! You can count on it.

Douglas Stuart: God had just reassured Moses. Next he gave Moses the words with which to reassure the Israelites, words that represent an expansion on his reassurance to Moses—similar in some ways to it but adding some important particulars as well. These words summarize God's plan for his people.

2. (:6b-8) Covenant Promises Detailed = Seven "*I Will*" Statements

F. B. Meyer: said when you analyze these "*I will*" statements, they present for God's people "The possibility of the Impossible" (Studies in Exodus, p. 97). God does have

the power and ability to do anything and to reverse any situation.

J. Vernon McGee: called this the seven “*I wills*” of redemption. He said when you carefully study them, they paint a picture of the fact that we are saved to the uttermost. There is no doubt that we may make great application of these “*I will*” statements, but they are specifically for Israel.

Guzik points out that "There is a strong contrast with the later five *I will* statements of Satan in **Isaiah 14:13–15**. The great difference is that Satan was powerless to make any of his “*I wills*” come to pass. God is more than able to fulfill each of His promises.

Steven Cole: The seven “*I will's*” cluster around three areas:

- deliverance and redemption from bondage;
- personal relationship (“*I will be your God*”);
- and, future possession of the land.

Those three areas mirror the promises of the new covenant that we enjoy in Christ (**Heb. 8:10-12**): God delivers us from our sins through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. He promises that He will be our God and we will be His people; and He promises every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (**Eph. 1:3**)!

a. (:6) **Promise of Redemption**

1) #1 – Compassionate Deliverance

*“and **I will** bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,”*

2) #2 – Hopeful Liberty

*“and **I will** deliver you from their bondage.”*

3) #3 – Powerful Redemption

*“**I will** also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”*

John Mackay: ‘Redeem’ adds to ‘rescue’ the idea of relationship. It implies ‘act as your kinsman-redeemer’, and is the practical outworking of the bond that the LORD has already recognized as existing between himself and the Israelites. “*Israel is my firstborn son*” (**Ex 4:22**). The kinsman-redeemer acted on behalf of close relatives who had fallen on bad times: he was required to buy back any inalienable property sold by them (**Lev. 25:25**), to buy back any kinsman who sold himself into slavery to a foreigner (**Lev. 25:47–55**), and to act in place of a deceased relative in receiving restitution (**Num. 5:8**). Boaz acted as kinsman-redeemer with respect to Ruth (**Ruth 4**). Here the LORD is committing himself to act to free the Israelites because of the relationship that the

covenant has created between him and them. It will not be the case, however, that some monetary payment will be made for their release, but a display of divine strength overthrowing their oppressors.

C. I. Scofield: When you track the concept of “*redemption*” through the book of Exodus there are four critical things that are taught: (Scofield Reference Bible)

- Redemption is wholly from God.
- Redemption is through a person.
- Redemption is by blood.
- Redemption is by power.

b. (:7) Promise to Adopt Israel as His Own People

1) #4 – Family Ownership

*“Then **I will** take you for My people,”*

Rod Mattoon: In Christ, we belong to God as His peculiar people (**1 Pe 2:8 KJV+**). We are accepted in the Beloved (**Eph 1:6 KJV+**), even though we are unworthy. The Lord says and wants you to know that you belong to Him when you have put your faith in Christ. If you are saved, you are part of the bride of Christ. As Paul says *“For if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”* (**Ro 14:8+**)

2) #5 – Personal Knowledge of God

*“and **I will** be your God;
and you shall know that I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out from under the burdens of the
Egyptians.”*

c. (:8) Promise of the Land

1) #6 – Peaceful Rest

*“And **I will** bring you to the land which I swore
to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,”*

John Mackay: The land had always played a key role in the benefits God would bestow on the covenant people (**3:8, 17; 6:4**). Possession of the promised land would be the ultimate vindication of their trust in him, and enjoyment of his presence in the land would be the supreme reward for their loyalty.

2) #7 – Lasting Inheritance

*“and **I will** give it to you for a possession;
I am the LORD.”*

3. (:9) Communication of the Mission Rejected Again by the Israelites

a. Repetition of the Divine Assurances Supporting the Mission

“So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel,”

b. Rejection due to Discouragement and Hardship

*“but they did not listen to Moses
on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.”*

Walter Kaiser: on **despondency** - The NIV weakly translates “*their discouragement*” (v.9); but it was the inward pressure caused by deep anguish that prevented proper breathing—like children sobbing and gasping for their breath. This made such an impact on Moses that he had another attack of self-distrust and despondency. How could he persuade Pharaoh when he failed so miserably to impress his own countrymen who presumably would have had a naturally deep interest in what he had to say, given their circumstances (**Ex 6:11–12**).

J Ligon Duncan: These people were both physically beaten down, and frankly, they had lost heart. There is a lesson, I suspect even in the connection between the weariness of the body and the weariness of the soul. But whatever the case, their oppression was heavy, and it is described in amazing terms here. We are told that they did not listen on account of their shortness of breath. Maybe you know what that is like. Maybe you know what it is like to be so under his hand that you are out of breath, you can’t breathe. Man, you just can’t catch your breath. And when you can’t catch your breath, it is pretty hard to listen to sermon. Have you ever been grasping for breath and you don’t think the next one is coming? It is hard to concentrate on anything else.

Rod Mattoon: Their despair was rooted in their unbelief and bitterness. Moses was looked upon as a deceiver. God was considered as a deserter. Their bondage was more devastating than before. Discouragement is an effective tool of Satan that is used to rob us of God's blessings and His best for us. Such was the case here with God's people....Their discouragement led them to reject the very message which would give them relief.

Douglas Stuart: Optimism is often dashed by suffering, especially ongoing suffering. Faith is often diminished by hardship because emotions play a powerful part in most human thinking, and thinking can become increasingly pessimistic when any sort of pain continues unabated. Accordingly, it is understandable that the Israelites would not listen (v. 9) to Moses’ latest message of divine reassurance, even though they had previously welcomed Yahweh’s words (4:29–31). Pharaoh’s strategy (5:7–9) had proved remarkably successful. The people were overcome by impatience for relief and by hard slavery (NIV “*discouragement and cruel bondage*”).

II. (:10-13) RENEWED CHARGE TO FULFIL HIS MISSION AS DELIVERER

A. (:10-11) Clear Charge Repeated to Moses

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land.’”

B. (:12) Recalcitrant Reluctance Expressed -- Two Excuses

“But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying,”

1. Poor Track Record

“Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me;”

2. Poor Speech Ability

“how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?”

Rod Mattoon: His claim, "I am a failure because I have uncircumcised lips which means "I am unable to talk eloquently." Moses has a great fear of failure. It is one of the pains of life that we just cannot bear. No one wants to fail. Unfortunately, we are bad judges of identifying failure.

Our service to the Lord Jesus Christ must not be conditioned on how folks respond to our message. We are to do what God says whether people believe God's message or do not believe it. God sent Moses back to Pharaoh again and again even though Pharaoh never believed. Our calling is simply not dependent on whether people believe or not. It is dependent upon God's commands. What Moses considered a defeat, was actually in essence, a delay. His so called "failure" was not one at all.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: In spite of the grandeur of what “*I am the Lord*” meant for Israel in the current situation, the people did not listen “*for shortness of breath*”. . . This made such an impact on Moses that he had another attack of self-distrust and despondency. How could he persuade Pharaoh when he failed so miserably to impress his own countrymen who presumably would have had a naturally deep interest in what he had to say, given their circumstances (vv. 11-12a).

C. (:13) Forceful Charge Issued to Moses and Aaron

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.”

III. (:14-25) GENEALOGY ESTABLISHING MOSES AS AUTHENTIC LEADER OF THE JEWS

A. (:14-19) Sons of Reuben, Simeon and Levi

1. (:14) Sons of Reuben

“These are the heads of their fathers' households. The sons of Reuben, Israel's first-born: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben.”

Gispén: The author inserts the genealogy of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi because Moses and Aaron were from the tribe of Levi; and for that reason Reuben and Simeon are mentioned only briefly.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Everything in the list suggests that God's choosing Moses had

nothing to do with natural advantage or ability.

John Mackay: At this point the narrative is broken off for what seems to us to be at best peripheral details regarding the descent of Moses and Aaron. We should remember, however, that in the ancient world details of this sort were of far greater significance. Indeed, genealogies are intrinsic to the Israelite feel for the flow of history that arose from their conviction that God was shaping events in this world so that his purposes would be achieved. This is linked to the nature of the covenant promises which did not come to individuals in isolation, but to individuals and their offspring after them. In this way family history was a testimony to the outworking of God's saving purpose in history. What happened in each generation was not isolated from what preceded or what followed. Through the history of the line of promise there is the reality of God's continuing graciousness. As the narrative is about to plunge into the crucial conflict with Pharaoh, and so exhibit the tremendous reality of God's covenant commitment on this occasion, Moses takes time to pause and place matters in their historical perspective. As well as providing essential background information, the genealogies, by delaying the flow of the narrative, also serve to heighten tension: how will Pharaoh's intransigence be dealt with?

2. (:15) Sons of Simeon

"And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon."

3. (:16-19) Sons of Levi

"And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years."

Cole: At this point the narrator breaks off, in order to identify and particularize Moses and Aaron more precisely. The Hebrew method of identification was to give a genealogy, in this case the genealogy of the founding fathers, beginning with Reuben, the senior tribe. It is repeated from the beginning up to the mention of Levi, the required tribe. No further tribes are then mentioned.

a. (:17) Sons of Gershon

"The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families."

b. (:18) Sons of Kohath

"And the sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath's life was one hundred and thirty-three years."

c. (:19) Sons of Merari

"And the sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi."

“These are the families of the Levites according to their generations.”

B. (:20-22) Sons of Amram, Izhar and Uzziel

1. (:20) Sons of Amram = Aaron and Moses

“And Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years.”

2. (:21) Sons of Izhar

“And the sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri.”

3. (:22) Sons of Uzziel

“And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri.”

Davis: The Amram mentioned in **verse 20** as the father of Moses was probably not the same person as the Amram who was the son of Kohath (**v. 18**), but must have been a later descendant.

C. (:23-25) Sons of Aaron, Korah and Eleazar

1. (:23) Sons of Aaron

“And Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.”

2. (:24) Sons of Korah

“And the sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites.”

3. (:25) Son of Eleazar = Phinehas

“And Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas.”

“These are the heads of the fathers' households of the Levites according to their families.”

David Thompson: By God giving this list, it again demonstrates to Moses and Aaron that they have a big job to do that is lineage linked clear back to Israel in the book of Genesis. This assignment is not just about having some weekend family reunion, this is a national covenantal program of God designed to take Israel to a specific land.

IV. (:26-27) HIGHLIGHTING LEADERSHIP ROLE OF MOSES AND AARON

Chiastic structure of **6:26-27**

A1. (:26a)

“It was the same Aaron and Moses”

B1. (:26b)

“to whom the LORD said, ‘Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts.’”

B2. (:27a)

“They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the sons of Israel from Egypt;”

A2. (:27b)

“it was the same Moses and Aaron.”

John Hannah: In verses **20** and **26** Aaron is mentioned before Moses because Aaron was older (cf. **7:7**). But in **6:27** Moses’ name precedes Aaron’s because the major responsibility of the Exodus was his.

John Mackay: The point is made that they carried out the divine commission given to them

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did the Lord go through this process of renewing His charge to Moses?
- 2) What impacted you the most in the seven “*I Wills*” recorded here?
- 3) How would a covenant, amillennial theologian address the importance of the land aspect of the covenant commitment?
- 4) What role do the genealogies play in the narrative?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Roe: God sends Moses to tell Pharaoh let Israelites go

"Now," He says, "I'm going to start acting like Yahweh, the God of the covenant. You are going to have that land I promised you. I told Abraham you wouldn't have it for 400 years, but you are going to get it now. Secondly, I have heard the cry of My people the Israelites, and I am going to respond to that cry. The reason I am moving now, Moses, is because I promised your forefathers, and I am going to keep my covenant with them. Not only that, but I am going to respond to the cry of My people because I have a covenant with them also. That is why we are going to move, Moses." Now based on this information God wants Moses to make an intelligent choice and move out. . .

At the beginning of all this God tells them, "I am Yahweh, and I keep my promises." At the end He reminds them, "I am Yahweh, and I keep my promises." In the middle He promises three wonderful things. Three steps. Very fascinating because they coincide with the three steps He has given us today.

Verse 6: First of all He says, *"I will bring you out from the burdens of Egypt, deliver you from the bondage of Egypt and also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."* The first step, God says, "I am going to redeem you. I am going to deliver you from bondage. I am going to do it." He uses the word redeem. It is the word for "kinsman redeemer." Kinsman redeemer was provided for in the Law of Moses, see **Leviticus 25**. It is especially significant in the Book of Ruth. When God gave the Jews the land of THE Promise, it was forever. He gave it to the various tribes forever, and He gave it to the various families in the tribes forever. It was to be that family's possession forever. If the family got into financial difficulty and had to sell their land, they were never allowed to sell it forever. The buyer was never allowed to keep it forever. God made provisions for the family to get it back. He said, "If you have to sell your land, then a near kinsman, a kinsman closely related to you, who is willing and able to redeem it, is to redeem it. They are to buy back for you that eternal possession which I have given to you." That is the word He uses here. God says, "I am going to be your kinsman redeemer. I am going to be a near relative to you. You are going to be born unto Me, and I am willing, even up to the point of crucifying My Son. What is more, I am God Almighty, *El Shaddai*, and I am able to redeem it, and I am going to do it." The first step in our deliverance is to be delivered from the bondage of self and sin by God's Almighty power.

The second step. "Not only that," He says in **verse 7**, *"I will take you for My people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians."* He is saying to us, "I'm not going to just save you from sin, self and bondage and then leave you a neuter. I am going to identify with you. You are going to be My people, and I am going to be your God. We are going to be identified. I am going to live in you. When I look at you, I'll see Me. I am going to give you the indwelling life of God so you can live a life of positive righteousness, not just neutrality or absence of evil, but a life of power, a life of God, a life which will manifest Me in you. You are going to be My people, and I am going to be your God, and everybody is going to know it." And that is what God does in our second step. He not only pays the penalty for our sin, but He gives us a life of power to live above old Adam. We don't have to keep on sinning. He indwells us with His life, and we become identified with Christ, His death, His burial and His resurrection, so that as He walked in newness of life on the other side of the grave, so we are to walk in newness of life down here. We are to have victory in our Christian life over the old habits and the old slavery.

However, God wants something far more than that. He wants a third step. Note **verse 8**, *"And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD [Yahweh]. I am going to do it."* The land of Canaan was fought for by the Jews. God said, "It is yours. I give it to

you. Go in and take it. I want you to butcher all the inhabitants. I want you to remove them totally out of the land. It is going to be a fight, but you are going to win. I have already taken it. I have already given it to you." One of Egypt's military leaders had already rammed his way through Canaan smashing their city states and breaking up their coalition of armies. He left a bunch of petty kingdoms each with its own little police force and no alliances so another nation, 40 years later, could come in and pick them off one by one without having to face some gigantic force. God says, "I broke it all up for you." In Joshua He says, "I sent the hornet before you." The hornet was the scarab very prevalent in Egypt. God said, "I've done it; It's yours; So take it. You'll have to fight for it, but I have already taken the land, and I have already given it to you. The Title Deed is yours. You are fighting a battle already won. Your activity is to be done out of My adequacy, out of My rest."

Relating step 3 to Christians, we need to know that the land of Canaan is not heaven in Scripture. It is the rest of God on earth. He wants us to enter the land of rest, the land of Canaan, a life of rest in the midst of activity. He doesn't want a constant struggle down here trying to keep ourselves clean, righteous, holy and pure or even safe, if you don't believe in eternal security. He wants us to live a life of vital activity but living it out of the rest and adequacy of the indwelling God. This particular portion of Exodus helps interpret a beautiful passage in **Hebrews 4** where God points out to the professing Christians of that day, to whom the book of Hebrews was written, not to turn back to Judaism to escape persecution. They were going back into Judaism even after "*God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*"

So the author of the book of Hebrews is warning the Hebrews of 60 A.D. who professed Christ, "Don't exercise the same kind of unbelief that your forefathers did 1500 years ago." God gave them the land of rest, but they were never allowed to enter it because of their unbelief. He quotes **Psalms 95** by David which says that very thing. "*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness; When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.*" This Psalm is 450 years later than the time of Moses. This rest has been available ever since creation when God Himself created for six days and then on the seventh day He rested. It is that Sabbath Rest of God that He wants us to enjoy as a continual and permanent possession. That's what He points out here in **Hebrews 4, verse 8**. "*For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.*" If Joshua had given them rest after taking them into the Promised Land, 1400 years before Christ, then why 900 years before Christ would David have written about it as still being available and still not appropriated? It wasn't true in David's day either. David was not a man of peace. He was a man of war and therefore not allowed to build the temple.

It wasn't true in Solomon's day either. Solomon destroyed the nation of Israel in one generation. His reign was a disaster. The nation broke apart in his son Rehoboam's

reign. It would have broken apart in Solomon's day but God wouldn't let it happen for David's sake. And so in **Hebrews 4, verse 9**, *"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one, [the believer] who has entered His [God's] rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."* It says in Genesis God rested from His work. After creating for six days, how did God rest from his work? What did He say about His work? Yeah! He looked it all over and said it was "*very good*," and then He rested. Well, what did He do? Did He lie back in the sack and fan himself while the world wound down? No! All He needed to do was simply carry out His program for what He had already done. In other words, God sat back, looked at His creativity, His creative work, and said, "I am satisfied with what I have done. It is perfect." After that He simply maintained His perfection. In Hebrews it talks about Christ maintaining the universe by the word of His power, not creating again but maintaining the universe by the word of His power.

So, how does a believer enter into the rest of God? Exactly the same way God entered into it. What do you think of the work of God? Is it adequate? Is it sufficient? Is it complete? Is it finished? Or does it need your desperate striving, manipulating, scheming, planning efforts in order to accomplish God's purpose in your life? That is your choice. You can live a life of activity totally in the will of God while at rest in the midst of the most troubling circumstances because you are trusting in the finished work of Christ and the adequacy of the indwelling God to do whatever is out there in front of you that needs doing. You are not trying to do it. You are obeying God and stepping out by faith letting the life of God through you do the job. You will discover in the midst of your activity, in the midst of the circumstances that are driving you nuts, that you have rest, just a quiet sense of settledness and assurance. That is what God wants. He wants you to have a life of rest. Not a life of ease, a life of rest, living a very active life out of someone else's power and life. The Jews, because of their unbelief, never got that even though He intended, in His three steps, for them to have it. But look at **verse 9**.

Exodus 6:9: *So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage*

They rejected the living God who had done those three wonderful signs which caused them temporarily to believe and worship. Then as soon as Pharaoh put the thumb screws to them, they looked at Pharaoh and chose Pharaoh. "Our God is not big enough to handle that god." So they spurned the promise of God because of their own despondency and the cruel treatment of the circumstances, and they never entered the rest of God. That is the tragedy of His people.

Where is Moses' self-worth about now? It is right back down at the bottom, isn't it? See God told him, "Hey, when you go back to the land, the Israelites are going to heed you." He didn't tell him when. "Old Pharaoh will oppose you, but the Israelites will heed you." And they did heed him temporarily, and when they did, you can almost hear Moses thinking. "Hey, I'm not really so bad. This thing may work yet. I've still got a little of the old charisma." God can't use Moses with this attitude, so He totally wipes him out. Now Moses is lower than a snake's belly, but the unbelief of the Israelites and

the unbelief of Moses is not going to stop the program of God. It may prevent Moses and the Israelites from enjoying the program of God, but it will not stop that program.

Same is true of us. God is going to accomplish in our lives what He planned to do whether we like it or not. We may go through our whole Christian life fighting God, or doing our own very best for God, and have a miserable Christian life, up and down and up and down with no rest. The thing we overlook is that when it is all through we'll be right where God wanted us all the time, but our enjoyment will have been zilch, like going to the opera all the time.

Youngblood: During the patriarchal period the characteristic name of God was “*God Almighty*” (**6:3**; see, for example, **Gen. 17:1**), the usual English translation of the Hebrew *El Shaddai*, which probably literally means “God, the Mountain One.” That phrase could refer to the mountains as God’s symbolic home (see **Ps. 121:1**), but it more likely stresses His invincible power and might. God as *El Shaddai* controls nature and history as He acts on behalf of His people from the most ancient times. . .

But during the Mosaic period the characteristic name of God was to “*the LORD*,” the meaning of which was first revealed to Moses himself (**Exod. 3:13-15**). . . The patriarchs (and doubtless others before them) had a more or less casual knowledge of the name *Yahweh*, but not until the time of Moses would the descendants of the patriarchs come to know that name in all of its rich meaning and application. **Exodus 6:2-8** makes clear that the name *Yahweh* emphasizes the activity of God as the One who would redeem His people, and that fact could only be fully understood by the Israelites who were about to experience the Exodus.

David Thompson: This almost seems strange, but right in the middle of this discussion between God and Moses, there is a **genealogical list** of Hebrew families that Moses is responsible to bring out of Egypt. The seeming point of the list is to put the pressure on Moses to carry out his task. There are certain observations we want to make about this list:

Observation #1 - The list starts with Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn son, which traces the Hebrew lineage of Aaron and Moses clear back to Israel/Jacob who began the nation. **6:14**

Observation #2 - The list ends with Aaron’s grandson (Phinehas) which connects the ancient lineage to the priestly lineage. The main emphasis is on Levi, not Jacob. Only two generations of Jacob are given and five generations of Levi. **6:25**

Observation #3 - The list introduces us to many of the Israelites who will be delivered, who later will turn out to be losers - (i.e. Korah, **6:21, 24/Numbers 16:1-49**; Nadab and Abihu, **6:23/Numbers 3:2-3**).

Observation #4 - It honors Aaron’s family and sets the stage for their priestly responsibilities (**6:23, 25**). Most verses are about descendants of Levi, not Jacob.

Observation #5 - It shows that Moses was from a priestly tribe and family which would give him the right to not only function as a prophet, but as a priest. **6:18, 20**

Observation #6 - It shows the importance of several Hebrew women who were purebloods necessary to form the proper priestly line and the importance of women who were not from a pureblood line. Rare list that contains women.

Observation #7 - Most of the names of this genealogy never show up again in Scripture. So God had sovereignly preserved the right lineage prior to Him establishing His priesthood. Known unto God are all his works from beginning to end. In **verse 14**, we are introduced to the phrase “*these are the heads of their fathers*” which is a typical way a genealogy list begins.

Douglas Stuart: The genealogical list itself has at least seven particular purposes:

- (1) It begins with Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn son, and thus traces the lineage of Aaron and Moses back to Israel the man, linking them with the very beginnings of their people, as a proper Israelite genealogy was expected to do.
- (2) It ends with Aaron’s grandson (Phinehas, **v. 25**) and thus brings the genealogy into the time of the book of Judges (**Judg 20:28**), providing a way for successive generations to link these leaders with their own place in time.
- (3) It honors Aaron and the true priesthood, one of Moses’ special concerns in Exodus.
- (4) It shows the reader where Korah, the leader of the wilderness rebellion (**Num 16:1–49**) founded his claim to credentials of leadership.
- (5) It reminds the reader that Moses was from a priestly family and tribe, thus qualified and called to perform priestly—not merely prophetic—duties from time to time (including his directing the building of the tabernacle, his right to enter it, and his offering the ordination sacrifice in **Lev 8:28–29**).
- (6) It reminds the reader that the Israelites were not ethically pure, by specifically mentioning the Canaanite woman in **v. 15**.
- (7) By reason of calling special attention to several women in the priestly family lineage (**vv. 20, 23, 25**), it reminds the reader of the importance attached to proper, godly marriage for priests, a theme also reflected later, in the laws.

TEXT: Exodus 8:1 – 10:29

TITLE: *SERIES OF PLAGUES – DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN POWER AND CONTROL*

BIG IDEA:

THE PLAGUES DEMONSTRATE GOD'S SOVEREIGN POWER IN MAKING MAN ACCOUNTABLE TO HIM FOR OBEDIENCE TO HIS DEMANDS

INTRODUCTION:

Man likes to imagine that he is in control of his own life. He can do what he pleases without any outside accountability or repercussions. The more powerful the man, the stronger this sense of independence. This account of the series of plagues that led to God delivering his people from the oppressive rule of Pharaoh destroys that mindset. In fact that is one of the main reasons why God goes through this tedious series of judgments instead of jumping ahead to the final and decisive Passover event. As the sovereign ruler of the universe, the all-powerful God controls all things and rules over the life of every man. He demands obedience to His commands. He wants all mankind to acknowledge His rule. He will enforce ultimate accountability. Stubbornness and rebellion will only exist for a season. In the contest for ultimate power and control, God wins every time.

Motyer: The plagues run from the passing discomfort of water turned to blood to the revoltingly disruptive invasion of frogs, to the potentially disease-bearing lice and flies, the commercially damaging animal sickness, the personally debilitating boils, the environmentally disastrous hail and locusts, the terrifying darkness, and end at last with the heart-stopping sadness of the death of the sons. It is a terrifying tale of the woes which still mark and mar earthly life and which, then as now, prompt an intuitive, often rightly indignant and sometimes understandably hostile 'Why?' rising up from earth to heaven.

This questioning is exacerbated by the fact that from the start the Lord knew that it would have to come to the contest of the firstborn (4:22–23) and, therefore, that the earlier acts would prove ineffective.

Why, then, did he not 'cut to the chase'? Why the prolonged agonies of nine ineffectual acts?

The immediate and basic answer is that in the eyes of the Lord disobedience is as greatly abhorred as obedience is prized. . . The plagues reveal his love of obedience and his revulsion from disobedience.

David Thompson: GOD HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART AND PERFORMED THESE SIGN/MIRACLE/PLAGUES SO THAT ISRAEL WOULD COMMUNICATE TO THEIR FUTURE GENERATIONS HOW GOD MADE A MOCKERY OF THE

EGYPTIAN WORLD, AND SHOWED THE ENTIRE WORLD THAT HE IS THE SOVEREIGN LORD.

Tim Chester: What is clear is that God planned ten plagues so he could display his power and glory. That's why he hardened Pharaoh's heart. The workings of this are mysterious. But its purposes is clear: (7:5, 17; 8:10; 9:14, 16; 10:1-2). The plagues are an act of revelation. God sends them so that people might know that he is the Lord, that there is no one else like him, and that his name might be revealed in all the earth. . .

The nine plagues systematically undermine Egypt's pluralist claims. They are a lecture against **religious pluralism** – the belief that all religions are valid – and **personal autonomy** – the belief that I have the right to live how I like it. It is a curriculum with ten unforgettable lessons. And the message is clear: there is only one God.

I. (7:14-25) PLAGUE #1 – TURNING WATER INTO WINE

[last message]

II. (8:1-15) PLAGUE #2 -- FROGS

A. (:1-4) Warning

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and say to him Thus says the Lord, Let My people go, that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. The Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.’”

Ryken: God had a serious theological purpose for sending what seems to be such a silly plague. Once again he was demonstrating his power over the gods of Egypt. **James Boice** wrote:

“If we are to understand the full significance of this plague, we must recognize that a goddess of Egypt was involved in the judgment—the goddess Hekt [also Heqet], who was always pictured with the head and often the head and body of a frog. Since Hekt was embodied in the frog, the frog was sacred in Egypt. It could not be killed, and consequently there was nothing the Egyptians could do about this horrible and ironic proliferation of the goddess. They were forced to loathe the symbols of their depraved worship. But they could not kill them. And when the frogs died, their decaying bodies must have turned the towns and countryside into a stinking horror.”

Writing in a similar vein, **Charles Spurgeon** pointed out how appropriate it was for God to plague the Egyptians in this way:

“There was a suitableness in God's choosing the frogs to humble Egypt's kings, because frogs were worshipped by that nation as emblems of the Deity. Images

of a certain frog-headed goddess were placed in the catacombs, and frogs themselves were preserved with sacred honors. These be thy gods, O Egypt! Thou shalt have enough of them! Pharaoh himself shall pay a new reverence to these reptiles. As the true God is everywhere present around us, in our bed-chambers and in our streets, so shall Pharaoh find every place filled with what he chooses to call divine. Is it not a just way of dealing with him?"

Heqet's other responsibility was to assist women in childbirth. Since she was the spirit who breathed life into the body, women turned to her for help when they were in the pains of labor. This suggests that there may be a connection between the second plague and Pharaoh's sin against the Hebrew midwives. Remember that the book of Exodus began with attempted infanticide. In his effort to exterminate the Israelites, Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill Israel's baby boys (**Exod. 1:15, 16**). When his evil plan failed, he ordered the infants to be thrown into the Nile (**Exod. 1:22**). Given that background, it seems significant that God's first two plagues struck blows against the gods of Egypt's river and the goddess of Egypt's midwives. It was a matter of strict justice: God was punishing the Egyptians for their sins. The very river that Pharaoh used as an instrument of genocide was turned to blood, and the first goddess to be humiliated was the one who governed labor and delivery. There was a connection between Pharaoh's crime and God's punishment.

David Thompson: Now the specific target here is Pharaoh's house. His house was the best. It was the most secure. It was luxurious compared to other people's homes. But with all of his wealth and all of his security and guards, he would not be able to stop the frogs from coming right into his house.

B. (:5) Instructions

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'"

C. (:6) Implementation and Devastation

"So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt."

D. (:7) Imitation by the Magicians

"And the magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt."

E. (:8) Initial Yielding Response of Pharaoh

"Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, 'Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD.'"

F. (:9-14) Intercession by Moses and Aaron for Relief from the Plague

“And Moses said to Pharaoh, ‘The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, that they may be left only in the Nile?’ Then he said, ‘Tomorrow.’ So he said, ‘May it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. And the frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile.’ Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul.”

Douglas Stuart: Giving the Egyptian king this power of timing is from a human point of view apologetically brilliant on God’s part: if the king could say when the frogs would go away, he would personally know that the timing was not due to the simple consequences of natural processes or a fiat of the gods of the Egyptians but the sovereignty of the God of Israel. Theologically, therefore, this plague was the point by which Pharaoh should have been able to admit that there was a true, powerful God behind the demands voiced by Moses. His refusal to believe even then is a paradigm for all people who, though confronted with the reasonableness of biblical truth, nevertheless refuse to believe by reason of factors other than the believability of the evidence.

John Mackay: ‘Cry out’ indicates the intensity of Moses’ approach to the Lord. The word is usually used in situations where relief is sought from injustice or suffering (5:8). What is remarkable here is the response given. Literally it is, *“And the Lord did according to the word of Moses.”* This is a measure of the closeness of the relationship between the Lord and his representative. It is not a matter of Moses doing according to the word of the Lord. Rather Moses is permitted to determine the pace of events, and the Lord acts on the basis of his request.

F. (:15) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”

Ryken: The only thing that really mattered to Pharaoh was his own personal comfort. When he *“saw that there was relief,”* he once again hardened his heart against God. More literally, the Hebrew says, *“when Pharaoh saw that there was room.”* He just wanted a little space, and as soon as he had enough space to get his life back on his own terms, he had no use for God. It was out sight, out of mind, because once the frogs were out of Pharaoh’s sight, God was off his mind.

Motyer: Exodus tells us three things about Pharaoh’s heart: that **the Lord hardened it**; that **Pharaoh hardened his heart (8:15[11])**; and that **his heart became hard (7:13)**. In other words, it is possible to tell two stories about Pharaoh’s heart, just as about the

hail. One is the story of Pharaoh's moral choices, whereby his heart became increasingly 'set in its ways', committed more and more irretrievably to a course of genocide regarding Israel. The other is a mere statement that from the perspective of the Lord as moral ruler of his world, the point of no return had been reached and the hardness of Pharaoh's heart must now be judgmentally imposed on him as the justly due consequence of what his own choices had made him. All three components of our moral universe are brought together in **9:34–10:1**: [Pharaoh] made his heart unresponsive—he himself and his servant [*√kābēd*] (**9:34**); Pharaoh's heart was strongly resistant' [*√hāzaq*]' (**9:35**); and I, for my part, will make his heart unresponsive along with his servants' hearts [*√kābēd*] (**10:1**).¹⁵ With these words we are forcefully reminded that choices are the privilege and price of being human. Our privilege is that of being responsible beings, recognizing moral values, called to make responsible choices, and given the opportunity and obligation to live in the light of the foreseeable consequences of our actions. The price we pay is that every choice, for good or ill, goes to fashioning our characters, and whether in the long or short term—or both—makes us answerable to the Judge of all the earth.

Thompson: We get a glimpse here as to what a hardened heart actually does. It sees clear direct evidence of God and His power, Word and will and then refuses to accept it or submit to it. A hardened heart actually knows the Word of God and work of God, but refuses to yield to it.

III. (8:16-19) PLAGUE #3 -- GNATS

A. (:16) Instructions

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.’”

B. (:17) Implementation and Devastation

“And they did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt.”

C. (:18-19a) Imitation Attempted

1. (:18) Failed Attempt

“And the magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast.”

2. (:19a) Finger of God Testimony

“Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’”

Motyer: The cause was the Lord's hand, the hand regularly being symbolic of personal intervention and action, or the Lord's finger (**8:19**[15]), the finger suggesting a more detailed involvement (e.g. **Isa. 2:8**). It is the Lord who puts a protective covering over his people (**8:23**), who banishes the flies (**8:31**[27]), acts at appointed times (**9:5**), brings in the locusts (**10:4**), guides the wind (**10:13**) and changes its direction (**10:19**).

It is he who delivers blow after blow upon the disobedient. Regularly, the Old Testament indicates the presence of the Lord by the motif of disruption or violence in the elements and forces within the created order. For this reason one of its most frequent titles of God is '*Lord of hosts*', pointing to the fact that he contains, within himself, and therefore has at his disposal, every potentiality and power. Yahweh is Lord indeed.

Douglas Stuart: What happened, then, was that the magicians confessed publicly that this plague (and by implication the others so far) was not a trick but a miracle. The expression "*this is the finger of God*," in light of its usage in **Exod 31:18** and **Deut 9:10**, would seem to mean something like "a supernatural act of God" rather than literally referring to God's hand or figuratively conveying a sense such as "something easy enough for him to do with just a finger." The magicians were not confessing to their own conversion to true faith; they were simply saying that the plague was divine in origin, not human.

D. (:19b) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

"But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."

IV. (8:20-32) PLAGUE #4 -- FLIES

A. (:20-23) Warning

"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, Thus says the LORD, Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 21 For if you will not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of insects on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of insects, and also the ground on which they dwell. 22 But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of insects will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. 23 And I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall occur.'"

John Oswalt: In this second series of plagues we also see Aaron beginning to fade from the picture as the active agent of Yahweh's word. **Sarna** (1991:37) suggests this is because the magicians were no longer a factor. Aaron was still with Moses and assisted him in gathering the "soot" (**9:10**), but Moses was the speaker (**8:26, 29**) as well as the actor (**9:10**). It is interesting that in this series, no staff appears. Yahweh simply announced that something was going to happen, and it did. Only in the case of the "boils" did the Hebrew spokesman carry out any activity, but that did not involve the staff.

Douglas Stuart: Especially significant in this fourth plague account, and indeed an inherent part of the threat, is the stress on the fact that God would not do to his own people what he would do to the Egyptians, their oppressors. To one extent or another,

all the plagues anticipated and progressively led up to the final, ultimate judgment of God in the form of the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn. In that climactic event, much emphasis is placed on the distinction made between the Egyptians and the Israelites, a distinction that follows from the willingness of God's people to act in faith by marking their homes with the sign of the blood of the lamb. Here God's distinction between his own and those who do not belong to him is shown by his control of nature: although flies and other swarming insects cannot naturally discriminate by nationality or political boundaries in deciding on whom they will land and whose skin they will bite, nationality/political boundary was exactly the basis for the plaguing or nonplaguing by the swarming insects. Here, then, is brought overtly to the reader's attention the fact that the plagues, far from being natural phenomena naturally produced, were nature turned on its head: nature ordered by its Creator to act in abnormal ways that were ominously frightening for the Egyptians, wonderfully reassuring for the Israelites, and clearly evidential (in this plague, even to Pharaoh) of a divine mighty act in service of a divine demand.

Constable: God demonstrated His sovereignty over space as well as nature and time by keeping the flies out of Goshen and off the Israelites (**Exodus 8:22**). The exact location of Goshen is still unknown, but its general location seems to have been in the eastern half of the delta region of Egypt (cf. **Genesis 46:28-29; Genesis 46:33-34; Genesis 47:1-6; Genesis 47:11**). [Note: **Durham**, p114.] Some of the commentators assumed that the first three plagues did not afflict the Israelites either, though the text does not say so explicitly (cf. **Exodus 7:19; Exodus 8:2; Exodus 8:16-17**). God distinguished between the two groups of people primarily to emphasize to Pharaoh that Israel's God was the author of the plagues and that He was sovereign over the whole land of Egypt (**Exodus 8:23**).

Ryken: If we ask why God made this distinction, the answer is that this is one of the eternal mysteries of his sovereign plan. Later, when Moses tried to explain to the Israelites why God delivered them from Egypt, he said, "*The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love*" (**Deut. 7:7-9a; cf. 10:14, 15**). In order to demonstrate his mercy and covenant love, God chose a people for himself. Out of all the nations he set them apart—a people who had nothing to commend them and thus no claim upon his grace. He chose them because he chose them, and he loved them simply in order to love them. Theologians call this "the doctrine of election." It means that God's grace is God's choice. The people of God are not saved through any merit of their own, but by the sovereign purpose of God's electing will. On the basis of his own choice, God makes an absolute distinction between his people and everyone else.

B. (:24) Implementation and Devastation

"Then the LORD did so. And there came great swarms of insects into the house

of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was laid waste because of the swarms of insects in all the land of Egypt.”

C. (:25-27) Initial Yielding Response of Pharaoh

“And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.’ But Moses said, ‘It is not right to do so, for we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us? We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us.”

Ryken: Pharaoh was a shrewd negotiator, and this was one of his cleverest ploys. It seemed like a reasonable compromise: He would permit the Israelites to offer their sacrifices, provided that they stayed in Egypt. They would not be allowed to go out into the wilderness (as God had demanded), but at least they would be able to make atonement for their sins.

Alan Cole: Moses refuses on the grounds that to sacrifice in Egypt would be like killing a pig in a Muslim mosque, or slaughtering a cow in a Hindu temple. Racial rioting would break out at once.

Douglas Stuart: Another important feature of this fourth plague account is Pharaoh’s partial capitulation to Moses’ demands: in v. 25 Pharaoh expressed willingness to let the Israelites have a special religious holiday as long as they held it within the land of Egypt; and in v. 28 he went so far as to authorize a brief departure from the land into the wilderness—on which he subsequently reneged (v. 32). These concessions, however brief and partial, represent the first cracks in the stone of the official Egyptian government resistance, demonstrating that the plagues were beginning to affect the king’s resolve. Moses’ account does not differentiate between the two most likely causes for Pharaoh’s wavering, the growing intensity of the plagues and their overall cumulative effect. Presumably, both causes worked to influence Pharaoh’s decision toward compromise. As plagues kept coming, as their severity kept increasing, and as it became ever more obvious that they were not mere tricks but real, divinely instigated acts of judgment against Egypt, the king began searching for ways to end them without ending Egyptian domination over Israel. This plague account thus represents a way station on the road from imperious disdain for anything the God of Israel was asking for to the eventual complete capitulation that will follow the tenth and final plague, the death of the Egyptian firstborn. . .

Without Compromise:

Of course, the real issue was that staying in Egypt would violate God’s command, which is why Moses went on to say, *“We must take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, as he commands us” (Exod. 8:27)*. On occasion it is appropriate to use a practical argument to persuade someone to do what is right, but the ultimate standard for right and wrong is the will of God. The reason Moses refused to compromise was because he had made a commitment to do exactly what God

commanded. The prophet knew that one of the differences between God's people and Pharaoh's people was that God's people did what God said. Therefore, if God told them to make sacrifices out in the wilderness, then out into the wilderness they would go.

The example of Moses shows that when it comes to obeying God's commands, there can be no compromise. This is true at the beginning of the Christian life, when a sinner first comes to Christ. Just as God brought Israel out of the house of bondage, so he brings the church out of the prison-house of sin—not halfway out but all the way! Some people are interested in getting religious without ever becoming Christians. They come to church on Sunday, but they are not willing to leave their sins behind the rest of the week. To put it in terms of **Exodus 8**, they are willing to make a few sacrifices, as long as they don't actually have to leave Egypt! But becoming a Christian means leaving sin behind to follow Christ. **Spurgeon** explained it like this:

“God's demand is not that his people should have some little liberty, some little rest in their sin, no, but that they should go right out of Egypt.... Christ did not come into the world merely to make our sin more tolerable, but to deliver us right away from it. He did not come to make hell less hot, or sin less damnable, or our lusts less mighty; but to put all these things far away from his people, and work out a full and complete deliverance.... Christ does not come to make people less sinful, but to make them leave off sin altogether—not to make them less miserable, but to put their miseries right away, and give them joy and peace in believing in him. The deliverance must be complete, or else there shall be no deliverance at all.”

Even after coming to Christ, Christians continue to struggle with the temptation to stay in Egypt. Every day we are confronted with opportunities to compromise our faith. Often there is a way to offer God partial obedience without disturbing the rest of our commitments. We are willing to call ourselves Christians as long as we do not have to take a moral stand in the workplace or give up part of our financial prosperity or speak with our neighbors about spiritual things or allow ourselves to be inconvenienced by the needs of others. Secretly we wish that we could offer sacrifices to God while remaining within the friendly confines of Egypt, but Moses teaches us not to settle for a partial compromise that falls short of full obedience. Everyone who claims to follow Jesus Christ must follow him without compromise. To quote again from **Spurgeon**,

“If Moses had thought that going a little way into the wilderness would have saved Israel, he would have let them go a little way into the wilderness, and there would have been an end of it. But Moses knew that nothing would do for God's Israel but to go clean away as far as ever they could, and put a deep Red Sea between them and Egypt. He knew that they were never to turn back again, come what might, and so Moses pushed for a going forth to a distance; as I would in God's name push for full committal to Christ with everybody who is tempted to a compromise.

D. (:28-31) Intercession by Moses for Relief from the Plague

“And Pharaoh said, ‘I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication

for me.’ Then Moses said, ‘Behold, I am going out from you, and I shall make supplication to the LORD that the swarms of insects may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.’ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people; not one remained.”

E. (:32) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.”

V. (9:1-7) PLAGUE #5 – EGYPTIAN LIVESTOCK

A. (:1-5) Warning / Instructions / Timetable

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, behold, the hand of the LORD will come with a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.’ And the LORD set a definite time, saying, ‘Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.’”

Douglas Stuart: Domesticated animals were treasured as enormously valuable assets in Bible times (as in any time prior to the industrial revolution, or any place even today where farming predominates). Moreover, they were seen as closely interrelated to the welfare of humans, a fact reflected even in the Bible’s creation accounts. The pantheistic Egyptians revered all animals but birds and livestock more than fish and amphibians. For them to have lost livestock would constitute a serious blow indeed. For them to have lost livestock while the Israelites retained all theirs represented a nationwide humiliation.

B. (:6) Implementation and Devastation

“So the LORD did this thing on the morrow, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died.”

John Oswalt: The statement that “*all the livestock of the Egyptians died*” (9:6) has provoked a good deal of discussion among commentators, especially since there were still animals alive to suffer the boils of the next plague (9:10), and the hail of the succeeding one (9:19). Basically, the suggestions that have been offered fall into three categories:

- (1) “All” is not intended literally, but hyperbolically, to make the point that the deaths were not simply here and there (**Cassuto** 1967:111).
- (2) “All” applies only to those animals which were not undercover (9:3; lit.,

“your animal property in the field”).

(3) “All” is intended literally; this is a folktale, and the author or redactor was not concerned with consistency (Houtman 1993:2.70).

I believe the first is the most likely. .

C. (:7) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“And Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.”

John Oswalt: Despite the accumulated evidence of the first five plagues, Pharaoh still refused to believe there could be some limit to his authority. And it is important to remember that this is what his “hard-heartedness” is all about. It is not a matter of being insensitive to the plight of his slaves. It is a resolute refusal to admit that he was not in sole charge of his own life. This is why the evidence continued to be insufficient. It was a matter of the will, and a matter that would involve an entire change of Pharaoh’s perspective on the meaning of his life.

Thompson: Now again we learn something about how to recognize a heart God has hardened. A hardened heart does not think or react in rational, logical ways. A hardened heart is a heart that thinks and acts in ways that are illogical. The logical thing to do when you have just seen this plague would be to say - we need to let these people go. But a hardened heart does not think rationally or logically.

Ryken: In keeping with our practical method for studying Exodus, there are at least **five lessons** to learn from the plague on livestock. Most of these lessons were introduced in the earlier plagues; yet they are important enough to bear repeating.

First, we learn *the meaning of salvation*. In its most basic sense, salvation means deliverance. The fifth plague—in which God again commanded Pharaoh to let his people go—is a further reminder that God had come to set his people free. What was true for Israel under Moses is true for the believer in Jesus Christ. Jonathan Edwards taught that “Christ and his redemption are the subject of the whole Word of God.”² This is especially true of the book of Exodus, in which salvation is displayed as deliverance from bondage. The exodus from Egypt prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the true exodus. By his sufferings and death on the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin and released sinners from its captivity. Now everyone who trusts in Christ and in his cross is delivered immediately from the guilt of sin, and ultimately from sin itself, for believers will be made perfect in Heaven. The gospel is the greater exodus, in which God says to Satan, “Let my people go! Release them from their slavery to sin. Allow them to come all the way out and find freedom in Christ.”

Second, we learn *the purpose of life*, which is to glorify God. When God said, “*Let my people go*,” he went on to say, “*so that they may worship me*.” The Israelites were saved for God’s glory. Since the Hebrew word for “worship” is also the word for “service,” God was claiming his right to both their work and their worship. This is our purpose as well—to give God the glory. Jesus Christ has set us free from sin and death so that we can serve the living God. He is both our Savior and our Lord. We turn to him

not only to deliver us from our slavery to sin, but also for everything that follows—a whole life of fruitful work and worship for God. Like the Israelites, we are saved for God’s glory.

Third, we learn *the folly of idolatry*. Pharaoh was such a proud man that in order to humble him, God had to humiliate his gods one by one. With the plague on livestock, God humiliated Apis, Hathor, and the rest of Egypt’s sacred cows. Apis was a masculine god: He represented sexual prowess. Hathor was a feminine god: She represented glamor. Although we do not bow down before golden cows, we sometimes worship the very same gods and goddesses. We are tempted to gratify sexual desire outside the marriage covenant or to glamorize our outward appearance for the sake of our inward esteem. But this is utter folly. The idols of sex and beauty cannot save. They do not free us; they only bind us. The attractions they offer are temporary, and in the end those who lust after them will gain nothing but lonely, empty disappointment.

Fourth, we learn *the superiority of faith*. In the plague on livestock God differentiated between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This is the distinction he always makes—the distinction between the people of his choice, who receive all the blessings of his salvation, and the rest of fallen humanity, who remain under his curse. Just as protection from pestilence was only for those who trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so now the free gift of eternal life is only for those who trust in his Son, Jesus Christ. Believers have the unique privilege of knowing that God will keep them safe in his arms for all eternity. On the day of judgment, when rebellious sinners will face the fury of God’s wrath, repentant sinners will be kept safe from the fires of Hell.

The superiority of faith is proved by a fifth lesson, which is *the consequence of rebellion*. It is true that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. This is one of the mysteries of sovereign predestination: God wills the choice of some for salvation, while he hardens others in their sins. But it is also true that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The account of the plague on livestock is explicit about this. God said to Pharaoh, “*If you refuse to let them go ...*” (**Exod. 9:2**, emphasis added). Pharaoh was given every opportunity to meet God’s demand. Yet he deliberately refused to let God’s people go, choosing instead to keep Israel in bondage, thus rebelling against God’s revealed will. Such defiance always brings divine judgment. As God’s patience wore thin (to put it in human terms), he struck Pharaoh with the wrath of his hand.

VI. (9:8-12) PLAGUE #6 – BOILS

A. (:8-9) Instructions

“Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt.’”

Ryken: To understand how completely God humiliated Pharaoh’s magicians, it helps to know that by throwing ashes into the air, Moses was doing something that Egyptian priests often did. It was customary for Pharaoh’s priests to take sacrificial ashes and cast them into the air as a sign of blessing. But God took that ritual act and turned it into

a curse. This was a matter of justice, because the soot may well have come from a furnace for making bricks, like the bricks the Israelites baked for Pharaoh. If so, God was exacting strict justice, repaying the Egyptians for their sins. **John Currid** writes, “The type of furnace spoken of here was probably a kiln for burning bricks. The furnace, then, was a symbol of the oppression of the Hebrews, the sweat and tears they were shedding to make bricks for the Egyptians. Thus the very soot made by the enslaved people was now to inflict punishment on their oppressors.” God was making Israel’s curse a blessing and was turning Egypt’s blessing into a curse.

B. (:10) Implementation and Devastation

“So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast.”

C. (:11) Imitation Not Possible

“And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians.”

D. (:12) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“And the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.”

Ryken: Pharaoh’s hard heart confronts us with the mystery of **divine sovereignty** and **human responsibility**. Both of the following statements are true: Pharaoh hardened his heart; God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. But how can these two statements be reconciled? What is the relationship between them?

Some scholars argue that God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart until after Pharaoh hardened it himself. When God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, he was simply confirming the decision that Pharaoh had already made. Thus the moral of the story is that “God hardens those who harden themselves.” This is often true. As a matter of justice, God sometimes hardens the hearts of those who have hardened themselves against him.

However, in this case that explanation is less than fully adequate because even before Pharaoh hardened his heart, God promised to harden it for him. The Lord had told Moses, “*I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go*” (**Exod. 4:21b**). While it is true that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, the deeper truth is that even this was part of God’s sovereign plan. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was not God’s response to Pharaoh, but his purpose for Pharaoh. God did this to demonstrate his justice. He also did it to demonstrate his power, as we will discover when we get to the seventh plague (**Exod. 9:16**). And he did it to display his mercy. As God said to Moses, “*I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites*” (**Exod. 7:3, 4**). God hardened Pharaoh’s heart in order to multiply the plagues, which magnified the power of both his justice and his mercy.

VII. (9:13-35) PLAGUE #7 – HAIL

A. (:13-21) Warning

1. (:13-14a) Warning Initiated

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people,’”

John Oswalt: The third series of three plagues follows the literary pattern of the first and second series (see above on **7:8–8:19**), but the discourse surrounding the first and second plagues in this series, the hail and the locusts, is much longer than in any of the other plagues. This probably reflects two factors: the increasing seriousness of the plagues, and Pharaoh’s increasingly complicated negotiations as he attempted to avoid the inevitable—surrender to the authority of Yahweh.

2. (:14b-17) Reason for the First Nine Plagues

“so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go.”

Tim Chester: It’s worth asking the question: Why the first nine plagues? The tenth plague was the one that made the difference and say God’s people finally allowed to go. Why not skip straight to the tenth? . . . The answer comes in **9:15-16** . . . God could have liberated his people with just one plague. But the ten plagues are a demonstration of his power. In this sense, they are missional. Their aim is that God’ name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

John Mackay: The reason for these divine blows is then stated: *so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth*. The purpose of the plagues was to bring Pharaoh (and with him the Egyptians as a whole) to recognize the Lord as the Supreme Creator, whose unlimited domain took in Egypt and everywhere else as well. This spells out in greater detail the reason given earlier for the plagues, “*so that the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord*” (**7:5**), by emphasizing the universal implications ‘*in all the earth*’ (**9:16, 29**) of the Lord’s sovereignty. By displaying his control over phenomena the Egyptians attributed to other gods, the Lord clearly indicated his realm was without limits of any sort. Especially it included Pharaoh, who thought of himself as the ultimate power in Egypt. By his defiance Pharaoh showed that he had adopted the same rebellious mindset as was evident in the Fall. Satan had proposed to Adam and Eve that they act so as to show they were autonomous, free from God’s control. “*You will be like God*” (**Gen. 3:5**). Pharaoh had to be brought to see the enormity of his mistake in making the same claim for himself.

Douglas Stuart: Most of the concepts in **9:14–16** are quite new, however, and it is likely that **9:14–16** plays a special role in the entire narrative of the plague account in two ways. First, it appears as an apologia for the plagues as a group. In other words, this is the point in the narrative about the plagues at which God had certainly gotten Pharaoh's attention and that of the Egyptians in general. Now he issued his explanation for all the plagues that he had sent and would send against them. At the same time, it represents a point of intensification so that the reader is aware that the prior plagues, troublesome as they were, were essentially preliminary and that now a series of developments that would really do damage to Egypt—including actually taking of human life—was underway in the form of the final four plagues. If Pharaoh retained any doubts about the purpose of the plagues to this point, he had no reason to be uncertain any longer. The explanation given him in these verses is clear and simple: Pharaoh must learn that Yahweh alone is supreme, the implication being that the gods in whom Pharaoh had trusted and whom he represented were essentially nothing (**9:14**); the earlier plagues, hard as they were on the Egyptians, were actually examples of restraint since God already could have sent at any time a fully destructive plague to eliminate the Egyptian population entirely (**9:15**). Pharaoh himself had come to power and was acting as he was under God's control, the result being not only that he, the king of the world's greatest superpower at that time, would see true divine power but that all who learned of the exodus story in all generations thereafter would give the true God credit for that power (**9:16**).

Alan Cole: The secondary goal is again given, as being that pharaoh should realize the uniqueness of YHWH. Now, however, a new theological point is stated. Pharaoh has been treated mercifully so far: his life has been prolonged so that YHWH's name and power should be exalted (**verse 16; cf. Rom. 9:17**). This brings, as corollary, the further thought that all the plagues came in mercy, rather than judgment; for each one was an opportunity for pharaoh to repent. Instead, he hardened his heart, making his final judgment both certain and inexcusable.

3. (:18-19) Warning Finished

“Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been seen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die.”

4. (:20-21) Response by the Servants of Pharaoh

a. (:20) Heeding the Warning

“The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses;”

b. (:21) Disregarding the Warning

“but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the field.”

John Mackay: The action of some of his officials shows how unreasonable Pharaoh's continuing resistance was. But Pharaoh was not alone in his stubborn refusal to heed the Lord's message. While this warning of impending doom and news of how to escape from it brought a positive response from some officials, there were others who did not listen. But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field (9:21). 'Ignored' is 'did not set their hearts on' (7:23; Deut. 32:46; Job 1:8). They did not give it the inner response that they ought to have. Like their leader whom they were copying, they had hardened their hearts, and because of their stubbornness the information they had been given did not lead to appropriate action.

B. (:22) Instructions

"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.'"

C. (:23-26) Implementation and Devastation

1. (:23-25) Poured Out on the Land of Egypt

"And Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field."

2. (:26) Withheld from the Land of Goshen

"Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail."

D. (:27-28) Initial Yielding Response of Pharaoh

"Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.'"

John Oswalt: For the first time, Pharaoh was moved to admit that the Lord had been right in what he had done (9:27) and that he, Pharaoh, had been wrong, and he called his action a sin. This is a stunning turnaround. It is an admission that Yahweh has the right to determine what is right behavior and what is wrong behavior, and that it is a sin to oppose him. Yet, Pharaoh's admission did not change his behavior. When the immediate pain was removed, both he and "his officials" reverted immediately (9:34–35). What does this say about the nature of repentance? It says that mere cognitive awareness of sin accomplishes very little. Sin is not primarily a matter of knowledge; rather, it is a matter of the will. We think of King Saul's eventual admission of sin to

Samuel in **1 Samuel 15:24–25** and compare it to the repentance attributed to King David in **Psalms 51**, and we see the difference. In Saul's and Pharaoh's cases, the admission was primarily motivated by a desire to escape punishment. In David's case, the admission was motivated by a passionate desire for reconciliation and restoration. Only the latter results in long-term behavioral change, and only such change is what is meant by the fear of the Lord (**9:30**).

E. (:29-33) Intercession by Moses for Relief of the Plague

“And Moses said to him, ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.’ (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late.) So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth.”

Douglas Stuart: **Exodus 9:30** contains the first usage in the Bible of the term “*fear the Lord*” (*yārē’ ’et-yahweh*), a wording that designates an enormously important theological concept. The fear of the Lord is enjoined throughout Scripture, demanding that God's people stand always in awe of him, appreciate his supremacy and greatness, fear the consequences of disobeying his will, and not treat lightly any aspect of their covenant relationship with him, lest the consequences be severe or even fatal. Attempts on the part of some in modern times to define fearing the Lord as merely respecting him distort the biblical evidence. Pharaoh and the Egyptians may have moved much closer to capitulation to the Israelites' God in the bargaining process, and may have been much more disposed to granting some sort of serious concessions, but they (the verb at the end of **v. 30** is plural) had not actually come to the point of religious faith in Yahweh.

Ryken: Taken together, these three purpose statements (**9:14, 16, 29**) explain why God plagued Pharaoh's Egypt. He did it to show his unique omnipotence, his universal praise, and his unlimited authority over all the earth. God accomplished the same purposes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By raising Jesus on the third day, God displayed his mighty power over sin and death. Now the good news of salvation in Christ is proclaimed around the world, so that God's name is praised in all the earth.

John Mackay: The next two verses are in effect a footnote giving background details about Egyptian agriculture to explain the impact of the storms. The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bloom. The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later (**9:31–2**). Flax was grown to make linen for clothing. Barley was used to make an inferior type of bread, and also in brewing and feeding animals. Both flax and barley would be sown in November and harvested in March. The fact that the barley was nearly ripe and the flax was blossoming points to January as the time at which the hailstorms occurred. These two

crops were consequently destroyed (literally, ‘struck’). Spelt was a type of coarse wheat which could thrive in poorer conditions and was used in bread making. Wheat was the main export crop from Egypt right through to Roman times. They both ripen a month or two later in early April. Because they were not so far advanced at the time of the January storms, they were largely undamaged.

F. (:34-35) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.”

Ryken: This is one of the differences between remorse and true repentance. Remorse is the sadness that comes from suffering God’s judgment. Remorse is useful when it helps persuade sinners to repent. However, many people are filled with remorse for what is happening to them without ever truly repenting of their sins. The best way to tell is to see what happens after they confess their sins. True repentance is a complete change of heart that produces a total change of life. By that standard, Pharaoh’s confession was false. It was only temporary. Once the storm stopped and the plague was over, his heart was as hard as ever. It turned out that he did not want a change of heart after all; he just wanted God to leave him alone. But a confession that does not lead to new obedience is a false confession that falls short of true repentance.

John Mackay: The economy of Egypt was predominantly agricultural. Even though it had sustained a major blow with the loss of these important crops, Pharaoh was far more concerned with maintaining his own position than with the welfare of his people. The regime and its ideology had to be upheld no matter what it cost the citizens of the land in deprivation and disaster. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why there is no Egyptian record of the Exodus. Disasters did not happen there. With an efficiency matched by many modern totalitarian regimes only the official version of events was allowed into the records.

VIII. (10:1-20) PLAGUE #8 – LOCUSTS

A. (:1-2) Purpose of the Lord

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and how I performed My signs among them; that you may know that I am the LORD.’”

Motyer: The Lord is master over every force, political or religious, earthly or supernatural that might either oppose or challenge him. His purposes are not hindered by Pharaoh’s opposition, Moses’ inadequacies or Israel’s unworthiness. So we see even as huge and overmastering a thing as the locust plague is totally in his hand: he decrees

its onset, sets its bounds and determines its duration. The narrative is presented with [chiastic] style:

- A1 The Lord, Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart (1–2)
 - B1 Moses comes to Pharaoh: the plague threatened (3–6)
 - C1 Pharaoh negotiates, arrogantly, autocratically (7–11)
 - D The locusts, exactly as threatened (12–15)
 - C2 Pharaoh pleads (16–17)
 - B2 Moses leaves Pharaoh: prays against the plague (18–19)
- A2 The Lord, Pharaoh, Pharaoh's heart (20)

B. (:3-7) Warning

1. (:3) Futility of Resisting the Warning – Pride and Stubbornness

“And Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me.’”

2. (:4-6) Details of the Warning

“For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. And they shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one shall be able to see the land. They shall also eat the rest of what has escaped-- what is left to you from the hail-- and they shall eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. Then your houses shall be filled, and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians, something which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day. And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.”

Wiersbe: If vocabulary is any indication of significance, then the locust was a significant creature in the Old Testament world, for there are at least eleven different Hebrew words in Scripture referring to it. . . The Jews hated the creatures because of their ability to strip the vegetation from an area with incredible speed. The Israelites used the locust swarm to describe anything that quickly invaded and devastate their land (**Jud. 6:5; 7:12; Isa. 33:4; Jer. 46:23; 51:14, 27**), and the Prophet Joel compared the locusts to an invading army (**Joel 1-2**; see **Amos 7:1-3**).

3. (:7) Reinforcement of the Warning by Pharaoh's Servants – Give it Up

“And Pharaoh's servants said to him, ‘How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?’”

C. (:8-11) Initial Yielding Response of Pharaoh Does Not Extend Far Enough

“So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, ‘Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?’ And Moses said, ‘We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.’”

Then he said to them, 'Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. Not so! Go now, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire.' So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."

John Mackay: What Pharaoh says may be understood as heavily sarcastic: "The Lord will indeed be with you if I do what you suggest. It will need divine intervention for someone to get the upper hand in negotiating with me." This is followed by what seems to be a threat, "Be careful, trouble is in store for you" (NIV margin). Though his land is devastated, Pharaoh still had at his disposal his military might which could make life very difficult indeed for the Israelites. The rendering of the NIV text, *Clearly you are bent on evil*, recalls the earlier tactic of false allegations against the people (5:8–9). In this case, however, what Pharaoh has in mind is that if the Israelites all leave, they will never come back, and that he is not prepared to allow.

Douglas Stuart: Israelite worship was to be a full family affair. The men played a key role in the actual offering of the sacrifice by the priests, but the women and children also participated, both by observation and by eating the meal after it was prepared through the sacrifice process. Accordingly, Moses could only regard Pharaoh's offer as too little too late, and he reacted accordingly.

Ryken: Another Round of Negotiations -- Pharaoh's other false assumption was that he could bargain with God. He assumed that he and God were on more or less equal terms, and therefore he could negotiate from a position of strength. But there would be no compromise. God does not discuss terms; he dictates them. What he demanded in this case was nothing less than Pharaoh's unconditional surrender. It was all or nothing, which is why God was not impressed with Pharaoh's offer to let the men of Israel go.

D. (:12) Instructions

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt, and eat every plant of the land, even all that the hail has left.'"

E. (:13-15) Implementation and Devastation

"So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; they were very numerous. There had never been so many locusts, nor would there be so many again. For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt."

Thompson: This is very important. God always fulfills prophecy literally. It is not symbolic, it is not metaphorical, it is literal. If God promises He is going to send a judgment, it will literally come just as He said. Future fulfillment of things is literal.

F. (:16-17) Further Yielding Response from Pharaoh

“Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, ‘I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me.’”

G. (:18-19) Intercession by Moses for Relief of the Plague

“And he went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. So the LORD shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt.”

H. (:20) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.”

IX. (10:21-27) PLAGUE #9 – DARKNESS

A. (:21) Instructions

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt.’”

John Mackay: Every morning the Egyptians worshipped the sun-god Kephri-Re-Atum in celebration of his renewed victory over the forces of darkness and chaos. But in the ninth plague an ominous darkness suddenly grips Egypt with paralysing intensity. Though the darkness does not itself directly bring death, the source of life and light for Egypt has been overpowered, and the threat that hangs over the land is made very evident. There is a note of finality in this plague. Darkness had been characteristic of the world before it was ordered by the divine decree (**Gen. 1:2**); so now the order that had prevailed in Egypt is being reversed by the divine decree of judgment back into primal chaos.

B. (:22-23) Implementation and Devastation

1. Poured Out on the Land of Egypt

“So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days,”

Thompson: This was a three day plague. You could not do business. You could not travel. You could just sit in the dark and hope to survive or hope the plague would end. To actually go three days without any light would be a serious sensory deprivation and

would lead to serious consequences. One of the things we have learned is that lack of light causes depression. During dark winter months, some doctors prescribe that depressed patients go to tanning salons because it can actually be used as a preventative against depression.

2. Withheld from the Land of Goshen

“but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings.”

C. (:24) Initial Yielding Response of Pharaoh

“Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, ‘Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you.’”

D. (:25-25) Intensified Demands by Moses

“But Moses said, ‘You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice them to the LORD our God. Therefore, our livestock, too, will go with us; not a hoof will be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD.’”

E. (:27) Stubborn Response of Pharaoh

“But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was not willing to let them go.”

Ryken: The only way to escape the coming darkness is to trust in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. When Jesus was born, it was true that “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (**Matt. 4:16**, quoting **Isa. 9:2**). In order to bring us into his light, Jesus had to enter our darkness. The Bible explains that when Jesus was crucified, “darkness came over the whole land” (**Luke 23:44**). This darkness was spiritually significant. It showed that Jesus had taken upon himself the guilt of all our sin, and therefore that he was under the dark curse God reserved for his enemies. Then Jesus went into the grave, where he remained in the deepest darkness for three days. But on the third day he was raised again, in a body dazzling with the light of God’s glory. Now everyone who comes to Christ comes into the light of his salvation. “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (**2 Cor. 4:6**; cf. **1 John 2:8**).

(10:28-29) EPILOGUE – FINAL CONFRONTATION

A. (:28) Pharaoh Threatens Moses

“Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!’”

John Mackay: For both Pharaoh and Moses matters have reached a complete impasse. The sequence of interviews and plagues has come to an end. The ordered world of Egypt with its abundant resources is in disarray and complete confusion, but still Pharaoh will not acknowledge the power of God and his right to rule in all human affairs.

John Oswalt: The issue had been made perfectly clear. Only Yahweh is God. There is no other in heaven or on earth. He alone holds life and death in his hand, and the only rational response to these facts is complete surrender and total trust. There was no rationalizing left to do. Pharaoh knew the truth; that could not be denied. The only issue was how he would act on the truth. Either he would surrender or not. Of course he would not, and that meant that he was in denial of the truth. The only recourse to that was rage, and that is what he succumbed to, driving Moses, the truth-teller, out of his presence, and determining never to confront the truth again. Of course that is never a real possibility, as Pharaoh's future was to make abundantly clear.

B. (:29) Moses Threatens Pharaoh

“And Moses said, ‘You are right; I shall never see your face again!’”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did the Lord use so many plagues and give Pharaoh so many chances when it was obvious his heart was hardened?
- 2) How can you use the ministry of Moses and Aaron to increase your boldness in taking a stand for the Lord in any situation?
- 3) Where do you struggle in trusting the Lord for His sovereign control over the details of your life and circumstances?
- 4) What lessons can we learn here about idolatry and about the severity of the judgment of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Motyer: When the fourth plague came, Goshen was set apart as a protected enclave (8:22–23), and once more the visitation ended in answer to prayer (8:30). Goshen was again exempted from the fifth plague, but this time Pharaoh sent investigators to convince himself of its immunity (9:7) and, of course, to load more evidence (and more guilt) on his own head. The sixth plague left even the magicians incapacitated (9:11). There is neat and telling use of two separate Hebrew verbs—the magicians could not *stand before Moses*, but the Lord could command Moses to confront [*take your stand before*] Pharaoh (9:11, 13). We see, therefore, that Pharaoh was faced both with a rising severity of divine action and a mounting body of evidence of the absolute power and incomparable nature of the Lord. His refusal on the occasion of the sixth plague (actually his seventh refusal in all) was decisive. Plagues now followed in a crescendo

of destruction and horror until at last the hardened heart was broken. Where, might we ask, did Paul learn the lesson that ‘*God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows*’ (**Gal. 6:7**)? Had he been reading Exodus?

Ryken: Consider the following parallels that **John Currid** has noticed between the Exodus plagues and the six days of creation:

When God created the world, he separated light from the darkness (Day 1; **Gen. 1:1–5**); but in the ninth plague light was blotted out (**Exod. 10:21–29**).

When God created the world, he gathered the water into one place (Day 2; **Gen. 1:6–8**); but in the first plague the water was turned to blood (**Exod. 7:15–25**).

When God created the world, he made vegetation grow on the land (Day 3; **Gen. 1:9–13**); but in the seventh and eighth plagues he destroyed Egypt’s crops (**Exod. 9:18–10:20**).

When God created the world, he put two great lights in the heavens (Day 4; **Gen. 1:14–19**); but with the ninth plague, the sun ceased to shine (**Exod. 10:21–29**).

When God created the world, he made the waters swarm with creatures of the sea (Day 5; **Gen. 1:20–23**); but the first and second plagues ended with the death of fish and frogs (**Exod. 7:15–8:15**).

When God created the world, he made land animals and people (Day 6; **Gen. 1:24–31**); but the third through sixth plagues afflicted both man and beast with pestilence and disease (**Exod. 8:16–9:17**), until God finally killed every first-born son in Egypt (**Exod. 11–12**).

The plagues brought such chaos that Currid concludes that God was “de-creating” Egypt.

Wiersbe: What does it mean to harden your heart? It means to see clear evidence of the hand of God at work and still refuse to accept His Word and submit to His will. It means to resist Him by showing ingratitude and disobedience and not having any fear of the Lord or of His judgments. Hardhearted people say with Pharaoh, “*Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?*” (**5:2**) . . . The opposite of a hard heart is a heart that fears God, and that reverential fear motivates us to obey the Lord’s commands. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (**Prov. 9:10**), but the hardhearted person is ignorant of God and His truth (**Eph. 4:18**).

Walter Kaiser Jr.: When these same nine plagues are considered sequentially, however, they may likewise be viewed in another arrangement of three sets of triplets in an ascending order of severity: the first three introduced irritations, the second set destructions, and the final set death. Again, each in the first set were brought on with the use of Aaron’s staff (**7:19; 8:5, 16**); the first two plagues in the second set (nos. 4, 5) were the work of the Lord directly while the last one (no. 6) was the result of Moses’ word (**8:24; 9:3, 6 and 10**); and the last set of three (nos. 7, 8, 9) were all brought on by Moses with his outstretched hand and staff (**9:22–23; 10:12–13, 21–22**).

Constable: Pharaoh offered Moses three compromises, which the world still offers Christians.

- First, he suggested that the Israelites stay in Egypt (**Exodus 8:25**). He said, in effect, You can be who you are, but live as a part of your larger culture; do not be distinctive.
- Second, he permitted them to leave Egypt but not to go far from it (**Exodus 8:28**). He allowed them to separate from their culture but not drastically.
- Third, he gave permission for the males to leave, but their children had to remain in Egypt (**Exodus 10:8-11**). Even godly parents are sometimes inclined to desire prosperity and worldly position for their children.

Steven Cole: Exalt the Lord God

At times we may challenge some human authority, but when it comes to the Almighty Lord God, who spoke the universe into existence by His word alone, who will judge the thoughts and intentions of all the living and dead, it's not wise to oppose Him! There is no one anywhere like the Lord God (**Exod. 8:10; 9:14**). The whole earth belongs to Him (**Exod. 9:29**). He is able to command everything from the smallest bacteria to powerful hailstorms to blacking out the sun. The plagues that God brought on Egypt because of Pharaoh's hard heart teach us:

Because the sovereign Lord God will be exalted over all, it is foolish to harden your heart against Him.

1. The Lord God will be exalted over all because He is sovereign over all.

The plagues reveal God's sovereignty in three broad areas:

A. The Lord God is sovereign over His creation.

The Egyptians, like all idolaters, worshiped the creation but not the Creator. They had gods that supposedly had influence over different aspects of life. So in the plagues, God challenged Egypt's gods, showing His absolute superiority and sovereignty over them.

B. The Lord God is sovereign over people.

God hardens whom He desires and shows mercy to whom He desires (**Rom. 9:18**). But we need to understand that He wasn't hardening the heart of someone who otherwise would have believed. Even **John Calvin**, noted for his emphasis on God's sovereign election, states that God didn't harden a heart otherwise given to obedience; rather, He hardened a reprobate who was willfully devoted to his own destruction (Calvin's Commentaries [Baker], p. 210). This is a mystery that no one can understand completely, but we must hold two truths in tension: God is sovereign over all; and, people are responsible for their sin. If you let go of either truth, you're out of balance.

C. The Lord God will be exalted both in judging the wicked and in saving His people.

These ten plagues on Egypt are a merciful warning to everyone who hears about them that God is holy and He will bring terrifying, final judgment on all who harden their hearts in rebellion against Him. In **Revelation 6:12-14**, John describes the cataclysmic destruction when the sixth seal was broken: a great earthquake, the sun became black, the moon became like blood, the stars fell to the earth, the sky was split apart, and mountains and islands were moved out of their places. Then everyone from great kings to lowly slaves cried out to the mountains and to the rocks (**Rev. 6:16-17**), “*Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*”

The Book of Revelation reveals that many of these same plagues that were inflicted on Egypt will be poured out on the earth during the great tribulation: Water will be turned to blood (**Rev. 8:8; 16:4-5**). There will be frogs (**Rev. 16:13**); locusts (**Rev. 9:3**); boils (**Rev. 16:2**); hail (**Rev. 8:7**); and darkness (**Rev. 9:2; 16:10**). God’s righteousness will be glorified by His judging the wicked and His grace by saving His people. Thus,

2. It is foolish to harden your heart against the sovereign, exalted Lord God.

There are four truths to consider here:

- A. The sovereign, exalted Lord God will answer the prayers of those who sincerely call upon Him.
- B. The sovereign, exalted Lord God knows your heart, so beware of superficial repentance.
- C. If you fight against the sovereign, exalted Lord God, you will lose.
- D. The goal of submitting to the sovereign, exalted Lord God is that you and your children might worship and serve Him.

TEXT: Exodus 7:8-25

TITLE: *SHOW TIME – THE BEGINNING OF THE PLAGUES*

BIG IDEA:

THE SOVEREIGN GOD PROVIDES SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO CONFIRM HIS MISSION OF REDEMPTION AND TO JUSTIFY HIS JUDGMENT AGAINST STUBBORN REBELLION

INTRODUCTION:

Stubborn rebellion is not a wise course of action to pursue against the demands of a sovereign God. God's redemptive mission lies at the heart of His kingdom agenda. In the case of Pharaoh, God provided miraculous signs through Moses and Aaron to confirm the authenticity of His demands to let His people go. But Pharaoh turned away in stubborn unbelief and was met with the harsh reality of God's judgment. The entire nation of Egypt suffered greatly as a result.

Likewise God has provided ample testimony and supporting evidence regarding the redemptive mission of Christ on the cross. He commands people everywhere to repent and turn to Christ in faith in order to be delivered out of the bondage of sin and the penalty of eternal judgment. There is only one way that God has provided to deal with our sin problem and restore a right relationship with Him. Stubborn rebellion in the face of such an invitation only invites God's severe judgment.

I (7:8-13) MAIN SIGN OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN POWER TO CONFIRM THE MISSION OF MOSES AND AARON IN DELIVERING THE JEWS FROM EGYPT

A. (:8-10) Miraculous Sign of the Staff Becoming a Serpent

1. (:8-9) Sign Commanded

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, Work a miracle, then you shall say to Aaron, Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”

Believer's Study Bible: Here begins the first great concentrated period of biblical miracles. The second period comes in the days of Elijah and Elisha, and the third covers the life of Jesus and His apostles. A miracle is a signature of God, His sign of confirmation that the proclaimed message is truly His revelation.

John Mackay: **Second Session with Pharaoh** -- Moses and Aaron had already set the Lord's demands before Pharaoh (5:1–3). When the Lord instructs them to return to him, it is not just to repeat the message, but also to provide backup for its acceptance in the form of a convincing demonstration of power. The following incident in which Moses' staff becomes a snake is not one of the plagues that come as the Lord's

judgment on Egypt, but it did function as a sign. It pointed to the power and control of the Lord, and should have led those who witnessed it into serious consideration of the accompanying message. This sign is similar to that which was earlier performed before the Israelites (4:2–5, 30) with a view to evoking trust on their part. . .

It is significant that the sign challenges Egypt at two levels. It takes on the Egyptian religious system in precisely the area where it thought it had abundant expertise and capability. When the magicians are reduced to silence, they cannot claim that what they had been dealing with was not really their specialty. We must also remember that the serpent crested headband of Pharaoh symbolized his sovereignty and status in Egypt (4:3). Aaron is challenging this when he throws the serpent on the ground before Pharaoh. It was not quite as blatant an assault as taking the coronet off his head, but the symbolism was clear for all to see.

2. (:10) Sign Executed

“So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.”

B. (:11-12) Magical Imitation Exposed as Powerless

1. (:11-12a) Sign Imitated

“Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents.”

Ryken: Notice, however, that the best they could do was to imitate what God did. Pharaoh’s magicians simply repeated Aaron’s sign. This is because Satan can only corrupt, never create. The Bible says that *“the work of Satan [is] displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders”* (2 Thess. 2:9). Satan is always a counterfeiter, never an innovator. He is like the annoying little brother who never comes up with any ideas of his own but always copies his older siblings. This explains why every false religion has ethical principles or sacred rituals that seem vaguely similar to Christianity. Satan is a knockoff artist. Unable to make a religion that is truly unique, he is always borrowing something from God.

2. (:12b) Imitation Exposed as Powerless

“But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.”

Constable: These were not sleight-of-hand artists but wise men who were evidently members of the priestly caste (cf. Ge 41:8). The power of their demonic gods lay in their *“secret arts”* (Ex 7:11). They were able to do miracles in the power of Satan (1 Cor. 10:20; cf. Mt. 24:24; 2 Th 2:9,10; Rev. 13:13–14). The superiority of the Israelites’ God is clear in the superiority of Aaron’s serpent over those of the Egyptian magicians (Ex 7:12). The rod again represented regal authority and implied that Yahweh, not Pharaoh, was sovereign (cf. Ex 4:2–5).

Guzik on **they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same** - Apparently, this wasn't mere magic; the enchantments of the Egyptian magicians were examples of dark, demonic power showing itself in what at least appeared to be miracles. Miracles—or at least apparent miracles—are part of Satan's arsenal. (Read **2 Th 2:9,10**). This means that miracles can prove that something is supernatural, but they cannot prove that something is true.

MacArthur on **secret arts** - By means of their “*witchcraft*,” the wise men, sorcerers, and magicians demonstrated their abilities to perform a similar feat. Whether by optical illusion, sleight of hand, or learned physical manipulation of a snake, all sufficiently skillful enough to totally fool Pharaoh and his servants, or by evil supernaturalism, the evaluation given in the inspired record is simply “*they also ... did the same*.” However, the turning of rods into snakes, and later turning water into blood (**Ex 7:22**) and calling forth frogs (**Ex 8:7**), were not the same as trying to create gnats from inanimate dust (**Ex 8:18–19**). At that point, the magicians had no option but to confess their failure.

C. (:13) Miraculous Sign Rejected by Hard Hearted Pharaoh

“Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”

John Mackay: It may also be the case that the situation brought about by the plagues was needed to get the Israelites willing to leave the land. Egypt was very attractive, and the people subsequently show how much about Egypt was to their liking (**16:3; Num. 11:5**). Already they seem to have acquiesced in the brutality of the regime rather than fight for their rights and freedom. They were so dispirited that they had become unable to stand against the Egyptians, and would not have left Egypt unless this exceptional course of events had occurred to have them forced out of Egypt.

Ryken: What Pharaoh should have done was to get down from his throne and begin to worship the one true God. He had heard God's word and seen God's sign, and the only proper response was to fall down at God's feet. The reason Pharaoh didn't do this was that spiritually he had a cardiac condition: His heart was hard. The verb used to describe this hardening (*hazaq*) appears in the perfect tense, which indicates completed action. In other words, Pharaoh's heart was not simply getting hard; it was hard already. Literally, it was “heavy.” It was slow to grasp the truth. Utterly insensitive to true spiritual influences, it was not warmed by love for God. It was neither sorry for sin nor willing to change. Pharaoh's heart was hard all the way through.

II. (:14-25) PLAGUE #1 – TURNING WATER INTO BLOOD

A. (:14) The Reason for the Judgment – Stubborn Refusal to Submit to God's Sovereignty

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.’”

Youngblood: The ten plagues had several purposes as described in Exodus itself. The

Lord sent the plagues to judge Egypt and her gods (**Exod. 7:4; 10:2; 12:12; 18:11**), and we will note that many of the individual plagues seem to have been directed against a specific Egyptian deity. Needless to say, the plagues were also used by God to compel the pharaoh to free the Israelites (**7:4; 18:10**). Third, they were sent to prove once and for all that God Himself is the only sovereign Lord of nature and history (**7:5; 9:14-15; 10:2; 18:11**). Fourth, the plagues struck the land of Goshen selectively, making a distinction between Egypt and Israel and demonstrating that the Israelites were God's chosen people, who came under His protective care (**8:22-23; 11:7; 12:27**). Finally, the plagues displayed the Lord's almighty power and proclaimed His holy name (**9:16**).

B. (:15-18) The Proclamation of the Judgment to Pharaoh

1. (:15-16) Circumstances of the Proclamation

a. (:15) The Staging of the Proclamation

“Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent.”

Rod Mattoon: One reason why the Pharaoh may have been at the river was to worship it. The Nile River was worshiped as a god. It represented the chief god of Egypt. Hapi or Apis, the bull god, was the god of the Nile. Isis was the goddess of the Nile. Khnum was the ram god and was the guardian of the Nile. The Nile River was considered as the body and blood of Osiris himself. The yearly flooding symbolized the miraculous rebirth of Osiris, god of earth and vegetation according to the Egyptians.

J Ligon Duncan emphasizes the parallel with Pharaoh's daughter finding Moses at the Nile and now Moses encountering Pharaoh on the Nile ("What goes around comes around!") - We don't know exactly why Pharaoh was there. It's a little surprising to find Pharaoh at the banks of the Nile, but perhaps there was some sort of morning ritual connected with the religion that circled around the Nile. The Nile was considered divine, and perhaps Pharaoh was out participating in this ritual. But the fact that Moses meets Pharaoh there is extremely important. Remember that once upon a time the daughter of Pharaoh had met Moses on the banks of the Nile, and her actions would forever change the future of the life of Moses. Now, Moses meets Pharaoh on the banks of the Nile, and his actions will not only forever change the life of Pharaoh, but of Pharaoh's household. The language here deliberately mirrors the language of **Exodus 2:3-9+**, when Pharaoh's daughter meets Moses and discovers him and draws him out of the water on the banks of the Nile.

Ryken: Scholars have long debated the historicity of the plagues in Exodus. Some claim that they never happened at all, that they are merely symbolic literary inventions. Others have tried to find some sort of natural explanation for the plagues. In the case of the first plague, it is sometimes suggested that the river did not actually turn into blood but merely resembled blood. Perhaps heavy rains in southern Egypt washed red soil into the Nile Delta. Perhaps the river was red with sediment from seasonal flooding, and the sediment led to an oxygen imbalance, which would account for the river's stench. Or perhaps the Nile was covered with a bloom of reddish algae or inundated with

microorganisms. Whatever the precise explanation, some of these scholars admit that the plague was nevertheless an act of God. God judged Egypt by overruling his creation, using natural disasters to show his supernatural power.

There are several difficulties with these naturalistic explanations. One is that they have trouble accounting for the fatality of all the fish. Another is that they do not explain why there was blood throughout Egypt, and not simply in the Nile. Still another difficulty is explaining how the sediment or fungus or whatever it was appeared instantaneously when Moses struck the Nile with his staff. Then there is the plain language of Scripture, which clearly states that “*the water was changed into blood*” (v. 20). The word “*changed*” (*haphac*) shows that a real transformation took place, while the word “*blood*” (*dam*) is generally used to refer not just to any thick red fluid but to blood, plain and simple.

The real problem with trying to explain away this miracle, however, is that a merely natural phenomenon would not have accomplished God’s purpose, which was to prove that he was the Lord. If the Nile turned to blood every time there was a downpour somewhere upriver, this sign would have been meaningless. Pharaoh wouldn’t have even bothered to call for his magicians. He would have said, “Big deal, Moses; this happens all the time.” For all these reasons, it is right to believe and teach that the river of blood was a divine miracle, a supernatural demonstration that the Lord is God.

Don Fortner: Pharaoh looked upon the Nile River as the source of Egypt’s life, power and glory, the great benefactor of his land. — The God of Glory was about to make his god and his religion a curse upon him and his land.

b. (:16) The Sovereign Power Behind the Proclamation

“And you will say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now.’”

Douglas Stuart: The speech God here gave Moses to say to Pharaoh clearly describes who Moses represented (Yahweh, “*the God of the Hebrews*,” v. 16), what Yahweh was demanding (“*let my people go*,” v. 16), the reason a plague-punishment was warranted (“*until now you have not listened*,” v. 16), the fact that Yahweh was determined to teach Pharaoh who he, Yahweh, was—meaning his greatness and exclusive power, not merely his name (“*by this you will know that I am the Lord*,” v. 17), the mechanism for bringing about the punishment (“*with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile*,” v. 17), and what the punishment would be (“*it will be changed into blood. The fish ... will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water*,” vv. 17–18). Such precision made sure that Pharaoh could not misunderstand the purpose of the plague and the power of the God who caused it. Pharaoh needed to understand that Moses was merely an instrument of God; his adversary was the King of the universe, not a former Egyptian princeling. He must also understand that his refusal to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt would be “rubbed into his face” by divine design. And, as well, he must understand that the Egyptian people in general would share in the

misery that his cruel stubbornness, with their complicity, would bring upon them in retribution.

Ryken: The way God dealt with Pharaoh shows that his demands are nonnegotiable. Every time Pharaoh encountered God, he was confronted with the same God making the same demand. God never changed his terms or issued a counteroffer. This is because God never changes his terms: *“The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Ps. 33:11)*. What was true for Pharaoh during the exodus is true for sinners in salvation. God’s terms remain unchanged. What God demands today is the same thing he demanded in the time of the apostles. When people asked what they had to do to be saved, the apostles said, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31)*. God still requires sinners to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ. We should not expect him to make us another offer. Jesus Christ is God’s best and only bargain for eternity.

2. (:17-18) Content of the Proclamation

“Thus says the LORD, ‘By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul; and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.’”

Don Fortner: Clear Message -- There was no offer of mercy, no appeal was made to Pharaoh, no indication of grace was given, and no compromise was offered, just a plain command and a stark declaration of what God was about to do.

Dwight Pentecost: What we refer to as the ten ‘*plagues*’ were actually judgments designed to authenticate Moses as God’s messenger and his message as God’s message. Their ultimate purpose was to reveal the greatness of the power and authority of God to the Egyptians (**Ex 7:10–12:36**) in order to bring Pharaoh and the Egyptians into subjection to God.

Bruce Hurt: The first recorded miracle of Jesus was water to wine (probably red wine) (**Jn 2:1-11+**), but here Jehovah's first miracle is water to red blood! God is going to respond to Pharaoh's stubborn (heavy) heart with a command to confront the commander of Egypt. Moses is not the same man he was in **Ex 4:10, 13**! Throughout the 10 plagues, when he confronts Pharaoh (4 he inflicts without warning), he does so obediently and courageously. He has come to truly know Jehovah as the LORD Who is able to perform what He commands Moses to carry out (**Ex 6:1-2+**). While this section marks the first of 10 plagues, note that the word **plague** is used only in **Ex 9:14, Ex 11:1 and Ex 12:13**.

C. (:19-21) The Performance of the Judgment

1. (:19) Instructions Regarding Turning Water Into Blood

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over

their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.”

J Ligon Duncan: The next time there will be a judgment of blood in the water, it will be at the Red Sea, and it will be the armies of Egypt filling the Red Sea with death. So God is showing a picture of things to come as Pharaoh is stubborn, as he will not turn back, so God will bring death to Egypt. The whole point here is that God is sovereign over Pharaoh, God is sovereign over the Nile, God is sovereign over all creation, and God is sovereign over Egypt. So the plagues are both judgments and signs. They are punishments and ways in which God is revealing the fact that He is Lord.

Douglas Stuart: In the implementation of this miracle, Moses by his words directed Aaron, who did the actual motion with the staff in accordance with the general pattern of responsibility predicted in **4:15–17**, which specifically indicated that Moses would teach Aaron “*what to do*” (**4:16**) and that the staff would be the device for performing “*miraculous signs*” (**4:17**). Thus we see here Moses and Aaron working together in accordance with the revealed pattern, as the opening words of **v. 20** also imply.

2. (:20-21) Implementation of the Instructions

“So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood. And the fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt.”

D. (:22-25) The Response to the Judgment

1. (:22a) Response of the Magicians in Egypt

“But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts;”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The question, where they found any unblemished water if the fourfold water system in “*all Egypt*” (**vv. 19, 21**) was affected, is answered in **v. 24** – from subterranean water from freshly dug wells.

2. (:22b-23) Response of Pharaoh

a. (:22b) Hardened Heart of Stubborn Rebellion

*“and Pharaoh's heart was hardened,
and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.”*

b. (:23) Cold Heart of No Concern

*“Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house
with no concern even for this.”*

J Ligon Duncan: Then we see how Pharaoh reacts. It’s absolutely stunning, **verse 23**. Pharaoh returns to his palace, he shows absolutely no concern, and he thinks it was all a

trick. I mean, after all, his magicians had been able to duplicate it. It's all a farce, it's all a trick. His people are without water, they're trying to dig new wells because they can't find clean, pure water to drink. Egypt is in havoc for seven days, and Pharaoh is absolutely unconcerned. This will not be the last time that we see a picture of a heart which is blind to the truth of God.

3. (:24) Response of the Egyptians

"So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile."

4. (:25) Duration of the Plague

"And seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile."

John Hannah: Some say this means seven days intervened between the first plague (of one day) and the second plague. However, since intervals are not stated between any of the other plagues, it seems better to assume that the first judgment lasted seven days.

John Davis: The first plague brought upon Egypt eloquently revealed the power of God and the impotence of Egyptian deities. For the Egyptian who sought water for his cattle and for himself, it would have meant an exercise in deep frustration and despair. For the very religious Egyptian who faithfully sought the guidance and protection of the various deities associated with the Nile it must have raised serious questions about the unqualified powers of such deities. To the Israelites who witnessed this event, it was a reminder of the awesome power of the God who had chosen them and had blessed them. To us who are alive today and witness the idolatry of this present generation this miracle is a reminder of the tremendous power of a God who will not only bring blessing upon those who are faithful to Him, but will, with equal power, bring judgment and humiliation upon those who lift up their hand in rebellion.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are the purpose of these sign miracles?
- 2) Why is it so important to insist that these plagues were divine miracles rather than God overseeing some type of naturalistic events?
- 3) What parallels can you draw between these supernatural signs and what God promises to do in the book of Revelation in the end times?
- 4) Why does God ever harden anybody's heart if He truly desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: The first nine plagues divide into three triads, each triad climaxing with a plague that wasn't announced. The third (gnats), sixth (boils), and ninth (darkness) plagues came without warning; all the others were preceded by an announcement. Pharaoh had no right to complain because God told him what He was going to do....The longer Pharaoh resisted God, the more serious the judgments became. The first three plagues were distressful (water to blood, frogs, gnats); the second three were painful and costly (flies, death of the livestock, boils); and the last four were dangerous and destructive (hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn). The longer sinners resist God's will and refuse to hear His Word, the "louder" He has to speak to them through His judgments.

Rod Mattoon gives us one way to summarize the 10 plagues...These ten plagues are grouped into three cycles of three plagues each, with the tenth being a climatic judgment. A look at these plagues reveals interesting insights, contrasts, and comparisons.

- Plagues 1, 4, and 7 begin each cycle and are introduced by the words, "in the morning." (**Ex 7:15; 8:20; 9:13**)
- In cycle one, the three plagues were loathsome, affecting the comfort of the Egyptians. Israel was afflicted too. Aaron's rod was used in these plagues of bloody water, frog infestation, gnats or a mosquito pestilence.
- In cycle two, the plagues were bothersome, affecting their possessions such as land, cattle, and themselves. No rod or staff was used and only the Egyptians were affected. The plagues consisted of a pestilence of flies, the death of the livestock, and bothersome boils on their bodies.
- In cycle three, the plagues were natural disasters bringing desolation and death to the Egyptians. Moses' staff was used and in the final plague, the firstborn died. God knew how to get the attention of those concerned. He messed with their comfort, their possessions, and their health. The longer sinners resist God's will and refuse to hear His Word, the "louder" He has to speak to them through His judgments.
- In all three cycles, a warning was issued in the first two judgments of each cycle, but no warning was given before the final judgment of each cycle.
- These ten plagues may have occurred over a period of at least nine months. The Nile rises in July and August (Plague 1). The barley ripens in January (Plague 7). The east winds bring locust in March and April (Plague 8). The Passover is in April (Plague 10).

James Montgomery Boice: The ancient Egyptians had about eighty major gods and

goddesses. A lot of minor deities clustered around the others, but those eighty gods and goddesses were themselves clustered around the **three main forces** in Egyptian life: the **Nile**, the **land**, and the **sun**.

The ancient historian Herodotus called Egypt “the gift of the Nile.” If it weren’t for the Nile, Egypt would have been part of the desert that stretches across North Africa to the west and across the Gulf of Suez to the Arabian Desert to the east. In ancient times the Nile overflowed its banks every year, depositing in that river valley the wonderful soil that had been carried down from central Africa and making Egypt one of the most fertile lands of the ancient world. Combined with the rich land and the water, the brilliant sun produced marvelous crops.

The **plagues** were directed **against these three forces and against the gods and goddesses of Egypt** that were grouped around them. The **first two plagues** were directed against the gods and goddesses of the Nile and everything associated with the Nile. **Four plagues** were directed against the gods and goddesses of the land. The **final four plagues** were directed against the sky and everything associated with the sky. Even the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, was against the sky. Pharaoh was considered the earthly incarnation of the sun god Ra, the most powerful force in the sky. His firstborn son would have been the next incarnation.

Bruce Hurt: What are the Purposes of the Plagues?

1. First, they reveal the omnipotence of God and the impotence of Pharaoh who was considered a god by the Egyptians. God was trying to get the king to let His people go from the land.

2. The plagues demonstrate God's protective power in shielding His people and that He cares for us.

Exodus 8:19-Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

3. They were a divine visitation of God's wrath and a punishment of Pharaoh and the Egyptians for the cruel treatment of the Jews.

Exodus 10:16-Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you.

4. The plagues were also a judgment of God upon the demons and fake gods of Egypt.

Exodus 12:12-For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.

Numbers 33:4-For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the Lord had smitten among them: upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments.

5. The judgments were a solemn warning to other nations that God would curse those who curse Israel.

Genesis 12:3-*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Joshua 2:8-9-*And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; [9] And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.*

1 Samuel 4:8-*Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.*

6. The plagues were a series of testings for Israel that were designed to soften their hearts and create a desire to leave Egypt. They had been in Egypt for 400 years, a country steeped in idolatry. God would use the plagues to deliver His people.

Deuteronomy 4:33-35-... *Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? [34] Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? [35] Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him.*

Exodus 15:11-*Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? This was the result of the plagues and their departure.*

7. The judgments were designed to strengthen the faith of Moses. He needed faith for the wilderness journey that was ahead of him.

James 1:3-*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances. When we look at the plagues, we will also note that many of the judgments and events in Egypt will take place again during the Tribulation period, described in the book of Revelation. In spite of all the plagues, none of them softened Pharaoh's heart. He let them go after the death of the firstborn, only to pursue Israel later to his own death. Pharaoh was a proud man.

John Davis: Quotes from **Joseph P. Free** who lists five unique aspects of the plagues which set them apart as miraculous events. These are as follows:

1) Intensification. While frogs, insects, murrain and darkness were known in Egypt, these were intensified far beyond any ordinary occurrence.

2) Prediction. The fact that Moses predicted the moment of the arrival and departure sets them apart from purely natural occurrences (cf. **8:10, 23; 9:5, 18, 29; 10:4**).

3) Discrimination. Certain of the plagues did not occur in the land of Goshen where Israel was living (**8:22**, no flies; **9:4**, no murrain; **9:26**, no hail).

4) Orderliness. There is a gradual severity in the nature of the plagues concluding with the death of the firstborn.

5) Moral Purpose. These were not freaks of nature but were designed to teach moral precepts and lessons.

John Mackay: To ‘*know*’ the Lord means a personal recognition of who he is. At its most basic level it is acknowledgement of the existence of the one true God and understanding of facts about him. This is an experience open to both the Egyptians and the Israelites when they are brought to look beyond the phenomena of the plagues by considering the one at whose command they originated. However, acquiring facts about God, even recognizing that he will certainly punish those who oppose his will, is an insufficient basis for that knowledge of the Lord that must characterize his covenant people. For them, knowing the Lord does not stop at the level of the intellect, with philosophical speculation about him. To ‘*know*’ God requires submission to the covenant King and trusting obedience to him and reliance upon him. The Lord wants his people to ‘*acknowledge him*’, that is know him with loving commitment, without which mere knowledge is sterile and falls short of true faith (**Hos. 2:20; 4:1; 6:6; 13:4**).

One of the outcomes of renewed covenant life is such a knowledge of the Lord. “*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart*” (**Jer. 24:7**; see also **Jer. 31:33–34**). Such knowledge is seen as extending throughout the earth in the day of consummation when the Lord is given his rightful place in all human life. “*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*” (**Hab. 2:14**).

This understanding of the knowledge of God is taken up in the New Testament where knowledge is shown not just to bring an individual into living fellowship with God, but to be the essence of such fellowship. “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent*” (**John 17:3**). Such knowledge, which can never be truly achieved apart from recognition of what God has done in Jesus Christ, exists for the believer in part now, and fully hereafter (**1 Cor. 13:12**).

J Ligon Duncan: We can also say that the plagues in general foreshadow the judgment that is going to come against all the followers of Satan, against all unbelievers in the end times. In the book of Revelation, chapter 16, goes back and mirrors the language of Exodus, chapter 7, and applies it to the final pouring out of the bowls of wrath against the wicked. In the book of Exodus, we not only have a display of God’s sovereignty in

redeeming His people out of Egypt, but we have a picture of God's final judgment against all those who resist His will. The choices are very simple. You accept His revelation, you acknowledge Him as Lord, He makes you to be His People, and He becomes your God. Or, like Pharaoh, you respond by going into your house with no concern, rejecting Him, and the final judgments of God are visited upon you. Those are the only two options for us in this passage or anywhere else in Scripture. Bow the knee, and accept the Lord Jesus Christ, or be judged in God's just judgment. That's the message of Exodus 7, verses 14 through 25.

TEXT: Exodus 11:1-10

TITLE: INTRODUCTION OF THE FINAL PLAGUE TO DELIVER ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

HARDENED HEARTS FAIL TO RESPOND TO THE WONDERS OF GOD –

- **EXPERIENCING DEFEAT AND HUMILIATION INSTEAD OF VICTORY AND JOY**
- **EXPERIENCING DEATH AND DEVASTATION INSTEAD OF LIFE AND PROTECTION**

INTRODUCTION:

The events recorded in Exodus detailing God's dealings with Pharaoh and the nation of Israel are now coming to the great climax of Redemption. Throughout the former nine plagues God has consistently demonstrated His sovereignty over this world power and its supposed deities. Now with this final plague He strikes against life itself – the precious firstborn of every Egyptian family – including the royal heir to the throne. God's purposes will not be thwarted. Despite his stubbornness and rebellion, Pharaoh will be forced to let Moses and the Jews depart from the land. In fact Pharaoh will drive them away. In fact His people will beg for them to be released. In fact His people will gift them with every form of precious metals and jewelry and adornments to encourage their departure and enrich them.

Bruce Hurt: At first glance this chapter might not seem to make sense as in **Exodus 10** Pharaoh says Moses will never see his face again but here it is clear he is in the presence of Pharaoh. **J Ligon Duncan** gives a good explanation of what is going on - If you look at **Exodus 11:1-3**, they basically serve as a parenthesis to explain to you the context of this particular announcement. Then in **Exodus 11:4-8**, the plague is actually announced in the presence of Pharaoh. All of this is happening **before Moses leaves**. You remember back in **Exodus 10:28,29**, Pharaoh said to Moses, *"I'm never going to see your face again, and if I do I'm going to kill you."* And Moses says, *"You're right. You're not going to see my face again."* Well before Moses has left the presence of Pharaoh, he has announced this tenth and final plague, and then he dismisses himself in great anger against Pharaoh. And then finally, in **verses 9 and 10** we have a summary explanation for all of God's dealings with Pharaoh in the plague."

Douglas Stuart: This pericope (**11:1–10**) has a three-part structure in which the announcement of the tenth plague, that of the death of the firstborn (**11:4–8**), is carefully sandwiched between two reminders of what previously had been revealed: first, that the tenth plague would be effective at producing the exodus and that Israelites were to be financially prepared for it by obtaining wealth from the Egyptians (**11:1–3**); and second, that the whole series of prior plagues had not resulted in the exodus because that was the way Yahweh had planned things (**11:9–10**). This surrounding of “**new**” narrative material with “**reminder**” narrative material has the effect of helping orient the reader/listener to the fact that the plague of death on the firstborn and the

resulting exodus of Israel from Egypt was not merely an event in itself but the culminating act of a long process controlled by God and brought to fruition exactly as he had predicted it before any of the process had started. Moses was writing this story not merely to help his fellow Israelites trust Yahweh as things happened but to help them learn to trust that Yahweh is the one who makes things happen in the first place, as part of a great redemptive plan for the benefit of his people.

John Oswalt: I think **11:1–12:30** constitute a unit in which the final act of the drama of the plagues is played out.

Wiersbe: Pharaoh and the Egyptian people sinned against a flood of light and insulted God's mercy. The Lord had endured with much long-suffering the rebellion and arrogance of the king of Egypt as well as his cruel treatment of the Jewish people. God had warned Pharaoh many times, but the man wouldn't submit. Jehovah had publicly humiliated the Egyptian gods and goddesses and proved Himself to be the only true and living God, yet the nation would not believe.

I. (:1-3) ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FINAL TENTH PLAGUE TO MOSES BY THE LORD – VICTORY ENRICHES GOD'S PEOPLE AND HUMILIATES GOD'S ENEMIES

A. (:1) Promising Victory

1. Certainty of the Victory

“Now the LORD said to Moses, ‘One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here.’”

After nine attempts with the various plagues met with disappointment every time, Moses needed assurance from the Lord of the victory that would be achieved via this final plague.

John Mackay: The short chapter (**11**) acts as a transition from the first nine plagues to the culmination of the sequence in the tenth plague. It seems that a strictly chronological sequence is departed from. The information in **verses 1–3** was given to Moses prior to the interview with Pharaoh recorded in **10:24**. It has been delayed until here to avoid mixing information about two different plagues. The interview with Pharaoh thus continues from **10:29** into **11:4–8** where Moses informs Pharaoh about the final plague. **Verses 9–10** provide a summary of what has taken place so far.

Douglas Stuart: Now at least Moses knew that the final plague was at hand; and the long series of announcements/warnings, plagues, refusals by Pharaoh, was coming to an end. Pharaoh and the Egyptians had indeed been humiliated many times over. God had shown them repeatedly that it was he who had true power and that their own gods were ineffective nothings. Now was the time for the ultimate demonstration of his sovereignty, in the form of a punishment of such magnitude that Pharaoh would certainly not merely allow the Israelites to leave Egypt but would require that they do so.

2. Completeness of the Victory

“When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely.”

The Jews would not just escape barely but would actually be completely driven out by Pharaoh.

John Mackay: In previous interviews Pharaoh had been forced to yield ground, but there was always some hedging, some restriction. After the final plague has struck the land, there will be no hesitation. Indeed, Pharaoh will force the people to go, and go completely. It is not a matter of a three day journey, but permanent removal from the land.

B. (:2) Plundering the Egyptians

“Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold.”

What a bold request to make!

Ryken: Scholars have also tried to explain what the silver and gold represent. Some say they were Israel’s wages. God wanted to make sure that his people got paid for all the work they did in Egypt. Others say it was the price of redemption, which was always required for release from slavery. Still others consider it a form of military tribute, which God made the Egyptians pay their conquerors. In any case, the silver and gold were a sign of divine favor. It would have been enough to escape from Egypt in one piece, but in his mercy God arranged to provide his people with what they needed for their journey (although, as we shall see, the plunder turned out to be a mixed blessing!). God often does this: In addition to spiritual salvation, he gives his people material blessings that go far beyond what they need or even ask.

John Mackay: This request involved a further humbling of Egypt. It was not just a matter of the Israelites being in effect paid for the labor they had been forced to give. The people would be prepared to pay anything to get the Israelites to leave. This was a measure of the extent to which they recognized that their own belief system had proved ineffective. The gods whom they had believed would protect them had proved incapable of doing so. Their land had been devastated by plagues. No matter what the price it would not be too high to pay to ease the burden that had come upon them.

J. Ligon Duncan: Now, there's something very interesting going on here. When do you plunder someone? You plunder someone after you have conquered them. You remember those great narratives in the historical books of the Old Testament when Israel wins a great battle? What happens? The armies go out in the field, and they plunder.

C. (:3) Promoting the Jews and Moses in the Sight of the Egyptians

1. Promoting the Jews

“And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.”

2. Promoting Moses

“Furthermore, the man Moses himself was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, both in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.”

Douglas Stuart: These verses bring strongly to the reader's attention a sense of the psychological distance that had developed between Pharaoh and the rest of the Egyptians, something that a casual reader may not have fully appreciated previously, although evidences of it were certainly already mentioned in earlier portions of the story (e.g., **8:19; 9:20; 10:7**). Anyone with an ounce of sense among the Egyptians had long since realized that resistance to the Israelites' God Yahweh was useless. Indeed, the Egyptians in general had come to respect the Hebrews (presumably partly out of fear and partly out of pragmatism) and saw their pharaoh's policy of continued resistance to the exodus for what it was: a fanatical, destructive, hopeless stance that was doing nothing but harm. The virtually uniform consensus among Egyptians was that the Israelites were entitled to leave Egypt and that their God had shown himself fully capable of ruining the country if they were not allowed to do so. The only person who could not yet see this was Pharaoh because God had blinded him to reason as a punishment for his oppressions and as a means of demonstrating his divine power over the greatest human potentate of that era. The Egyptians' attitude toward the Israelites was not entirely a simple matter of normal human reasoning. God's plan was to provide his people with the financial wherewithal to survive as a nation on the move until they arrived at and settled in Canaan, so he supernaturally influenced the Israelites' Egyptian “neighbors” to give them valuables simply for the asking and caused them to think highly of Moses as well, in direct opposition to the increasing bitterness Pharaoh was displaying toward him.

II. (:4-8) ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FINAL TENTH PLAGUE TO PHARAOH BY MOSES – JUDGMENT DEVASTATES GOD'S ENEMIES BUT LEAVES GOD'S PEOPLE PROTECTED AND UNHARMED

A. (:4-6) Death Decreed for All the First Born in Egypt – Including of the Cattle

1. (:4-5) Very Specific Judgment

“And Moses said, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first-born of the cattle as well.’”

Davis: The final plague was destined to occur “about midnight”. . . The particular night was not specified however. Perhaps this was done by design in order that Pharaoh might have time to ponder the fate that awaited him and his people. All that Pharaoh

knew was that a tragedy was to strike at midnight, which, unlike some of the other announced plagues, would have left him with a fearful suspense.

John Mackay: What would befall Egypt would affect the full range of the population, and bring bitter grief to every family. Such a judgment falling on the *firstborn* left no family exempt. The destiny of the family focused on the firstborn son, who was the chief heir of the family property and who would become responsible for its well-being. Indeed, in the case of the firstborn son of Pharaoh, it was the future of the whole nation that was involved. When his father died, he would become the incarnation of the god Horus and ascend the throne as the divine ruler of Egypt. His premature death would be a blow to the whole political and religious system of the land.

Alan Cole: The Bible certainly stresses both the universality of this plague and its indiscriminate nature.

Oswalt: This plague was the final attack on all that Egypt worshiped. Apart from all the natural forces that the Egyptians attempted to propitiate, what they really worshiped in the end was life itself. This is the reason for all of their elaborate funerary preparations. Life in Egypt was very good, with a benign climate, a beneficent sun, a very predictable river, and fertile soil brought down by the floods. To them the greatest good was the continuation of such a life. And in the end it was for the perpetuation of that life that they worshiped their myriad gods. But Yahweh had shown them in case after case that these so-called gods did not have the secret of life and that in fact, they could only produce death. Thus, this final plague is an attack on life itself. Even life does not have life in itself. It is a gift from the sole creator of the earth, and that creator is Yahweh of Israel. How humiliating this must have been to intelligent, cultured, and sophisticated Egyptians, that the stupid Hebrew slaves had found God without looking for him, while they with all their careful searching had found nothing but death.

2. (:6) Very Sad Outcry of Grief

*“Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt,
such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again.”*

Alan Cole: A great cry. This is another motif of the book. Israel had ‘*cried*’ to YHWH for deliverance (2:23), they had ‘*cried*’ in vain to pharaoh in their anguish (5:15). Now it is the Egyptians who will ‘*cry*’ in anguish at God’s judgment.

B. (:7) Distinction Between Egypt and Israel

“But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not even bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.”

Alan Cole: “Not a dog shall growl:” the Hebrew has the obscure ‘*sharpen its tongue*’, perhaps implying the lolling tongue of a panting dog, or else the similarity between deep growls in the throat and the noise made by sharpening a blade on a stone wheel. Compare **Joshua 10:21**, where the same phrase is used of men, not dogs. NEB has the

rather curious translation ‘*not a dog’s tongue shall be so much as scratched*’. However, though the exact meaning of the words may be still obscure, the general sense is plain: **not the slightest harm will be done to Israel.**

John Mackay: This develops the theme of knowledge of who the Lord is and what he alone is capable of doing that recurs throughout Exodus. What the Lord was doing was designed to display his sovereignty and his choice in such a way that the message of his power and control would be obvious to all. It is the Lord alone who has the ability to make choices and to back them up with a display of irresistible power. Only in terms of divine initiative is there a possibility of safety.

MacArthur: In contrast to the turmoil and grief experienced in Egyptian territory, all remained tranquil in Israelite territory – so much so that not even a dog barked. That the Lord had made and was making a sharp distinction between the two peoples was a fact to which none could be blind.

C. (:8a) Demand from the Egyptians that Moses and the Jews Depart

“And all these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, ‘Go out, you and all the people who follow you,’ and after that I will go out.”

D. (:8b) Departure in Anger of Moses from before Pharaoh

“And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.”

John Mackay: Moses’ anger was not sinful. It reflects the Lord’s own anger at Pharaoh’s intransigence and deceit.

**III. (:9-10) REVIEW (SUMMARY EXPLANATION) OF THE PREVIOUS NINE PLAGUES –
HARDENED HEARTS FAIL TO RESPOND TO THE WONDERS OF GOD**

A. (:9) Purpose of the Multiple Plagues

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt.’”

Ryken: The plagues were all part of God’s plan to reveal his **glory** in the salvation of his people. Even Pharaoh’s opposition was part of the plan. Each time he hardened his heart, God performed another miracle, so as to multiply his wonders. God did it all for his **glory**.

B. (:10a) Performance of the Multiple Plagues

“And Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh;”

C. (:10b) Pharaoh’s Stubborn Response

“yet the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you describe the emotions of Moses upon hearing that this would be the final plague before the granting of deliverance?
- 2) In what sense has the Lord Jesus plundered His enemies to provide a bounty for His own glorification and for the enjoyment of His people?
- 3) Why wasn't it a cruel thing for the Lord to end up killing the innocent firstborn of every Egyptian family?
- 4) How can people be so resistant to the doctrine of divine election and sovereign choice and yet so in favor of God making a watershed distinction between the people of the world and the people of His kingdom?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryken: What do the plagues teach about God's divine attributes?

First, the plagues teach that God is **almighty**, that he holds absolute power over everything he has made. The book of Genesis shows that God is the Creator, the God who made everything out of nothing and brought order out of chaos. The book of Exodus shows that God still rules over his creation. As we have seen, the plagues were creation reversals. God turned order into chaos and then brought it back into order again, miraculously revealing his power over the earth and sky. As Moses explained before the plague of hail, God performed these wonders so the Egyptians would "know that the earth is the Lord's" (**Exod. 9:29b**). He is a mighty God.

Second, the plagues teach that God is **jealous**, that he will not share his glory with anyone else. The Egyptians turned away from God to put their confidence in gods of their own invention. They chose to idolize everything from beetles to cattle and to worship everyone from Hapi to Amon-Re. Words from the Apostle Paul describe the situation well: "*although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles*" (**Rom. 1:21–23**). This is an exchange that God will not tolerate; so one by one he defeated Egypt's objects of worship. He is a jealous God.

Third, the plagues teach that God is **just**, that in his righteousness he deals with people according to their sins. Pharaoh was a cruel and wicked despot. In his rebellion against God he deliberately tried to destroy God's people. He stopped at nothing: slavery,

servitude, slaughter. And for their part, the Egyptians willingly carried out Pharaoh's orders to oppress the Israelites. Therefore, when God afflicted them with rivers of blood, swarms of bugs, storms of hail, and days of darkness, he was giving them what they deserved. He is a God of justice.

Fourth, the plagues teach that God is **merciful**, that he saves the needy when they cry out for deliverance. The exodus was set in motion by the prayers of God's people: "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant" (**Exod. 2:23b, 24a**). The plagues were an answer to prayer because, by God's mercy, they finally led Israel out of Egypt.

Fifth, the plagues teach that God is **sovereign**, that his mercy and justice are his choice. The plagues discriminated between God's people and Pharaoh's people. The Egyptians suffered, while the Israelites were spared. Therefore the plagues teach the doctrine of election. God chose to place his special favor on the Israelites, even though they did not deserve it. At the same time, he chose to leave Pharaoh in his sins. So when Paul wanted to explain the mystery of God's sovereignty, he pointed back to the exodus and said, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (**Rom. 9:16–18**). God's grace is God's choice because he is a sovereign God.

Each of these lessons has practical implications for daily life. The God who sent the plagues against Egypt still rules over Heaven and earth. Since he is almighty, he has the power to help us in every situation. Since he is jealous, we must not rob him of his glory by serving other gods. Since he is just, we can wait for him to judge his enemies. Since he is merciful, he will save us when we cry for help. Since he is sovereign, he is to be feared and worshiped.

David Thompson:

You may have the most powerful political leader in the world against you and he will not be able to stop what God wants done. God is the Sovereign God and this is certainly a lesson He wants His people to understand.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN IS FOR ISRAEL TO LEAVE EGYPT AND GOD SOVEREIGNLY USES ONE MORE PLAGUE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS SOVEREIGN PLAN.

Now this final plague will not become a reality until **Exodus 12:29-36**. This plague bridges the gap between the plagues and the Passover. Obviously the killing of the firstborn has tremendous Passover ramifications for it would be the firstborn, only begotten Son of God whose blood could save us and cleanse us and keep us from experiencing the wrath of God.

SOVEREIGN POINT #1 – What God tells Moses He is going to do. **11:1**

SOVEREIGN POINT #2 – What God tells Moses to say to the Hebrews. **11:2**

SOVEREIGN POINT #3 – What God did for the Hebrews and for Moses. **11:3**

SOVEREIGN POINT #4 – What Moses communicated to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. **11:4-8**

Now some have said that it doesn't seem fair that God would kill so many innocent firstborn children by this plague. But let's think about four facts about this:

(Fact #1) - God is the one who gives life and the one who can take life. He controls, it we don't.

(Fact #2) - God always does what is right and we are in no position to question Him because we don't always do what is right.

(Fact #3) - All humans, including children, have sinned against God and received the death penalty and therefore, any individual's death is perfectly just at any moment.

(Fact #4) - God's grace is seen in the fact that He did not kill all the Egyptians, but in fact let most of them live, even when some of them had killed His own people.

SOVEREIGN POINT #5 – What God would do with Pharaoh. **11:9-10**

God would harden Pharaoh's heart so that He could multiply His wonders in the land of Egypt. God wanted to add two more wonders to the list—the death of the firstborn and the parting of the Red Sea, which would end up drowning many of these hard-hearted Egyptians. The scary thing here is that Pharaoh was not going to let Israel go because God caused him not to let them go. Pharaoh's response is irreversible. By a sovereign edict of God, Pharaoh could not do anything except have a hard heart against God's Word and will. God had made his heart this way, which was perfectly consistent with his own nature so that He could display His great miraculous power.

When Jesus Christ was here on earth and after He had performed many miracles and had confronted many Jewish people with truth specifically about believing in Him for salvation, the Apostle John wrote these words in **John 12:37-40**:

“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘Lord who has believed our report? And to whom was the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ For this cause they could not believe for Isaiah said again, HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART

LEST THEY SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.”

The thing that is so horrible is that the tragedy of God hardening the hearts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians is the same tragedy that was repeated in Israel with God’s own nation and people. You may think it really doesn’t matter whether or not you respond to God’s Word and conviction. We all need to be warned, the same God who hardened the heart of Pharaoh in the days of Moses and the same God who hardened the hearts of the Jews in the days of Jesus, is the same God who can harden our hearts right now.

Constable: Some critics of the Bible have challenged God’s justice in putting to death so many "innocent" children. Looked at one way, a priori, whatever God does is right because He is God. Looked at another way, God as the giver and sustainer of life is righteous in withdrawing life from any creature at any time because life belongs to Him. He can take it as well as give it at will. Furthermore the fact that humans are all sinners and sin results in death means that God is just in requiring the punishment for any individual’s sin at any time. We do not have any claim on God’s grace. God graciously did not kill all the Egyptians.

Mark Vroegop: (College Park Church) – **The Sovereign God Who Delivers and Saves** Today we are going to learn about another term which has great significance in the Old Testament, the book of Exodus, and the New Testament. It is the term firstborn. And it is connected to the last of the Ten Plagues, the death of the firstborn.

Our series title has been “*The God Who Delivers*,” and we have seen the various plagues which have become leverage points for God to send the message “*Let my people go that they may serve me.*” The Nile, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness have all put enormous pressure on Pharaoh, and they have directly challenged multiple Egyptian gods. But the death of the firstborn will be the defining and final plague. And it is directly connected to two biblical ideas: **sovereignty** and **salvation**. The final plague shows us **a sovereign God who saves**.

The death of the firstborn will become a monumental moment for Pharaoh, for Egypt, for Israel, and for God. It will be a point of reference for future generations and a statement to those who would hear about this moment. Everything in **chapters 7-12** was leading up to this moment. In fact, this was a part of God’s plan from the very beginning. Before Moses’ first encounter with Pharaoh, God told him what would happen:

21 And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son’ ” (Exodus 4:21–23).

So there is more here than just a final plague. There is more here than just a proud ruler of Egypt. And there is more to this story than just people being freed from slavery. Embedded in this narrative and in the history of the word “*firstborn*” is the convergence of God’s ability to be God and His unstoppable plan to deliver His people. The death of the firstborn is a portrait upon which we see God’s sovereignty and His salvation, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New.

The Significance of the Firstborn Plague in the Exodus

Chapter eleven records both a flashback to what God had told Moses before and a promise of what was going to come in this final plague. The phrase “*the Lord said*” can also be translated (per NIV) as “*the Lord had said*.” The flashbacks are found in **verses 1-3** and **verse nine**. . .

Verses 4-8 seem to be words that Moses spoke directly to Pharaoh in the context of the plague of darkness. So this narrative is not always sequential, and this is because the purpose of this book is theological, not just historical. In other words, it is communicating a message, not just recording a story. So what is the message or the significance of this final warning? What are the messages being communicated in this text?

1. God keeps His promises

The structure of this text, by sandwiching Moses’ words to Pharaoh in between previously made promises, is intended to communicate a very important message. It is a lesson that Israel will not learn easily: God is worthy of trust. **Doug Stuart** summarizes this well:

“Moses was writing this story not merely to help his fellow Israelites trust Yahweh as things happened but to help them learn to trust that Yahweh is the one who makes things happen in the first place, as part of a great redemptive plan for the benefit of his people.”

As we began our journey in this book, we read **Exodus 2:24-25** which highlighted the same idea:

24 . . . and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel — and God knew (Exodus 2:24–25).

The death of the firstborn is not only a warning to Pharaoh about the consequences of his hardened heart; it also is an encouragement and a warning to Israel that God can and should be trusted. God keeps His promises.

2. God is the one, true God

Like the other plagues, the death of the firstborn directly challenged the Egyptian worldview. In fact, this plague, more than any other, shattered it. First, the plague was to happen at midnight, and the Egyptians believed that their sun-god departed to the underworld during the night, leaving them unprotected. They greatly feared the night because of this. Second, the plague affected every level of their culture, including their

animals. Since their mythology was directly connected to the natural world, this would have had a devastating effect.

But it is the last aspect that is probably the most important. The Pharaohs of Egypt were worshipped as the sons of a god, and they were often obsessed with immortality and the after-life. Therefore, for every household to be simultaneously struck with death would have been incredibly frightening. Neither their gods nor Pharaoh could protect them.

3. God owns everything

There is a reason why God specifically targets the firstborn. In the Ancient Near East, the firstborn, typically the firstborn son, was believed to share more closely his father's qualities, and he was destined to succeed his father as the head of the family. The firstborn represented the continuation of a family from one generation to the next. Therefore, the firstborn was given greater authority and respect, and he was typically given a larger inheritance. The firstborn was a cherished child, not only because of birth order but also because of what it meant for the family's future.

But it is not just the importance of the firstborn child that is relevant here; it is God's claim of ownership over the firstborn. **Exodus 13:2** identifies this idea very clearly:

2 "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine (Exodus 13:2).

God exerts His rightful claim as the Creator and owner of all creation through this statement that the firstborn belong to Him. God is making a statement here that should not be missed. He is saying that the most important and the first evidence of life's creative abilities do not belong to humans. The divine ownership of the firstborn is a statement that "*I am God and you are not.*"

This is what Pharaoh needed to learn. Before Moses ever spoke to Pharaoh, God identified the people of Israel as His "firstborn son" and warned Moses what He would do to Pharaoh:

22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son' " (Exodus 4:22–23).

The death of the firstborn son is a clear and final statement regarding God's ownership of everything. Yahweh is God, and Pharaoh is not. This will be the ultimate lesson regarding Pharaoh's opposition of God, and it will also be the basis of Israel's relationship with their God. . .

The death of the firstborn and the Passover become a defining statement about God's sovereign power. He owns everything because He is God.

4. God will personally bring judgment and justice

The other plagues were mediated through Moses and Aaron. God gave the command and the power, but the plague happened as the water was struck (**Ex. 7:20**) or as soot was thrown in the air (**Ex. 9:8**). But this plague was going to be different. The warning was as ominous as it was personal:

*4 So Moses said, “Thus says the Lord: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle (**Exodus 11:4–5**).*

This judgment will involve the personal activity of God Himself. Pharaoh and Egypt will no longer contend with God through a mediator; they will experience the tragedy of being on the wrong side of their creator.

And with this judgment, God will execute justice. It is not by accident that verse six says, “*there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt . . .*” It is the same word used in **Exodus 3:7-9** for the cry that God heard from His own people, the cry that led Him to act on their behalf. God will personally bring absolute justice.

5. God’s redemption brings blessing

The final significance of this plague relates to what victory looks like. You cannot read the Exodus narrative and think only of God’s deliverance of his people from slavery. He redeemed them to something. God’s deliverance brings freedom, but it also brings amazing blessings.

Back at the burning bush, God told Moses that the people were going to plunder the Egyptians (**Ex. 3:22**). This war-time metaphor is meant to capture the real battle in which God and Pharaoh are engaged. The death of the firstborn will not only result in Israel’s freedom from slavery; they will also receive the spoils of war. God’s victory on their behalf will result in great blessings.

Material goods were among the spoils, but there also was something personal for Moses. God’s victory would result in Moses’ own exaltation – “*the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people*” (**Ex. 11:3**). In other words, Moses would be proven right. The death of the firstborn would make right the injustice that he had endured.

I hope that you can see more clearly now the importance and significance of this plague. It is more than just the final act of deliverance; it is definitive statement to Egypt and Pharaoh and Israel and to us about the **sovereign power of God**. This plague targets the firstborn in order to clearly communicate that “*there is no one like the Lord our God*” (**Ex. 8:10**).

<https://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/the-promised-judgment-the-death-of-the-firstborn/>

TEXT: Exodus 12:1-13

TITLE: INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE LORD'S PASSOVER

BIG IDEA:

ONLY THE PERSONAL APPLICATION OF THE BLOOD OF THE PASSOVER LAMB BRINGS DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE AND DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

Suspense has been building as we have worked our way through the nine plagues. The natural expectation would be that the author would jump immediately to the catastrophic tenth plague and the dramatic deliverance of God's people. Instead we find an extended discussion of the institution of the Passover Feast and other significant worship practices. That should tell us something about the significance of the Passover sacrifice – especially as it is fulfilled in the perfect Lamb of God.

Wiersbe: Passover marked a new beginning for the Jews and bound them together as a nation.

David Thompson: The entire theological development of Jesus Christ being a sacrificial lamb begins in **Exodus 12**. Paul would say that Jesus Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us (**I Cor. 5:7**). The Apostle Peter said that we were purchased with the precious blood of the unblemished and spotless Lamb, who is Jesus Christ (**I Pet. 1:18-19**). John the Baptist would say, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (**John 1:29**). John the Apostle would describe Jesus as the slain Lamb who is being worshipped in heaven in the great praise anthem "*Worthy is the lamb that was slain*" (**Rev. 5:6, 12**). All of these portraits of Jesus Christ start in **Exodus 12**. So this is a very important chapter to the entire Bible and to the potential of understanding the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oswalt: This truth—that the Exodus is really about becoming rightly related to God—explains why some 50 verses (**12:1–27, 43–50; 13:1–16**) are given over to discussion of worship practices—just as the narrative reaches its most exciting point, just when what appears to be the goal of the whole operation is on the point of being achieved. . . This extended discussion is the means by which the author makes his point that even if these slaves manage to escape their oppressors, they will have missed the point of the event unless they surround their memories of it with appropriate **acts of worship**. The question for humans is not whether we will serve a master but only what master we will serve. If we live our lives in service to our Creator, we will be free to be all we were made to be. If we refuse that service, we are seeking to live in ways we were never made for, and the result will be a worse bondage than we ever dreamed, whether to our own self-will or to the will of another. . .

It is important to note that this worship was centered in the memory of something God

had done in time and space (12:14, 24; 13:3, 8, 14, 16). . . Worship is to accurately remember the wonderful things God has done on our behalf and to realign our beliefs and behaviors on the basis of what God did. Moses is here, under divine inspiration, seeking to lay the essential foundations for what Israelite, Jewish, and Christian worship should consist of. If God did not do the things the Bible reports, then liturgical activities are valueless. They do not constitute an “event” with meaning in itself. God’s power is not ours to tap into through magical rituals.

(:1-2) PROLOGUE – MARKER FOR NEW BEGINNINGS AS A DELIVERED NATION

“Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ‘This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you.’”

David Guzik: The coming deliverance from Egypt was such a significant act that God told the children of Israel to remake their calendar. The new year would now start with the month of their redemption from Egypt. It was a dramatic way of saying that everything was to change.

G Campbell Morgan: These words constitute the record of a change of calendar at the command of God. This change was introduced in the hour when these people were passing into national constitution as a Theocracy, a people under the direct and immediate government of God, having no king except Him. It was directly connected with the institution of the Passover Feast. Thus the **beginning** of the year was changed from Tishri, the month of harvest, to **Abib**, the month of green ears, or of springtime, known after the captivity as **Nisan**. Thus the new year henceforth was to begin with the celebration of the feast which emphasized the relation of the people to God, and brought constantly to their memory the redemptive basis of that relation. **God is ever the God of new beginnings in the history of failure. The ultimate statement is found in the Apocalypse in the words: “Behold, I make all things new.”** All such new beginnings are founded on **plenteous Redemption**, conditioned in **persistent Righteousness**, and issue in **perfect Realization**. God had redeemed His people from slavery. The dawn of their new year was ever to be radiant with the glory of His bringing of them forth from cruel bondage. God had brought them to Himself, that under His law **they might realize the meaning of life, and fulfil its highest purposes**. God had admitted them to a fellowship with Himself, which meant, for them, the supply of all need; and for Him, an instrument in the world for carrying out the program of His infinite grace.

Douglas Stuart: Whatever might theoretically have been their previous thinking about a calendar, God decreed to his Old Covenant people that they would henceforth have a calendar designed to remind them of how they first became a people—it happened by reason of their deliverance by his mighty hand out of the bondage of the oppressor, an act so important that it was also to be memorialized by a special annual feast, the Passover.

I. (:3-6) INSTRUCTIONS FOR OBSERVING THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE

A. (:3-4) Logistics for the Passover Sacrifice

“Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying,”

1. (:3b) Timing for the Passover Observance

‘On the tenth of this month

2. (:3c-4) One Lamb Based on Number of People it Could Feed

a. (:3c) Typically One Lamb Per Household

*“they are each one to take a lamb for themselves,
according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household.”*

Bruce Hurt: **Lamb** (goat) (*seh*) is actually a neutral word which means one of the flock such as either a sheep or a goat. This animal was clean according to the Law and thus could be eaten (**Dt. 14:4; cf. Nu 15:11**), so long as the blood had been drained (**1 Sa 14:34**). A year-old lamb was necessary for a sin or burnt offering (**Lev. 5:7; 12:8**).

b. (:4a) Sometimes Necessary to Combine Small Households

“Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them;”

c. (:4c) According to Number of People it Could Feed

“according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb.”

B. (:5) Criteria for an Acceptable Passover Sacrifice

1. Unblemished Animal

“Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old;”

Douglas Stuart: Thus the reason for demanding perfection rested not in the quality of the meal but in the symbolic purpose: the animal served as a reminder of the eventual deliverance that a perfect God perfectly provided for his people as part of the process of making them holy like himself. Proper relating to God requires perfection.

Ryken: For Jesus to be our Passover lamb, he had to meet God’s standard of perfection. Back during the exodus, the Passover lamb had to be physically flawless. In the case of Jesus, the perfection God required was moral: Jesus had to be utterly sinless. The Bible is careful to show that this was indeed the case. By virtue of his virgin birth, his nature was free from the corruption of original sin. Nor did Jesus commit any actual transgressions. Peter said, *“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth”* (**1 Pet. 2:22**). The book of Hebrews says that he was *“tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin”* (**4:15**). Even Pontius Pilate said, *“I find no basis for a charge against him”* (**John 19:6b**). Jesus was morally perfect. Therefore, when it came time for

him to die, it was as an innocent victim—he “*offered himself unblemished to God*” (**Heb. 9:14**). Hebrews uses the word “*unblemished*” because the writer was thinking of the kind of sacrifice that God required in the Old Testament: a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish.

2. Sheep or Goat

“*you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.*”

C. (:6) Preparation and Execution of the Passover Sacrifice

1. Preparation

“*And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month,*”

2. Execution

“*then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.*”

Constable: on *kill it at twilight* - Some of the ancient rabbis taught that God wanted the Jews to sacrifice the Passover lamb exactly at sunset because of the instructions in **verse 6** and **Deuteronomy 16:6**. However “*at twilight*” literally means “*between the two evenings*.” The more widely held Jewish view was that the first evening began right after noon and the second began when the sun set. In Josephus’ day, which was also Jesus’ day, the Jews slew the Passover lamb in mid-afternoon. The Lord Jesus Christ died during this time (i.e., about 3:00 p.m., **Mt. 27:45–50; Mk 15:34–37; Lk 23:44–46; 1 Cor 5:7**).

J Vernon McGee: on the phrase *the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it* (Note it does not say each household is to kill it) - This portion of Scripture is quite interesting. Note that each family had a lamb. Thousands of lambs must have been slain that evening, but the sixth verse reads, “*Israel shall kill it in the evening.*” These many lambs were speaking of another Lamb. God looked at all of these lambs as that one Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the Passover offered for us. This feast was pointing to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world.

Ryken: There is an obvious progression here, with the lamb serving as a representative for larger and larger groups of people. At first God provided one lamb for one person. Thus Abraham offered a ram in place of his son Isaac. Next God provided one lamb for one household. This happened at the first Passover, when every family in the covenant community offered its own lamb to God. Then God provided one sacrifice for the whole nation. On the Day of Atonement, a single animal atoned for the sins of all Israel. Finally the day came when John the Baptist “*saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’*” (**John 1:29; cf. John 11:50–52**). God was planning this all along: one Lamb to die for one world. By his grace he has provided a lamb—“the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (**Rev. 13:8**).

II. (:7-10) INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLYING THE BLOOD OF THE PASSOVER SACRIFICE AND CONSUMING THE FLESH

A. (:7) Applying the Blood

“Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.”

Constable: The door represented the house (cf. **Ex 20:10; Dt. 5:14; 12:17**; et al.). The smearing of the blood on the door with hyssop was an act of expiation (cleansing; cf. **Lev. 14:49–53+; Nu 19:18–19**). This act consecrated the houses of the Israelites as altars. They had no other altars in Egypt. **They were not to apply the blood to the other member of the door frame, the threshold, because someone might tread on it.** The symbolic value of the blood made this action inappropriate. The whole ritual signified to the Jews that the blood (life poured out, **Lev. 17:11+**) of a sinless, divinely appointed substitute cleansed their sins and resulted in their setting apart (sanctification) to God. The application of the blood as directed was a demonstration of the Israelites’ faith in God’s promise that He would pass over them (**Ex 12:13; cf. Heb. 11:28**).

Douglas Stuart: The Israelites were required to eat the Passover in a manner that demonstrated their readiness to leave Egypt immediately. All aspects of the cooking and eating were designed to minimize time and maximize preparedness for sudden departure. This was an issue of faith: did the families of the Israelites really trust God’s promises for them? If so, were they willing to show that trust by arranging themselves so as to be fully prepared for departure, and by eating what was to be their last meal in Egypt in such a manner as not to impede their ability to gather together and start moving as soon as the command reached them? The willingness to go at a moment’s notice and never to return cannot have been easy for most Israelites, even though they initially believed Moses’ signs (**4:31**), had witnessed the nine plagues thus far, and had been treated so badly for so long. After all, they had lived in Egypt for 430 years—a long time to acclimate culturally and geographically—and were now being asked to leave behind everything they had ever known: the place where they had lived all their lives, where their parents and grandparents had lived and died, and where they had prospered until the paranoia of the post-Hyksos pharaohs had taken over. They were leaving the houses they had built and raised families in. Added to this, some people are simply more psychologically “territorial” than others. For them, going elsewhere is almost always harder than staying put and trying to survive. But now their faith was to be shown; now they were to gather as families to eat a quick meal of quickly prepared ingredients and then to depart quickly in order to get a head start on any potential Egyptian pursuit.

B. (:8-9) Consuming the Flesh

1. (:8) How to Consume the Flesh

a. Timing and Mode of Cooking

“And they shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire,”

Wiersbe: In order that the lamb might be kept whole, it was roasted in the fire and not

boiled in water. . . It was important to see the wholeness of the lamb.

b. Accompaniments

“and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

Spurgeon: The paschal lamb was not killed in order to be looked at only, but to be eaten; and our Lord Jesus Christ has not been slain merely that we may hear about Him and talk about Him, and think about Him, but that we may feed upon Him.

Constable: The bitter herbs—perhaps endive, chicory, and or other herbs native to Egypt—would later recall to the Israelites who ate them the bitter experiences of life in Egypt. However the sweetness of the lamb overpowered the bitterness of the herbs.

2. (:9) Additional Instructions

a. How Not to Cook it

“Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water,”

b. How to Cook it

“but rather roasted with fire,”

c. Treat it as a Unit

“both its head and its legs along with its entrails.”

C. (:10) Burning Anything Left Over

1. Don’t Save Any for the Next Day

“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning,”

John Mackay: Great care was to be taken to avoid misappropriation of the Passover, either by its being consumed other than at the time when all were eating it together or by people or animals not entitled to partake of it.

2. Burn Up Leftovers

“but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.”

III. (:11-13) INSTRUCTIONS FOR READINESS FOR THE PASSOVER EVENT OF EXODUS, DESTRUCTION AND DELIVERANCE

A. (:11) Readiness for the Exodus from Egypt – Freedom from Bondage

1. Preparing for the Journey

“Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand;”

J Vernon McGee: Friend, when you come to Christ, you should have your **loins girded and be ready to get out of the world** and no longer be involved in it. **I do not believe that you can be converted and continue living a sinful life** (cf **1 John 3:4-10+**). This does not mean that you will not sin occasionally, but it does mean that you will not

make a habit of living in a pattern of sin....You will get out of “*Egypt*” if the blood has been put on the doorposts. You are to eat the sacrificial lamb with your loins girt about, ready to go.

David Guzik: The Passover lamb had to be eaten in faith, trusting that the deliverance promised to Israel was present, and that they would walk in that deliverance immediately.

Douglas Stuart: Sandals normally were taken off at home; with this meal they were worn in the house, because a trip was imminent. No one carried his staff around the house; it was a tool for protection and herding in the open. A staff in the hand normally indicated readiness to be on the move, not a plan to stay at home. Thus the entire meal and its manner and posture of consumption were to indicate faithful readiness for a speedy departure.

2. Understanding the Urgency

“and you shall eat it in haste—“

3. Obeying the Master

*“it is the **LORD's** Passover.”*

David Guzik: The Passover was the Lord’s in the sense that He provided it:

- (1) **As a rescue**, to deliver Israel from the plague of the firstborn.
- (2) **As an institution**, to remember God’s rescue and deliverance for Israel through every generation.
- (3) **As a powerful drama**, acting out the perfect sacrifice and rescue Jesus would later provide.

B. (:12) Readiness for the Dramatic Event of Destruction

1. Judgment Against the First-born in the Land of Egypt

“For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast;”

2. Judgment Against the Gods of Egypt

“and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—“

3. Supremacy of the Lord

*“I am the **LORD**.”*

John Mackay: The Lord then adds as it were his signature to the verdict he has pronounced: *I am the Lord*. Because of who he is, what he says is guaranteed and will surely come to pass (6:2).

C. (:13) Readiness for the Merciful Event of Deliverance

1. The Sign of the Applied Blood

“And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live;”

Bruce Hurt: One may ask Why use blood as the sign? Throughout the Old Testament, the shedding of blood often signifies entrance into, and being part of, the covenant with God (see, for example, **Gen. 15:9–17; 17:9–14**). Blood is the essence of life, and thus it symbolizes the extremity of the covenant relationship extending to life and death. The Hebrews bear the sign of God and live; the Egyptians have no sign and many die.

2. The Efficacy of the Applied Blood

“and when I see the blood I will pass over you,”

Ryken: What was so important about the blood? It represented the taking of a life. Notice that this was a sign both to the Israelites and to their God. God said, *“The blood will be a sign for you ... and when I see the blood”* (v. 13, emphasis added). What the blood signified to the Israelites was that they had a substitute; that a lamb had died in their place. Their sin was a capital offense. God was coming in judgment, armed with a deadly plague. But when they looked up and saw the blood on the door, they knew they were covered. To use the technical term for it, the blood of the lamb was the expiation for their sins. While the book of Exodus does not draw an explicit connection between the blood of the lamb and the sin of God’s people, this connection is plainly implied. In the words of the brilliant Dutch theologian **Geerhardus Vos**, “Wherever there is slaying and manipulation of blood there is expiation, and both these were present in the Passover.”

3. The Protection of the Applied Blood

*“and no plague will befall you to destroy you
when I strike the land of Egypt.”*

John Mackay: ‘*Plague*’ here denotes a punishment imposed by God with terrible consequences for those on whom it comes. Notice that this implies that the Israelites themselves were liable to the death of their firstborn. It was not just a matter of judgment on particular sins of the Egyptians, such as their oppression and maltreatment of the Israelites. Those were specific symptoms of the basic problem of sinful rebellion against God. This time the Israelites would not be exempt apart from obedience to specific injunctions. The focus of the event is the threat of judgment and the alleviation of that judgment through the death of a lamb.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does Jesus Christ qualify as the perfect Passover Lamb of God?
- 2) How does our deliverance mirror the deliverance of the Jews in the event of the exodus from Egypt?

3) How does the destruction of the first-born mirror the wrath of God against unbelievers today?

4) How is God today showing Himself to be sovereign over the gods of this world?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J Vernon McGee: When Israel entered Egypt, it was as a family. When they made their exit from Egypt, it was as a nation. The interesting point is that God puts the emphasis on the family here because the family comprises the building blocks out of which the nation was made. You remember how Pharaoh forced the Israelites to make bricks without straw. All the time that Israel was in bondage, God made them the bricks of the family for the building of a nation out of the straws of individuals. An old cliché says, “No nation is stronger than the families of that nation.” The zero hour has come for Israel. The countdown begins in this chapter for the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt.

S. Lewis Johnson on the meaning of **pass over** (*pasach*) - The verb translated here “*pass over*” is **not a word of omission, but of protection**. It is not that the Lord will skip over the houses with the blood to those that do not have it. The Hebrew word (פָּסַח [pāsaḥ]) is not easy to define, for its usages are not numerous. It has been given the meaning of “*to limp*” (cf. **1 Kings 18:21**) or “*to leap over*.” I think the clue to its meaning is found in **Isaiah 31:5**, where it refers to the protection of Jerusalem by Yahweh [the LORD]. He is compared to birds that hover over their young with outspread wings to protect them. The idea is set out in more detail in **Exodus 12:23** where we read, “*For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.*” **Since the destroying angel exists under God’s control, he cannot enter the houses under the protecting hand of God.** One is reminded of Peter’s words in the same chapter of his first epistle in which he refers to the Lord Jesus “*as of a lamb unblemished and spotless*” (**1 Peter 1:19**)—“*who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (**1 Peter 1:5**).

There are some important spiritual truths illustrated here.

In the first place, it is clear that the safety of the Israelites depended upon the blood shed and sprinkled on the doorposts. It did not depend upon their sense of sin, or upon the possession of certain graces, or upon any spiritual experiences they may have had. It depended upon the blood. With the blood in the proper place they were safe. **Our spiritual salvation depends upon the blood of the cross alone. With that sprinkled upon the doorposts of our hearts we are as safe as a prophet or an apostle. It is the blood of the cross that is the foundation of our salvation.**

In the second place, the certainty of their salvation depended upon the word of God. It was He who promised that, if they would put the blood on the door, He would pass over them. So, while their safety depended upon the blood, their certainty, or assurance of safety, depended upon the faithfulness of God to His Word and their confidence in Him. It was entirely possible for some who had put the blood on the door to still be in a state of anxiety over their safety. Their safety, however, did not depend upon their state of mind, but simply upon the presence of the blood upon the doorpost. So, in our salvation our safety depends upon the blood of Christ shed on the cross, but our assurance of safety depends upon our confidence in what God has said.

Criswell: For the Christian, the memorial observance of the **Lord's Supper** replaces the **Passover Feast** in this day of grace (**Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 5:7, 8**). The Jews remembered their deliverance from Egypt in the annual Passover festival (cf. **Ex. 12:24-27**). Jesus died at Passover time as the new Passover Lamb (**5:7**) through whom believers are delivered from sin and Satan. As the Savior ate the Last Supper during the Passover and just before He died (cf. **Matt. 26:19-30**), He instituted this memorial of His death (**vv. 24, 25**). When He said, "*This is My body*," as He held the bread, the disciples understood the symbolism because they could see His physical body present before them. The Oriental considers eating together a sign of the bond among those present, and the Lord's Supper points to the bond among the various people present (**1 Cor 10:17**) and between each participant and the Lord (**1 Cor 10:16, 20, 21**).

The actions in the Supper are eloquent. The Lord, as it were, hands His people the broken bread, saying by this action, "Look! My body was given for you; I died for you." As the Christian takes the bread and eats it, making it part of himself, he says by this action, "*Yes, Lord! You died for me, and I am again showing my response to Your death. I am relying upon You to save me. I renew my vow of obedience to You. I love You.*" The enacted dialogue with the fruit of the vine is similar.

The **Christian should make sure that there is no unconfessed sin** within him before he comes to the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor 11:28**). The Supper is for repentant sinners who have put their faith in Christ. It is to be taken seriously, the participants being conscious of the presence of Christ at His table, and not despising others who are present; for they, too, are His body (**1 Cor 11:29**). The Lord's Supper is shared "*till He comes*" (**1 Cor 11:26**); it looks forward to the Lamb's Supper (cf. **Rev. 19:7-9**).

In summary, the Lord's Supper is designed to symbolize and communicate six distinct truths:

- (1) a memorial to remind us of the central truth in Christianity -- the atonement of Christ (**1 Cor 11:24, 25**),
- (2) the fellowship of Christ's body (**1 Cor 11:18**),
- (3) a diagnostic feast in which the believer examines his own walk with Christ (**1 Cor 11:28**),
- (4) a feast of thanksgiving for salvation (**1 Cor 11:24**),

- (5) a witness to Christ's death (1 Cor 11:26), and
- (6) a feast of hope (1 Cor 11:26).

(Believer's Study Bible)

David Thompson:

THE KEY TO ESCAPING DEATH AND THE KEY TO DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE IS TO MAKE SURE THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB HAS BEEN PERSONALLY APPLIED TO YOU.

Anyone with the applied blood is protected by God from ever experiencing eternal death. God actually hovers over one with the applied blood so that the destroyer cannot ever pull His property away from Him.

Now consider this point: It is not the Lamb alone that saves. It is not the sacrifice the Lamb made that saves. It is not the shed blood of the sacrifice that saves. It is the Lamb's blood personally applied to the sinner that saves him.

Jesus Christ died on that cross and shed His blood, but just having knowledge of that fact will not save anyone. That blood must be personally applied to you and the moment it is, you are forever protected from eternal death.

Now let us consider the statement God makes and the theological significance of the fact that when He sees the blood He will pass over the sinner.

The key to salvation was the objective reality of blood on the doorposts. From God's perspective, this is the objective fact that determined life or death. It was whether or not He saw that blood applied to the doorpost. Now the reason why this is so important is that people are very confused about what saves them.

- Some suggest in order to be saved we must feel like we are saved.
- Some suggest in order to be saved we must have experiences that prove we are saved.
- Some suggest in order to be saved we must have a certain amount of faith.
- Some suggest in order to be saved we must make Jesus Lord of our lives.
- Some suggest in order to be saved we must purpose to be a disciple and follow Jesus.

None of that saves. What actually saves is the objective existence of the blood applied and appropriated to the individual. When God sees the blood of His Son applied to the individual, that person is saved and given life instead of death.

Ryken: The importance of the lamb as a substitute would not have been lost on the firstborn son. Once the lamb was chosen, it was kept in the house for four days, during which time the family fed it, cared for it, and played with it. In that short time they

would have identified with the lamb, so that it almost became part of the family. “This is our Passover lamb,” they would say. Then it was slaughtered, which was a messy, bloody business. The head of the household took the lamb in his arms, pulled back its head, and slit its throat. Red blood spurted all over the lamb’s pure white wool. “Why, Daddy?” the children would say. Their father would explain that the lamb was a substitute. The firstborn did not have to die because the lamb had died in his place.

TEXT: Exodus 12:14-36

TITLE: *OBSERVANCE OF THE PASSOVER AND FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD*

BIG IDEA:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD SPEAKS TO US TODAY

INTRODUCTION:

These critical Old Testament events and feasts are foundational for our understanding of what God has accomplished for New Testament saints through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Ryken: When we consider how the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** is connected to **Passover**, we discover a very important truth about salvation—namely, that we are saved in order to be sanctified. Passover is about getting saved. It reminds us that we have been delivered from death by a perfect substitute whose blood was shed as a sacrifice for our sins. The Feast of Unleavened Bread reminds us what God wants us to do once we’ve been saved, and that is to live a sanctified life, becoming more and more free from sin.

I. (:14-20) OBSERVANCE OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

A. (:14-16) Instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread

1. (:14) Permanent Memorial

“Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The connection between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is close yet distinct. The OT uses both names to refer to the same feast: “*Passover Feast*” in **Exodus 34:25; Ezekiel 45:21**; and “*Feast of Unleavened Bread*” in **Deuteronomy 16:16; 2 Chronicles 30:13, 21; Ezra 6:22**. Yet the two rites are treated separately, even if in sequence, in **Leviticus 23:5-6; Numbers 28:16-17; 2 Chronicles 35:1, 17; Ezra 6; Ezekiel 45:21**.

2. (:15) Purifying Seven Day Festival

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”

Douglas Stuart: But why require eating unleavened bread as the special focus of the exodus memorial meal, the Passover? The answer is that unleavened bread was the

unique food of the original exodus, the event God wanted his people to be sure not to forget. People everywhere normally eat leavened bread. It tastes better, is more pleasant to eat, is more filling. Leavened bread was the normal choice of the Israelites in Egypt too. But on the night they ran, there was no time for the usual niceties—a fast meal had to be eaten, and hastily made bread had to be consumed. The fact that a lamb or goat kid was roasted for the meat portion of the meal or that bitter herbs were eaten as a side dish was not nearly so special or unusual as the fact that the bread was unleavened, thus essentially forming sheets of cracker. Eating it at the memorial feast intentionally recalled the original departure in haste. Eating it for a solid week tended to fix the idea in one's consciousness. . .

The statement that a person would be *cut off from Israel* was not juridical guidance for those enforcing laws but a prediction from God of the fate of the unfaithful. Not to be faithful is not to belong to God's people even if living among them (cf. **Rom 2:28–29**) and therefore not to enjoy their covenant blessings in the long run.

Ryken: For one thing, as we have already seen, unleavened bread reminded the Israelites of their hasty departure. But getting rid of the yeast had another purpose. Although it is not explicitly stated in **Exodus 12**, Jewish teachers have always understood yeast to represent the corrupting power of sin. Unleavened bread symbolizes holiness. What makes this comparison suitable is that unleavened bread is made of pure wheat untouched by yeast. When God's people ate unleavened bread, therefore, they were reminded to keep themselves pure from sin, and especially from the evils of Egypt. To this day, when devout Jewish families celebrate Passover they search their homes for leaven and then sweep it out the door. This symbolic act shows that they have a commitment to lead a life free from sin.

John Mackay: Because leaven is often used to describe the spread of sin (it is used of hypocrisy in **Luke 12:1**, and of malice and wickedness in **1 Cor. 5:8**), it is often supposed that it is a symbol of evil. But the situation is not as simple as equating leaven with evil. Leavened bread, as a finished product representing the best the land, could be offered to the Lord as first fruits on the day of Pentecost (**Lev. 23:17**). Christ could use leaven as a symbol of the pervasive action of his kingdom (**Matt. 13:33**). Leaven was used as a symbol of development over time, of the pervasive spread of something. . .

“*cut off from Israel*” - indicates physical expulsion from the community as a judgment of God, though not necessarily implying death.

3. (:16) Prescribed Days for Holy Assembly instead of Work

“*And on the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you.*”

Douglas Stuart: A considerable amount of repetition occurs in this passage, with the effect that the instructions of **12:14–16** are closely paralleled by the instructions

of **12:17–20**. The latter is not an exact repetition of the former, but it contains many similarities. Thus the features of the Passover memorial of unleavened bread are stated twice, as a means of drilling into the mind of the hearer/reader the point: absolutely no yeasted bread could be eaten for the seven full days of the special Passover festival. To prevent even the slightest possibility that any sort of bread or breaded food in the house would become yeasted accidentally, all yeast had to be removed from all Israelite homes during the week-long festival.

Yeast is an appropriate symbol for sin because of the way it grows and spreads. As yeast ferments, it works its way all through the dough. Sin works the same way, which is why the Bible makes this comparison. Sin is always trying to extend its corrupting influence through a person's entire life. But God had something better in mind for his people. He was saving them to sanctify them; so before they left Egypt he wanted them to make a clean sweep.

Consider the way bread was made in those days. The Israelites didn't have yeast packets; they just used a pinch of the old dough. I remember something similar from my childhood. From time to time someone would give my mother instructions for making "friendship bread." She would start by mixing the ingredients. However, in order for the recipe to work, her friend had to give her some "starter"—a lump of dough with leaven in it. Once my mother added the starter, the dough would begin to rise. But that is exactly what God did not want the Israelites to do. In spiritual terms, the last thing he wanted them to do was to take a lump of dough from Egypt that would eventually fill them with the leaven of idolatry. Instead, he wanted them to leave behind all of Egypt's gods and goddesses—the old life of sin. One commentator explains it like this:

"Unleavened bread was a symbol of discontinuity. Leaven was a bit of dough kept unbaked from the previous day's baking and added to the next day's batch of dough so that it would start the fermentation process there also. It was used in much the same way as yeast would be now. When a batch of bread was being baked a relatively small quantity of leaven or yeast is added, and it works its way through the dough and causes it to rise. The instruction to banish leaven from their houses and to take none of it with them from Egypt was a gesture that symbolised leaving behind all Egyptian influences that might work their way through their lives and corrupt them."

God wanted to do something more than get his people out of Egypt; he wanted to get Egypt out of his people. He was saving them with a view to their sanctification; so he told them to make a clean sweep. He commanded them to get rid of every last bit of yeast, the old yeast of Egyptian idolatry. To further show that they were making a fresh start, God gave his people a new calendar. He said, "*This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year*" (v. 2). It was a new year to mark a new spiritual beginning.

B. (:17-20) Importance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Importance shown by:

1. (:17) Purpose of the Observance

You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance.”

2. (:18-19a) Duration of the Observance

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses;”

3. (:19b-20) Penalty for Violating the Observance

“for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”

John Mackay: ‘Aliens’ were strangers who had come to settle among Israel, but had not been accorded full citizen rights. Even they were expected to observe various divine requirements. In return for the privilege extended to them of dwelling with God’s people, they were expected to keep the law of the land, though they were not compelled to worship the Lord.

II. (:21-28) OBSERVANCE OF THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

A. (:21-23) Instructions for the Passover

1. (:21) Central Focus = Slaying of the Passover Lamb

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, ‘Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover lamb.’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: When the instructions for the preparation of the Passover (and the topically connected but subsequent enlargement of the Passover in the Feast of Unleavened Bread) had been completed, the elders were briefed on what each Israelite family was to do (v. 21).

2. (:22a) Critical Feature = Application of the Blood

“And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts;”

John Hannah: *hyssop* – a common bushy plant that grows on rocky surfaces. It was widely used in Israel’s rites of purification (cf. Lev. 14:4, 6, 49, 51-52; Num. 19:6, 18).

Walter Kaiser: that Israel would know the grounds and means of their deliverance and redemption: a sacrificed substitute and the blood of atonement in which the paschal

animal died in place of the firstborn of all who took shelter from the stroke of the destroyer.

John Davis: This plant has a rather pungent fragrant smell, a taste something like peppermint, and has masses of tiny white flowers. It is found commonly on rocks and terrace walls.

Douglas Stuart: Why should God himself “*go through the land to strike down the Egyptians*”? Did God need to get up close to a house before he could “see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and pass over that doorway”? . . .

God had already been identified as the direct cause of all the preceding plagues. They were not merely events that he set in motion at some early stage or natural events generally subject to his control. So it was with the death of the wicked. In this world that God has created, human life does not just happen by accident, and no one’s death is a random event. The Judge of all the earth always does right (**Gen 18:25**). And he is the Judge, the one directly and expressly involved. He personally saves every individual who places faith in him, and he personally oversees the ending of the existence of everyone whose life has not conformed to his will. He is not a deistic god but a personal God who relates personally, directly, and continually to his creation. Consistent with his nature and with the pattern already established in the plague accounts, God here personally oversaw the destruction of the Egyptian firstborn.

S Lewis Johnson: The application of the blood of the Passover lamb that was shed was to be made to the lintel and the two side posts. That was their duty. Now, it’s a striking fact that this is parallel with the salvation we have in Christ. Many believe in the shed blood but not in the sprinkled blood. They sometimes acknowledge that Christ has died for sinners but they have never applied that blood to their own heart. What a difference it makes when we believe not simply in the fact that Christ died for sinners but that he died for me, that we have sprinkled the blood upon our hearts in his grace. It wasn’t the lamb tied to the altar that saved. It wasn’t just the blood of a slain lamb in a basin that saved. It was the blood sprinkled that saved.

3. (:22b) Careful Forewarning

“and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.”

4. (:23) Contrasting Fulfillments

a. Death

“For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians;”

b. Deliverance

“and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.”

David Thompson: Now let’s be very clear on this point – God is not some love God

who will just love everyone into His heaven and into His eternity. If God does not see the blood of His Lamb applied to a person, that person will be destroyed. It is that clear. Either that sacrificial blood keeps you from God's wrath or God's wrath is on you.

B. (:24-27a) Importance of the Passover

1. (:24-25) Permanent Memorial

a. (:24) Observe it Forever

“And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever.”

b. (:25) Observe it Upon Entering the Promised Land

“And it will come about when you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, that you shall observe this rite.”

David Thompson: It is clear from this verse that God has a plan for Israel that includes land; specific land. It is said in this verse that God will give Israel land He has promised her. The dimensions of that land are first spelled out in **Genesis 15:18-21**.

2. (:26-27a) Perpetuated by Instructing Future Generations

“And it will come about when your children will say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' that you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'”

John Davis: It was very important not only to perpetuate the proper form of the ceremony, but it was incumbent upon the parents of these children to know its meaning and significance. The Church of Jesus Christ has long been plagued with those who have maintained the performance of certain rites, but the spiritual significance and symbolism of such rites have long since been lost and in most cases do not reflect personal experience. The concern which Moses showed over the meaning of an ordinance should be a warning to us that God's ordinances are to be perpetuated not only in correct form, but as representing personal experience and correct theology.

Douglas Stuart: From the point of view of the greater sweep of biblical revelation, the practice of teaching each new generation the meaning of the Passover helped guarantee the transmission of the *proto evangelium* throughout the historical continuum of the people of Israel until New Testament times, when the human-divine Lamb was slain once for all as part of the divine plan of redemption set in place before the earth as we know it existed. In other words, every Israelite properly instructed about the Passover should have been also partly prepared to expect a dying Messiah whose shed blood would provide a means of escape from death. It also contains something of a model of the biblical emphasis on the importance of parents' teaching children—a responsibility well understood before the advent of universal education but often neglected in present times in favor of professionalized education.

C. (:27b-28) Response of the People

1. (:27b) Worship

“And the people bowed low and worshiped.”

Ryken: Their response is significant because it reminds us of the entire theme of Exodus. God’s purpose in bringing Israel out of Egypt was to save a people for his glory, a people who would give him all the praise. Finally his people were starting to do that. The last we heard from them (**Exod. 5:21**), they were so discouraged that they had given up any hope of salvation; but now they were starting to worship God, even before he actually saved them. All they had was the promise of salvation, although it is worth noting that God had already started to speak about their salvation in the past tense. He said, *“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt”* (**Exod. 12:17**). A grammarian might call this a “perfect of confidence” or “prophetic perfect.” God was so absolutely confident of his power to save that as far as he was concerned, Israel was as good as saved already. And because God’s people believed this too, they started to give him the glory.

2. (:28) Obedience

*“Then the sons of Israel went and did so;
just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.”*

III. (:29-36) OBSERVANCE OF HOW THE PASSOVER PLAYED OUT

Look at the various roles of the different cast of characters:

A. (:29) Role of the Lord = Killing the First-Born as Promised – No Exceptions

“Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt,

- from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne*
- to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon,*
- and all the first-born of cattle.”*

Guzik: This plague was directed against two significant Egyptian gods. First, **Osiris** was the Egyptian god thought to be the giver of life. Second, this was against the supposed **deity of Pharaoh himself**, because his own household was touched (the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne).

David Thompson: When God purposes to do something, no one can stop God. No force, no power, no nation, no person can stop God. God has all power and authority and He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants to whomever He wants at any moment. Never is that more evident than when we come to this section of Scripture.

We come now to the final plague. Of all of the plagues, this one is the most destructive plague. It doesn’t take long and it doesn’t last long, but it is devastating and it does accomplish exactly what God wanted it to accomplish. It is a death plague and it is a plague that generates the emancipation of Israel.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN WILL WAS TO TAKE ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT AND HE SENT A FINAL PLAGUE AGAINST EGYPT THAT ACCOMPLISHED HIS SOVEREIGN WILL AND THIS DELIVERANCE WAS TO BE REMEMBERED BY A MEAL THAT REFLECTED ON THE SHED BLOOD OF A SACRIFICIAL LAMB.

B. (:30-33) Role of Pharaoh and the Egyptians = Giving Up Their Resistance

1. (:30) Distress

*"And Pharaoh arose in the night,
he and all his servants and all the Egyptians;
and there was a great cry in Egypt,
for there was no home where there was not someone dead."*

2. (:31-32) Dismissal

"Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, 'Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.'"

John Davis: The heart of Pharaoh and the will of Pharaoh had been broken. His spirit now changed from that of arrogance and resistance to grave concern, so much so that he called for Moses and Aaron in the night (v. 31). Without dialogue and long discussion, he simply stated that the children of Israel should leave. No qualifications, no concessions were part of his response; in fact, the departure was to take place on Moses' terms (v. 32). His concern for his own welfare is expressed in the last phrase of **verse 32**, "*Bless me also*," a most amazing request in the light of Pharaoh's assumed divinity. The God whose existence and power he had questioned in earlier times (5:2) he now asks to bless him.

Douglas Stuart: Re vv. 31-36 -- Israel left Egypt on sudden notice, freely, rapidly, and comparatively wealthy. In this section of the narrative Moses helps the reader understand four things: the suddenness of the exodus; why Pharaoh and the Egyptians finally gave full and even eager permission for the exodus; why the Passover observance so strongly emphasizes eating unyeasted bread; and how the Israelites financed their forty years in the wilderness, a fact that explains their eventual ability to contribute and/or purchase precious metals and other valuable materials for the tabernacle and its appurtenances.

Ryken: There are times when it seems like the day of salvation will never come. There were times when it must have seemed that way to the Israelites. For centuries they languished in captivity, bearing the bitter yoke of their slavery in Egypt. And when God finally decided to do something about it, things got worse instead of better because Pharaoh made them work even harder. Now, finally, Pharaoh seemed to be getting what he deserved. Still, the Israelites must have wondered how many plagues it was going to take. But while they waited, they had God's promise that his mighty hand would make Pharaoh drive Israel out of Egypt—not just let them go but actually drive them out

(Exod. 6:1 ; cf. 3:20). This is precisely what happened: “*During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me’*” (Exod. 12:31 , 32).

These verses are so heavy with irony that they almost fall through the Biblical page. Here is the most powerful man in the world being rudely awakened to face things totally out of his control, including the death of his eldest son. Pharaoh had told Moses that he never wanted to see his face again (Exod. 10:28). How ironic, then, for him to summon God’s prophet in the middle of the night, especially since Moses had told Pharaoh that one day his officials would come bow down at his feet and beg him to get out of Egypt (Exod. 11:8). Pharaoh had treated the Israelites as his slaves, refusing to recognize their rights. But here he calls them “Israelites,” thus recognizing their status as a free nation. How ironic! Pharaoh had refused to let the Israelites worship their God. In fact, he claimed that he didn’t even know who their God was (Exod. 5:2). How ironic, therefore, for him to tell the Israelites to “*worship the Lord*” (Exod. 12:31). The word “worship” is really the word “serve,” which is another irony, because the problem all along was Pharaoh insisting that the Israelites had to serve him.

3. (:33) Dread

“And the Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, ‘We shall all be dead.’”

C. (:34-36) Role of the Israelites -- Plundering the Egyptians

“So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders. Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The Israelites wrapped the unleavened lumps of dough in sacks made from their outer garments or mantles and slung them over their shoulders along with their kneading troughs and whatever other incidentals they planned to take with them.

John Mackay: They left Egypt like a victorious army that had stripped the vanquished of their spoil and were departing laden with booty. This accorded with the promise that the Lord had made long before to Abraham that his descendants would come out of the land of their enslavement ‘with great possessions’ (Gen. 15:14).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Why such an emphasis on using only unleavened bread during this seven day feast –

especially when leavened bread is so much more appetizing?

2) What is the significance of the application of the blood in our context today with respect to Jesus Christ being our Passover Lamb?

3) Are we communicating to our children the biblical convictions behind the theology of our Christian ordinances and lifestyle or have we degenerated into more of a lifestyle of religious tradition?

4) In what respect does God allow for His people to plunder the world today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Motyer: Beyond the fact that the feast constitutes an annual remembering of the exodus, it is given no further explanation, but what we are told is enough. Passover was of such outstanding importance that its annual remembrance had to be protected from becoming merely episodic, a day that goes as quickly as it comes. In this way, we can, without being too imaginative, ‘feel’ the concentration of minds that must have accompanied the Passover celebrations. The special days of assembly, the special diet for all the days, the additional sacrifices—all of this prompting over and over again the question, ‘Why are we doing this?’ and receiving the answer, ‘Because the Lord brought us out from Egyptian slavery’. And then the supplementary question, ‘How was it he brought us out?’ with its answer, ‘By the blood of the lamb.’ Thus remembrance was hammered home, not as a casual, annual raising of the hat to a past truth, but as a serious focusing of life’s program on a foundational event of miraculous proportions and its continuing and contemporary significance.

David Thompson:

Jesus Christ, Himself, celebrated the Passover meal with His own disciples and specifically said it was all about Him (**Matt. 26:19- 29**). The Apostle Paul, in the development of His grace theology, specifically said Christ is our Passover (**I Cor. 5:7**).

This was a very serious and sacred meal to God because it pointed to His Son and it was to be viewed that way and it was to be conducted very precisely. This was not a meal that was to be carried out lightly. In fact, right here in Exodus if a person did not follow the instructions precisely, he would be “*cut off*” from the congregation of Israel.

**THE PASSOVER MEAL IS TO BE CELEBRATED VERY PRECISELY
IN THE EXACT WAY GOD PRESCRIBED BECAUSE IT HAS
NATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION, SPECIFICALLY IN
POINTING TO THE SACRIFICE OF HIS OWN SON.**

FACT #1 – The Passover was to start on a specific day . **12:14a**

We may observe that **verse 14** opens with the fact that “*this day*” will be a memorial to you. Not this day might be or should be, but will be a memorial to you. Now in pointing to this day, he is not slighting the other days. It is just that the starting day was nonnegotiable and crucial to the entire Passover week.

The day the Passover Lamb was sacrificed and the day the blood was shed started a new Passover feast of unleavened bread. If you missed the starting day, then everything else would be misaligned in the nation’s relationship with God.

The Israelites were to leave Egypt on the 14th day of the first month (**12:18**) and if you got the start date wrong, then everything God demanded to take place was not possible.

There is a specific timing with God for everything. For example, the precise moment Jesus Christ was born came at a moment called by God “*the fullness of time*” (**Gal. 4:4**). When Paul talks about the entire prophetic plan of God, he refers to it as “*times*” and “*epochs*” (**I Thess. 5:1**).

There was one specific day that starts a relationship with God and the start date is the day a sinner appropriates the blood sacrifice to his own life by believing on Jesus Christ. The day Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross becomes the beginning point of anyone having a relationship with God. It is the start date. Miss this date and you do not have a relationship with God. You miss everything else if you don’t have this date.

The point is God has specific timing for everything and the day that memorializes His Son is not celebrated any day, but on the specific day He ordains.

FACT #2 – The Passover was to be celebrated as a permanent ordinance. **12:14b**

All subsequent Jewish generations were to celebrate this as a “*permanent ordinance*.” Now we will admit that Israel has done a pretty good job of celebrating the Passover and they do it every year. However, they were not to just go through physical motions; they were to carefully understand the meaning of it. They were to think back to the night when they put that blood on the doorpost and ate the lamb and the unleavened bread. God wanted Israel to remember how He delivered her from Egypt and she has done a good job of that. But she has missed a key point. She has missed the connection to Jesus Christ. The Passover is to be celebrated every year because God wanted His people to remember that He may be trusted to be the saving God and this clearly points to Jesus Christ as the Savior.

The problem today is Israel goes through the physical motions of the Passover today, but she has not connected the dots of the generational progression to Jesus Christ. The generational Biblical progression would lead to the birth of a Jewish Messiah who would be the deliverer and ultimate sacrificial lamb. This Messiah would be the One who would need to shed His blood to save Israel. Had the significance of the Passover been truly understood, Jesus Christ would not have been rejected.

FACT #3 – The Passover required that unleavened bread be eaten for seven days.
12:15

It is quite obvious from this verse that the matter of “*leaven*” is a major contextual deal. It is mentioned 8 times between **verses 14-20**. In fact, there are two different Hebrew words used in **verse 15** for leaven. The first is *seor* which refers to “old leaven” and the second is *hometz* that refers to sourness.

It was mandatory that no leavened bread be eaten and God was so emphatic about this point that He wanted it removed from the house so the temptation was not even there (**verse 15**). This certainly illustrates for us that as soon as the blood has been applied to our lives, we should quickly remove any leavened thing from our lives and house.

Now the actual leaven in Bible times referred to spores of yeast which we call “starter dough” today. It is fermented dough that was made in various ways. One way it was made was by airing the dough out in the sun and then to dip it in wine or vinegar and store it in a closed vessel until it went sour or fermented. Another way to make it was to knead flour and water, add salt and then boil this mixture into a kind of porridge and then leave it until it went sour. When leaven is added to bread, it causes it to rise and makes it fluffy and nice.

The big question is why was it so important to God that no leaven be eaten during the Passover week? There are at least three answers to the question:

First, to have an entire week when you are forced to make sure you do not eat leavened bread would mean you would have an entire week when you would have to think about the delivering power of God and that no impurity was tolerated in a relationship with God. People normally eat leavened bread. It tastes better and is more filling. So to not eat this bread for an entire week would mean you would reflect on what God did.

Second, leaven is a picture of sin. Leaven works silently and secretly and spreads and pollutes entirely and sin causes a person to be puffed up just as it causes dough to rise and be puffed up (**I Cor. 4:18-5:2**). Both Jesus and Paul referred to false teaching as being “*leaven*” (**Mt. 16:6-12; Gal. 5:1-9**). Also Jesus taught that Pharisaical hypocrisy is leaven (**Lk. 12:1**). Paul taught that people in the church who were in sin needed to be removed because a little leaven, leavens the whole lump (**I Cor. 5:6-8**).

Third, the Passover is pointing to Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ had no sin. For an entire week, a mind that understands the Passover should reflect on the fact that in order to provide a sacrifice that can save from sin, the sacrifice must be sinless. There can be no leaven at all in the sacrifice that can deliver us. God was so serious about this that he said if any partakes in an unworthy way, he is to be “*cut off from Israel*” (**v. 15**) and “*cut off from the congregation of Israel*” (**v. 19**). Now the first thing that comes to your mind when you read that the person is to be “cut off” is that the person is to be “banished” or “excommunicated” or “executed.” It obviously was very serious business to partake of leaven. In fact, if a person partook of it he was completely ridded from the society that was connected to God. Either by banishment or execution, the person who

partook of leavened bread was to be completely eliminated. Ultimately it would be God who would cut off the person from the blessings so this is serious business. This would immediately mean that this person was cut off from all potential blessings and benefits for Israel and many of those benefits were and still are yet future. Leaven puts an irreparable breach in the relationship with God. . .

FACT #4 – The Passover required that two days be deemed as very special. **12:16**

There were to be two separate days of corporate, assembly worship. The two special days were the first day and the seventh or last day. In a true relationship with God, there must be corporate worship. There must be a corporate gathering together by the people of God. For the church, this is done on the first day of the week. The key factor of both of these days is no work at all was to be done. Now what is the significance of this? Why was it so important to stop any form of work? The answer is because no works can save anyone. Works could not save Israel and they cannot save us. So all work was to stop and the congregation was to gather together to think about the blood of the Lamb that saved them and the fact that nothing leavened can exist in a relationship with God.

Since we know that Jesus Christ is our Passover, we must wonder about the significance of two days. What would be the two days that would be critical to Israel's salvation and our salvation? There are several different possibilities:

- 1) The two days could refer to the first coming of Christ to Israel and the second coming of Christ to Israel. He came the first time and she rejected Him; the next time she will receive.
- 2) The two days could refer to the two main delivering days for Jewish believers, one will be the Rapture when Jews in Christ will be taken to glory and the other will be His second coming when the Jews will be given all blessings in her land.
- 3) The two days could refer to the day Jesus Christ died and the day He arose. He finished the work necessary to save us. In fact, He cried out that very point *"it is finished."*

The fact that no work was to be done clearly teaches He has done all the work necessary to save us. There is no work for us to do. Those two days did it all. On the first day and the seventh day there was to be a holy worship ceremony that featured no work and it also featured every single person eating and partaking of unleavened bread. In order to be saved, every single person must believe on Jesus Christ.

FACT #5 – The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be celebrated on the precise day of deliverance. **12:17**

The precise day of deliverance is a sacred day. To save a nation or an individual, the focus is to be on the shed blood of a sacrificial lamb and the nonexistence of any

leaven. In other words, in order for God to save, there must be the substitutionary death of the Lamb who is without blemish and without leaven. There can be no sin in a relationship with God. Since we are all sinners, the only way we may enter into a relationship with God is via a sinless sacrifice. That is Jesus Christ.

The word “*hosts*” (v. 17) is a word that indicates that God wants His people to be a conquering military army and force. All of this is contingent upon them obeying His Word and in not being leavened. The emphasis is that the focus on the shed blood and eating unleavened bread was on the very day of deliverance.

This was to be a perpetual ordinance. There was to be a reminder that God delivered His people on the day they ate unleavened bread.

Again we must see the failure here of not only Israel but most people to connect this to Jesus Christ. This all points to Jesus Christ. It is true that Israel remembers her deliverance from Egypt every year at the Passover, but she has missed the full meaning as it relates to her eternal deliverance. Jesus Christ was the spotless, unleavened Lamb and when we partake of Him, by faith we are forever delivered from our sin. This is an “*eternal ordinance*.”

FACT #6 – The Passover is so important that the elements are carefully restated.
12:18-20

This is basically a restatement of things with the addition of the fact that no matter where you live or who you are with, this Passover which featured the unleavened bread was to be celebrated.

(Reality #1) - Unleavened Bread was to be eaten for seven straight days. **12:18**
It is clear that the 14th through the 21st of the month were the specific days in which this was to be honored. The emphasis of seven days speaks of complete removal of leaven. Israel’s program will not be complete until her sin is completely removed by Jesus Christ. It is interesting that Daniel leaves one final unit of seven until everlasting righteousness is brought to Israel (**Dan. 9:24, 27**).

(Reality #2) - No leaven is to be found in a house for all seven days. **12:19a**

(Reality #3) - Who ever eats any leaven during this time is to be cut off from the congregation. **12:19b**

It does not matter if one is a native or alien. No leaven may exist in a relationship with God. There are no exemptions to this rule.

(Reality #4) - No leaven is ever to be eaten during this time in all your dwellings. **12:20**
It did not matter where a person lived; this needed to be obeyed or one would be cut off from God. Any relationship with God demands complete removal of all sin.

Paul Archibald: A Day of Remembering

First Point: What Does the Passover Mean?

1) Details of the Feast: On the 14th day of the 1st month of the new year, Israel began a 7-day feast in which leaven was removed both from the bread and the houses of God's people. No work was to be done – beyond basic food-preparation. Holy convocations were held on the 1st and last days.

2) Details of the Sacrifice: On the 14th day of the 1st month, an unblemished lamb (or goat) was to be sacrificed. Its blood was daubed on the door-frames by dipping hyssop into a basin with the lamb's blood. The lamb was roasted and eaten in total, with unleavened bread, bitter herbs – in haste, dressed for hasty travel. Later, the Jews would add wine and the singing of **Pss. 113-118** to the rite. The sacrifice was to be done in the Temple as well (**Dt. 16:2; Ezra 6:19ff; 2 Chron. 30, 35**).

3) Significance of the Celebration: The eating of bread implies life. Unleavened bread implies both haste and purity – separation from the leaven of sin in a people set free to begin a new life as God's covenant nation, worshipping & serving Him as a "holy priesthood." To do this, their sins had to be dealt with. The sacrifice of the unblemished Passover Lamb & its blood on the door-frames pointed to Christ's sacrifice to atone for our sins & free us from bondage to Satan, sin & death. Those set free in this way can then enjoy a fellowship meal in God's presence. The Lord's Supper shows the fulfillment of these things in Christ by replacing the bloody sacrifice with bread & wine.

Second Point: How Do We Remember the Passover?

1) A Permanent Ordinance: The passage stresses that this is a day for remembering, given as a permanent ordinance (**vss. 14, 17**), for "*you and your children forever*." The Lord's Supper, which continues the Passover in NT form, also stresses doing this in "*remembrance of Me*" (**1 Cor. 11:24, 25**) ... "*until He comes*" (**1 Cor. 11:26**).

2) A Present Reality: Remembering is not just recalling historical facts, but making the past present & effective in our lives today. We show that this is so when the sacrament causes us to want to worship God (**Ex. 12:27**); when we are filled with gratitude at the reminder of God's grace, the saving work of Christ, & the level of communion we enjoy in His presence; and when we desire all the more to live the new, consecrated life in obedience to God's Word – as we see in **v. 28**.

3) Teaching Our Children: When past redemptive-history is a present reality in our lives, the sacraments (as visible Word & therefore a means of grace) cause us to want to share the joy of salvation with others – especially our children. The children are expected to ask what the celebration means to their parents, and the parents to explain both the great & mighty deeds of God, and what that means for us – forgiveness, communion with God, and a life of service to Him. If it is not a present reality to us, we will have trouble conveying all that to our children. As the children learn about the past facts & the present implications, the ordinance truly becomes a permanent memorial down through the generations.

TEXT: Exodus 12:37-51

TITLE: CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS – MORE PASSOVER
INSTRUCTIONS

BIG IDEA:

THE CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM (WHICH IS OPEN TO ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE) MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS ACCORDING TO HIS INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

God showed His remarkable faithfulness to His promise to His servant Abram regarding His elect people, *“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.”* (15:13-14)

He gave explicit instructions how He wanted His people to memorialize and celebrate their deliverance from Egypt. This type of redemption is now celebrated by Christians every time they partake of the Lord's Supper. We are thankful for our salvation on an individual basis; but we also come together corporately to celebrate the Lord's faithfulness to His people as a unified body.

Douglas Stuart: This section of the story describes the very beginning of the exodus travel, from the primary departure city to the first stopping point. It tells the approximate number of nascent soldiers involved and indicates that, already, many people had become Israelites by faith choice rather than by birth. It was a full exodus with nothing left behind, and the main food of the traveling nation was, of necessity, unleavened bread. The exodus brought to an end 430 years of resident alien status for Israel in Egypt, the last eighty years or so being years of slavery. God paid special attention to his people that night, and in response his people of all future generations were expected to come to pay special attention to him on its anniversary.

John Mackay: This was the decisive first stage in their liberation. They leave Egypt geographically, but it is not till the Crossing of the Sea that they are completely prised from the grip of the Egyptians. Thereafter the problem is to remove Egyptian ways and thinking from them.

(:37-38) PROLOGUE – FAITHFUL TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

A. (:37) Beginning of the Exodus

1. Route

“Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth,”

David Thompson: They met at a city known as Rameses and they traveled to a place known as Succoth some 30 plus miles away. If we say that the people could travel at 2-3 miles per hour, which is realistic, this would take about 12-15 hours to make this trip. Now probably most of the people were excited and were looking forward to moving to their new home land. Most of the people were probably expecting God to inform them about their next move. But what God does, as soon as they are out of the land, is inform them, don't you ever forget, in all your generations, about the Passover. God says you need to be very careful to remember that the shed blood of the sacrificial Lamb is the thing that kept you from the death penalty. That shed blood is the reason you are alive and have a relationship with Me.

2. Headcount

"about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children."

Wiersbe: the total number of Jews must have been about 2 million.

This huge number of people would have presented significant logistical problems (of food, water, protection, etc.) as they traveled through a barren desert region. Supernatural resources and care on the part of the Lord were required.

B. (:38) Breakdown of the Entourage

1. Multitude of People – both Jews and non-Jews

"And a mixed multitude also went up with them,"

Wiersbe: Some of this crowd may have been Egyptians who had married Jews, contrary to God's law; others were probably Egyptians who were frightened, impressed with Jehovah's power (**Ex. 9:20**), and wanted to benefit from being with God's chosen people. Perhaps they thought more judgments might fall on the land and they wanted to escape them.

Bruce Hurt: The presence of this mixed multitude was like "leaven" and as Paul warned in the NT *"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?"* (**1 Cor 5:6**). These Gentiles were like leaven among the Israelites and spread like leaven becoming the source of unrest which led to the Israelites themselves beginning to grumble about manna among the Israelites as described in Numbers.

Cole: *A mixed multitude.* The Hebrew says 'swarm', from the same root as that used in **8:21** to describe the plague of gadflies. These people would either be the result of intermarriage, or else kindred Semitic groups who seized the opportunity to escape. **Numbers 11:4** uses a different derogatory word to describe the same people. On various occasions in the Pentateuch (as in this instance from Numbers) this group is seen as the occasion of various sins within Israel. If they have no real roots in Israel's religious traditions, this would not be surprising.

2. Multitude of Livestock

"along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock."

Douglas Stuart: The livestock had constituted the last “hostage” group in Pharaoh’s plan to keep the Israelites from leaving Egypt permanently, the last sticking point in the bargaining process that had played back and forth throughout the sequence of plagues (10:24–27). They are mentioned here, however, not merely because their presence among the departing Israelites indicated total victory over Pharaoh but as indication that the exodus constituted a complete emigration from Egypt of an entire people and their economic assets. The Israelites then made much use of their small and large cattle during the years in the wilderness, especially in connection with the sacrificial system (e.g., Exod 22:30; Lev and Num, *passim*).

I. (:39-42) FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE MEMORIALIZED

A. (:39) Diet of Unleavened Bread – Urgency of Departure

“And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.”

B. (:40-41) Duration of the Bondage in Egypt

1. (:40) Marked by the Time Spent in Egypt

“Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Appropriately, now that the Exodus had begun, the narrator took a moment to reflect on the total Egyptian experience.

Currid: on the 400 versus 430 - The discrepancy between the two figures may easily be explained by the Genesis figure simply being a round number, or one that is the minimum figure, that is, at least **400** years. The number in the present verses would then be the specific figure for the length of the sojourn. The fact that **430** years is the specific figure is confirmed in **Ex 12:41** where it says the Hebrews left Egypt, literally, ‘*on this selfsame day*’ (to the very day).

2. (:41) Marked by the Day of Deliverance

“And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.”

Douglas Stuart: it would be a radical change for people acclimated to one place and culture for so many generations to leave suddenly for a journey to a place none of them had ever even laid eyes on. Thus the Israelite departure in faith for a land of promise serves as an analogy for the pilgrimage of all God’s saints from life in this world to their ultimate destination in the promised but as yet unexperienced next.

C. (:42) Dedication to This Memorial of God's Faithfulness

"It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations."

John Mackay: Verse 42 is a transitional verse, which plays on the word 'keep vigil' to explain why the Passover was celebrated at night. Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honour the Lord for the generations to come (12:42). The phrase behind 'kept vigil' is 'a night of watch-keepings' and is found only here. The Lord had kept guard over his people, and in thankful response they are to remember this 'to honour the Lord' (literally, 'for the Lord'). The reciprocal nature of the covenant bond between the Lord and Israel is brought out by the repetition of the same phrase in respect of the actions of both.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: That night was to be observed by all future generations as a "Watchnight Service" (Cole, p. 113), for on that night the Lord "preserved" or "kept" the destroyer from touching them (v. 42). There is a clear play on the word *samar* ("watch," "preserve," "keep vigil"); as Yahweh watched over Israel that night, so Israel was to watch for Yahweh by keeping this feast perpetually (cf. v. 17).

II. (:43-49) FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE CELEBRATED ACCORDING TO SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

A. (:43-45) Instructions Regarding Participation – Who is Eligible?

1. (:43) No Foreigner

*"And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,
'This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it;'"*

John Davis: This foreigner or stranger would be one who retained his status as a foreigner by remaining uncircumcised and perhaps by not participating in other covenant practices.

2. (:44) Circumcised Slaves

*"but every man's slave purchased with money,
after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it."*

David Thompson: Now this O.T. mandate does raise a question about the female slave. What about the girls? How would a girl be connected to God if the mandate is circumcision? We must remember that in the O.T. economy, the female is always connected to the male. If a woman were married, she is connected to her husband. If a woman was not married, she was connected to her father. So if the "male" species made a decision that I am going to be circumcised so I can have a relationship with the God of Israel, it would affect the whole family.

Douglas Stuart: The main emphasis of this section is clearly circumcision. It is circumcision that constitutes the external demonstration of acceptance into the covenant

community and therefore circumcision that qualifies one and one's family to partake of the Passover meal.

3. (:45) No Sojourner or Hired Servant

"A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it."

Douglas Stuart: A "temporary resident" (*tôšāb*) would be excluded from the Passover because he or she would be someone without faith in Yahweh who was simply visiting or passing through or staying for a few days or weeks to help with some sort of project. A "hired worker" (*śakîr*) would be disqualified because he or she would be someone without faith in Yahweh who was merely doing some work on a household's property and staying on the property temporarily while doing so. Neither term refers to a permanent employee or permanent resident.

B. (:46) Instructions Regarding Partaking

1. Keep it In a Single House

"It is to be eaten in a single house;"

2. Keep it Inside

"you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house,"

3. Keep it Intact

"nor are you to break any bone of it."

David Thompson: Now this entire meal was to be eaten inside the house. It was to be eaten by the family at a family setting in the house. There are at least three reasons why:

Reason #1 - Because this best memorialized the fact that the final plague demanded that the family be inside the house, protected by the blood. All had to be in the house and protected by the blood.

Reason #2 - Because by eating this meal inside, it would certainly prevent unqualified people from eating it. No uncircumcised person was to eat and by eating this meal inside this could be regulated. No one could sneak into the house and partake in an unworthy manner.

Reason #3 - Furthermore, this was a sacred meal and you did not want pieces of food dropped outside for animals to eat.

Now this certainly teaches us some things about the sacredness of the Lord's Supper. It is to be celebrated inside the house of God by the family of God at a corporate family gathering. No one was to have their own little private Passover feast any more than one is to have his own little private Lord's Supper.

Douglas Stuart: The concern apparently stems rather from God's desire that the lamb or goat kid adequately symbolize the body of Christ crucified (**John 1:36**) and,

subsequently, the unity of the body of Christ in the sense of the church. Thus even the Old Testament covenant community was called to think of themselves as a unity, symbolized by a common meal that could not be divided except as portions of its flesh were eaten: the skeleton remained unified to indicate their unity, a present fact fully to be realized in the future by the work of the Savior on the cross. Further symbolizing this unity, the whole community must eat the Passover as a common meal shared by every true Israelite on the same evening.

Oswalt: Verses 46 and 47 underscore four other features that were evidently important enough to be stressed for the future Passover celebrations.

- (1) While the Passover was to be celebrated by the whole community,
- (2) it was to be celebrated in individual “houses,” that is, in the context of the extended family. Here is a statement of the importance of the family for theological education, as well as the Old Testament’s remarkable blend of the communal and the individual. It was to be a national celebration, but provision was made so that everyone was a participant; there were no spectators.
- (3) Furthermore, the Passover lamb was not for mere eating, so that some could be saved for “leftovers” or could be sold or even given away to others; and
- (4) no bone of the lamb could be broken. Perhaps the prohibition of breaking the bones (see the application to Jesus in **John 19:36**) relates to this same point. One could not divide up the carcass, cutting some off for later.

C. (:47-49) Instructions Regarding Participation

1. (:47) Entire Congregation of Israel

“All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this.”

2. (:48-49) Extended to Circumcised Strangers

a. (:48a) Native Status for Circumcised Strangers

“But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land.”

b. (:48b) Necessity of Circumcision

“But no uncircumcised person may eat of it.”

John Hannah: The several regulations for the Passover were apparently necessitated by the non-Israelites who joined the Exodus and had identified with the religion of the Hebrews. If a man did not identify with the covenant promises by the rite of circumcision he could not celebrate the Passover (**12:44, 48-49**). The feast was to be centered in the home and observed by the entire community (cf. **vv. 3, 6, 19**).

c. (:49) No Partiality

*“The same law shall apply to the native
as to the stranger who sojourns among you.”*

(:50-51) EPILOGUE – FAITHFUL TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

A. (:50) Response of Obedience

*“Then all the sons of Israel did so;
they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.”*

B. (:51) Reminder of Deliverance

*“And it came about on that same day that the LORD brought the sons of Israel
out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we understand the Lord’s Supper to be a celebration of God’s faithfulness?
- 2) What rules must we follow in the observance of communion?
- 3) How do we regulate who participates in communion?
- 4) In our emphasis on an individual personal relationship with Jesus Christ, are we neglecting the biblical emphasis on the community of the saints?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Israel’s exodus from Egypt is mentioned many places in Scripture as the greatest demonstration of Jehovah’s power in the history of Israel. The prophets point to the Exodus as proof of God’s love for Israel (**Jer. 2:1-8; Hosea 11:1**). They also refer to the Exodus when they speak about the Jews’ deliverance from Babylonian Captivity (**Jer. 16:14; 23:7-8**). Isaiah promises a future regathering of Israel to their land and compares it to the Exodus (**Isa. 11:15; 43:14-21; 51:9-11**). Frequently, Isaiah mentions a “*highway*” that will facilitate this future exodus of the Jews from the Gentile nations (**11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 62:10**).

Ryken: Passover was a feast to remember. It was a freedom festival—an annual reminder of the way God brought his people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. To celebrate Passover was to recall God’s great work of salvation. The Israelites ate bitter herbs to remember the bitterness of their captivity. They sacrificed a lamb to remember that God had provided a perfect sacrifice as a substitute for their sins.

Then they took the lamb's blood and painted it on the door. When God saw the blood, he restrained his hand of judgment, and death passed over. The Israelites were saved by the blood of the lamb, the mark of distinction that separated the redeemed from the damned. For the next seven days they ate unleavened bread, which represented holiness and thus symbolized their decisive break with the old life of sin. Passover demonstrated what God had done in history to rescue his people from slavery, death, and sin.

At the same time, the feast pointed forward to the coming of Christ. Its details set the pattern for the salvation that God would accomplish through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. To use the technical term for it, Passover was a *type*. A type is a pattern, like the key on an old printing press that strikes a letter on the page. In the Bible, a type is a person, practice, or event from the Old Testament that sets the pattern for salvation in Christ. . .

Passover is a type. It shows the pattern of salvation, in which the blood of a perfect sacrifice serves as a substitute for our sins. Just as the Israelites were delivered from death by looking to the blood on their doorposts, so we also are saved by looking to the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. And then, like the Israelites, we are called to sweep out the old leaven of sin and live in a way that is pure and pleasing to God. The Apostle Paul was referring to these "types" of salvation when he wrote, "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth*" (1 Cor. 5:7b , 8). . .

God wanted this feast to be celebrated properly, down to the last detail, because he wanted to give his people a full picture of salvation. Passover was a meal to share, a meal to eat, and a meal to explain.

SHARING PASSOVER

Passover was a meal to share with all God's people. God said to Moses, "*The whole community of Israel must celebrate it*" (Exod. 12:4). This is something God had said from the beginning of his instructions for Passover: "*Tell the whole community of Israel that ... each man is to take a lamb for his family*" (Exod. 12:3); "*all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight*" (Exod. 12:6). This was partly a matter of public safety. The destroyer was coming, and the firstborn sons would only be safe if they were covered by the blood of a lamb. So God said, "*Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning*" (Exod. 12:22b).

To be safe, all the Israelites needed to celebrate the first Passover. But even after death passed over, they all needed to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God told them to "*hold a sacred assembly*" (Exod. 12:16), which meant the entire community was to gather for worship (see also Lev. 23; Num. 28–29). If anyone refused to participate, he was cut off from Israel (Exod. 12:15, 19). God also told his people that during Passover they all needed to stay up and keep watch: "*Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep*

vigil to honor the LORD” (v. 42). Passover was a meal to be shared, a celebration for the whole family of God.

The reason it was necessary for all God’s people to celebrate Passover was because they were all rescued together. **Exodus 12** closes with this summary: “*All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions*” (vv. 50, 51). Since salvation was something they shared, it was only right for them to join together for the feast that praised God for the grace they had all received.

In America most Christians think of salvation in individual terms. Evangelicals often talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Christianity is about what God has done for *me*. However, we also believe in the communion of saints, which means that we all have something in common. In salvation God has joined us together with Jesus Christ.

This is why, when the New Testament explains the great doctrines of salvation, it almost always speaks in the plural. To give just one example, consider Paul’s words to Titus: “*When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life*” (**Titus 3:4–7**). Regeneration, justification, sanctification, glorification—together we share every aspect of salvation. We are all sinners in need of a Savior, we were all included with Christ when he died on the cross and rose from the grave, and one day we will all be transformed into his glorious image.

Since God wants to gather a people for his glory, corporate worship is an essential part of his saving plan. This explains why it is absolutely vital for Christians to be faithful in attending public worship. It is good to worship God in private. Every Christian should maintain some regular routine of personal prayer, praise, and Bible study. But we cannot be Christians on our own. It is of the very essence of our Christianity that we worship God together, praising him for the salvation we share in Christ. A Christian who decides that it is not necessary to attend church is in grave spiritual danger. As the Scripture says, “*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another*” (**Heb. 10:25**).

Because it was a meal to share, Passover helped unite God’s people into one community. All the Israelites kept the same feast at the same time in all their homes. We do something similar in the church whenever we celebrate the sacrament of Communion. Sharing the Lord’s Supper is a powerful symbol of our unity and community in Christ. The Apostle Paul explained this to the Corinthians, who sometimes had trouble getting along with one another. He asked them, “*Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*” (**1 Cor. 10:16**). The answer was “Yes!” In some mysterious way, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, Christians who eat the bread and drink the cup are spiritually connected to

Christ. At the same time, we are also connected to one another. To have union with Christ is to have communion with his church. So Paul went on to say, “*Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*” (v. 17). Like Passover, the Lord’s Supper is a meal to be shared—a tangible demonstration of our community in Christ.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Passover was a meal for all God’s people to share. Everyone was included—every man, woman, and child in Israel. However, some people were excluded. Here again God’s instructions were very specific: “*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner is to eat of it ... a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it’*” (Exod. 12:43, 45). To be blunt, God discriminated. Passover was for his people, and for his people only.

The question about who was eligible for Passover came up almost immediately because the Israelites were not the only ones who left Egypt. The Bible says, “*Many other people went up with them*” (Exod. 12:38). The King James Version calls them a “*mixed multitude*,” meaning that they came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Some of them may have been Egyptians who feared the God of Israel. Others undoubtedly came from other tribes—fellow-slaves who seized their opportunity to escape when they saw the Israelites walking into the desert. Thus the question naturally arose as to whether they were allowed to keep the feast.

The basic answer was no. Passover was exclusive. It was only for the people of God, and not for outsiders. Foreigners and migrant workers were not allowed to keep the feast. The reason was that they were not members of the covenant community. To use the contemporary term for it, they were not believers. This was not a matter of race but of grace. These outsiders had not yet put their faith in the God of Israel, and thus they had no right to receive the atonement that he provided through the Passover lamb. It was not appropriate for them to receive the sign of salvation because they were not trusting in the blood of the lamb.

The church maintains the same restriction at the Lord’s Table. As we have seen, there is a connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper. Both sacraments are exclusive. Like Passover, the Lord’s Supper is not for everyone. It is only for those who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that “*whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself*” (1 Cor. 11:27–29). At the very least, these verses mean that Communion is not for those who do not know Christ. It is inappropriate and even dangerous to participate in Communion without receiving Jesus Christ as Lord.

For this reason, it is necessary for ministers to warn some people not to receive the sacrament by saying something like this: “It is my duty to tell you that the Lord’s Supper is for the people of God. It is for those—and for those only—who have

confessed their sins, who have publicly professed their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, and who remain members in good standing of a gospel-preaching church.” The old Scottish Presbyterians called this “fencing the table.” The purpose of giving such a warning is not to keep people away from Christ, but to make it clear that the only way to receive salvation is by coming to him in faith. We cannot have communion with Christ unless we have faith in his blood. Telling people this helps clarify their spiritual condition. When a minister draws the line between those who are inside and those who are outside the church, it helps people who have not yet made a commitment to Christ to recognize that they are not yet saved.

There is a way to be saved, however, and that is to come to God in faith. The way people did that in the time of Moses was by receiving the sign of circumcision and thus joining the covenant community—the people of God. Once people were circumcised, whether they were Israelites or not, they were eligible to share Passover. God said, “*Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him*” (**Exod. 12:44**). . .

Slaves were not the only non-Israelites who were allowed to join the covenant community, however. This privilege was also extended to “*aliens*,” or foreigners who made their permanent home with God’s people. The Old Testament granted aliens a number of important rights and protections. They were permitted to glean grain from the edges of a farmer’s field (**Lev. 19:10; 23:22**). They could seek safety in a city of refuge (**Num. 35:15**). However, they were not allowed to celebrate Passover unless they were circumcised. God told Moses, “*An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’S Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you*” (**Exod. 12:48, 49**). Circumcision was the prerequisite for Passover.

These regulations show that God has always offered salvation to everyone. No one has ever been excluded from coming to God simply on the basis of race. Even in the Old Testament, God provided a way for outsiders to come into his family and receive his saving grace. The way to come was by faith in the God of Israel, and circumcision was the public way of trusting in his promise of salvation. Already in the Old Testament God was declaring his glory to the nations. His people—both native-born Israelites and a “*mixed multitude*” of others—were saved by grace through faith.

Here again Passover helps explain what the Lord’s Supper means for the church. Communion is an international feast, a meal to be shared by all nations. Jesus said, “*Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*” (**Matt. 8:11**). This promise was about the way the gospel would gather the nations. Jesus was saying that those who were outside would come in to share God’s feast. This promise is fulfilled whenever Christians from various tribes and nations sit down to share the Lord’s Supper.

There is one requirement, however, and that is personal faith in Jesus Christ. This is absolutely essential. There is more to Communion than simply showing up at church and sitting down to receive the Lord’s Supper. In order to receive it properly, a person must be baptized and make a public confession of faith in Christ. There was a similar

requirement for resident aliens who lived in Israel during the time of the Old Testament. They derived many benefits from living with the people of God. However, salvation required something more than just living next door to an Israelite. It demanded a total personal commitment to God, signified by circumcision. Only aliens who had made this faith commitment were eligible to receive Passover, with all the benefits it symbolized: deliverance from death, atonement for sin, and strength for holiness. The same principle holds true for the church. There are many spiritual benefits to attending church, but salvation is not one of them. What God requires is faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, and only those who believe and are baptized are eligible fully to commune with God's people.

THE PASSOVER MEAL

Because Passover was a feast, obviously it was meant to be eaten. First the Israelites ate the lamb—the whole lamb. God had said to Moses, “Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it” (**Exod. 12:9 , 10**). At the end of **chapter 12** , the Lord added, “*It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones*” (**v. 46**). . .

What is certain is that the command not to break any bones helps confirm that Jesus is the lamb of our salvation. Jesus and the two men who were crucified with him were nailed to their crosses the day before Passover. Some of the religious leaders wanted to make sure that their bodies were taken down before the holy feast, and in order to hasten death, they asked the Romans to break the legs of their victims. According to John, who witnessed these events, “*The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs*” (**John 19:32, 33**). Jesus' bones were left unbroken, and as John reflected on this, he recognized that “*These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken’*” (**v. 36**). This assures us that Jesus really is the perfect sacrifice for our sin—unblemished and unbroken. . .

This festival was to be observed even after the Israelites reached the Promised Land. Once they settled down, they would be able to eat bread with yeast because they would have plenty of time for the dough to rise. But every year at Passover they would eat bread without yeast as a testimony of their salvation. The bread would remind them how quickly they had to leave Egypt, and since the yeast represented sin, it would also remind them to lead holy lives. God did not want to find any trace of the old Egyptian sins in Israel.

John Mackay: The Exodus from Egypt is the Old Testament paradigm of divine salvation. The Passover, which commemorates that salvation, is central to the Biblical account of what happened. The primary feature of the narrative is the sovereignty of God's grace. He is the one who is in control of all that happens, and it is his sovereign mark that distinguishes his people from the Egyptians. It is the nature of that mark that discloses how it is that the Lord acts in salvation. On previous occasions he had

distinguished between his people and those of Pharaoh without any special sacred ceremony to express that difference. Now the mark of the sacrificial blood is divinely appointed to distinguish between Israelite and Egyptian and to prevent the death of the firstborn of Israel. Without that blood Israel would have been on the same footing as Egypt, and their firstborn would have been struck dead by the destroyer. The offering of the Passover sacrifice as signified by the shed blood was the means of effecting atonement whereby the Israelites were divinely set apart and brought into a new, saving relationship with God.

Within that relationship the people are permitted to consume the sacrificial meal. This is their privilege as those who have been set apart by God into a living bond of fellowship with him. That is why there are such specific regulations to avoid misappropriation of any of the meat and to stipulate who may eat the Passover. It is only those who are divinely distinguished as God's people that are given the right to enjoy fellowship with him.

The Old Testament Passover has now been consummated in the self-offering of Jesus, of whom Paul declared that "*Christ, our Passover [lamb], has been sacrificed*" (**1 Cor. 5:7**). Undoubtedly Paul's use of Passover symbolism looks back to the Last Supper as a Passover meal in which Jesus presented himself as the Passover lamb whose shed blood ensures that his people will escape the death to which their sin has condemned them. Paul then links the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (**1 Cor. 5:8**), urging that what now corresponds to it is that believers live a life of holiness, in sincerity and truth.

Oswalt: The fundamental point that is made about the Passover, as it was to be practiced in the future, was that no one could participate in it who was not a full participant in the covenant as indicated by circumcision (**12:44, 48**). Thus, the significance of Passover is not merely that it is an "Independence Day" celebration. It is something much deeper. Why is there an "Independence Day"? It is because of God's historic faithfulness. He is "true," true to his ancient covenant with Abraham. But it is also a testimony to the fact that God's goal is not merely deliverance; it is relationship. God was calling his people into a life-changing relationship with himself, and every spring the Israelites were called upon to remember that fact. God had called Abraham to "*serve me faithfully and live a blameless life*" (i.e., "all that a human was made to be") (**Gen 17:1**), and the acceptance of the mark of circumcision was Abraham's testimony to his willingness to live in a relationship like that (see above on **4:24–26**). Persons unwilling to be part of such a relationship could not enter into the Passover celebration.

Grant Van Leuven:

Main Point of Text: To partake of the rights of citizenship with God's covenant people; you must be a covenant citizen.

Sermon Point: Follow the rules of God's house.

Move 1: You must be a member of Christ's Church to partake of His family's

benefits. Non-Jews may not partake: **Vss. 45, 48b (Gen. 17).** First sacrament (initiation) required for the second (commemoration). Foreigners forbidden: **Vss. 43, 47.** Visitors can't be treated as citizens. **Joshua 5.**

Move 2: **If you were not born into Christ's Church, you may still become a member of it. Vs. 44.** “*at the time*”. Once so, entirely a Jew: **vs. 48a.** At birth. Or at conversion. All may become full-fledged citizens. **Vs. 49:** one law for all; any who so desire can be Israelites! Even servants (**vs. 44**).

Move 3: **Jesus changed the details of Church membership, but His rule and rules still remain. Vs. 46:** type of true Lamb (**Jn. 19:33-36; Ps. 34:40**). As in **Heb. 3:6:** Son rules over God's house (us!). Zeal for house consumes Him! (**Jn 2:17/Ps. 69:9**).

Did not do away with corporate signs. God's house under new management. Was servant, now Son. Same house/rule/signs: **1 Pt. 2:9 (Ex. 19:6); Acts 7:38; 1 Cor. 10:4, 9; Gal. 3:8, 16 (Gen. 15:5), 28-29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Phil. 3:3; Col 2:11-12.**

Sacraments adjust to Christ: no blood. Still signs of cleansing/citizenship/expansion! Christ commands baptism of His children (**Mt. 28:18-20**). And does not excuse His people from His Table (Lk. 22:19). See Ps. 116:13-14, 18, Rev. 19:9.

Move 4: **Only God makes the rules for His house.** God is the One saving His people: Vs. 51. So He makes the rules for this new people's identity (**Gen. 17; Ex. 12**). It is His Passover (**12:11, 27**). To be done His way: **vs. 48a, 49** (not only what and how, but by whom). And to be done: **vs. 50 (Gen. 17).** Not option: **Ex. 4:24-26; 1 Cor. 11:30.**
<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/122131433.pdf>

TEXT: Exodus 13:1-16

TITLE: APPRECIATING OUR DELIVERANCE AND REDEMPTION –
REMEMBER . . . CELEBRATE . . . PERPETUATE

BIG IDEA:

**SYMBOLIC ACTS OF COMMEMORATION HELP GOD’S PEOPLE
APPRECIATE THEIR DELIVERANCE AND REDEMPTION**

INTRODUCTION:

Having explained the Passover, Moses now goes into more detail about 2 observances that will help God’s people remember, celebrate and perpetuate God’s great work of deliverance and redemption. The structure of this section is a little peculiar because the first 2 verses are more oriented towards the second of the two observances. But the entire section is tied together by God’s sovereign rights over those whom He has delivered and redeemed for himself.

John Oswalt: **Festival of Unleavened Bread and Dedication of the Firstborn (13:1–16).** In this section, God commands the people to engage in two additional sets of symbolic activities designed to insure that they will never forget the events that confirmed to them the character and nature of God. The first is the **Festival of Unleavened Bread (13:3–10)**, and the second is the sacrifice or **redemption of firstborn males (13:11–16)**. **Verses 1 and 2**, although they make specific reference to the firstborn, provide a superscription to the whole: These practices are at the command of God. **Houtman** (1993:2.144) says these customs will “make transparent . . . that the people of Israel belong to Yahweh and are to be a nation consecrated to Yahweh . . . which out of gratitude for Yahweh’s mighty deeds is called to live according to his commandments.” Thus, while Israel must never live in the past, the past is to shape every response of Israel to new situations and challenges.

John Hannah: After an introductory statement about the Israelites’ **firstborn (vv. 1-2)**, who were to be dedicated for the service of the Lord (since they were spared in the 10th plague), Moses addressed **the people** again about the Passover and the Unleavened Bread feasts (**vv. 3-10**), and then returned to the subject of the **firstborn (vv. 11-16)**.

Douglas Stuart: What links all the material of **13:1–16** together especially is this sense of preparation for inhabiting the land—and not forgetting once there to keep covenant with Yahweh, who had made it possible for his people to have all that they would enjoy in their new land.

(:1-2) SUPERSSCRIPTION – SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OF THE COVENANT KING

A. Command: Setting Apart the Firstborn

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast;’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: the sanctification of all firstborn was commanded by God probably at Succoth, the first stopping place after the Exodus (**12:37**); and it fell within the seven days set aside for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (**12:15**).

Motyer: ‘*Set apart*’ could be translated as ‘*sanctified*’ (see the older English versions). We are not told, however, in what ways this ‘*sanctification*’ (or ‘*consecration*’, ESV) worked out in the lives of the firstborn. Were they intended to be the priests of Israel, and are they the ‘*young Israelite men*’ who we find functioning as priests in **Exodus 24:5**? This has the ring of truth, for even though the Lord’s highest purpose was that Israel should be a ‘*kingdom of priests*’ (**Exod. 19:6**), the sacrificial code would, simply as a practical necessity, have involved some delegation of function. Following the incident of the golden calf and the separation to God of the tribe of Levi (see **Exod. 32**), however, the Lord specifically says that he took the Levites for their special service, (lit.) ‘*in the place of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel*’ (**Num. 8:18**).

John Mackay: This reintroduces the concept of ‘holiness’ which has already occurred in **3:5** and which will feature prominently in later chapters. Firstborn males are to be set aside from the ordinary occupations of life and are to be exclusively appropriated to the service of the Lord. This is an assertion of the sovereign rights of the covenant king not only over the possessions of his subjects but over their persons as well. That these rights are grounded in the Lord’s saving activity is clearly stated later (**13:15**).

B. Reason: Divine Ownership

“it belongs to Me.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Their sanctification did not rest on their deliverance from the tenth plague, but rather God’s adoption of Israel as his “*firstborn*” led to his delivering them. From that time onward, that spared nation would dedicate the firstborn of its men and beasts in the way detailed in vv. **12-16** in commemoration of God’s acts of love and his deeds that night.

Douglas Stuart: His desire was that the Israelites recognize his right to ownership of the first and best, in whatever came to them in spoils of war, or harvests, or offspring. It is necessary and beneficial that human beings recognize that God is superior to them, and the requirement of a ritual that reminded every Israelite of this by insisting on “receiving” their firstborn from them helped create the spiritual attitude of submission so important for salvation, personal discipline, and blessing.

I. (:3-10) FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – APPRECIATING OUR DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE

A. (:3) Remember Deliverance from Bondage

“And Moses said to the people, ‘Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten.’”

John Davis: The whole purpose of this ceremony was to perpetuate the memory of the recent deliverance and to fix it in the mind of a nation which tended to forget divine blessings so easily.

Alan Cole: This associates the feast of the unleavened bread with the deliverance from Egypt. Not only so but (**verse 8**), like passover, it is to be associated with instruction given by father to son, presumably the first-born son. As he is the one peculiarly concerned, there is a double link with the context.

John Mackay: *Eat nothing containing yeast.* This symbolised the fact that the Lord's deliverance had introduced a decisive break in their lives from the corrupting spiritual influences of Egypt. Moses consequently emphasises the fact of their departure from Egypt. Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving (**13:4**). One wonders if this emphasis at that particular juncture in the people's experience was to counter all too human feelings of reluctance at being uprooted from homes and farms where they had lived for several centuries. Despite the brutality of the Egyptian regime, they would have memories and fond associations regarding the places they were leaving. But it was the land of rebellion against the Lord, and it was the land of oppression for his people. The way out was the way forward. There was no future for them there.

B. (:4-8) Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread

1. (:4-5) Connection with Future Blessing

*"On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth.
And it shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite,
the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to
your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you
shall observe this rite in this month."*

John Davis: The feast of unleavened bread was not only designed to bring back the memory of that great deliverance, but to remind them of the possibilities of future blessing. This is vividly portrayed in **verse 5** of this chapter, for the land of promise is brought into view, a land which was then inhabited by enemies but one which would one day provide blessing and sustenance to a people who had eaten the food of slaves only.

2. (:6-7) Connection with Present Sanctification

*"For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day
there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten
throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among
you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders."*

Douglas Stuart: These verses restate and condense (with somewhat varied wording to help reinforce the concepts in the listener/reader's mind) what **12:14–20** have already covered: the Feast of unleavened bread must be a weeklong festival, culminating with a special celebration on the closing day, and requiring absence of yeast in all locations

(13:7, “anywhere within your borders”; 12:20, “wherever you live”).

3. (:8) Connection with Past Deliverance

“And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’”

C. (:9-10) Perpetuate This Observance

1. (:9) Meaningful Observance

“And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The Jewish practice of writing **Exodus 13:1-16** out on two of the four strips of parchment (along with **Deut 6:4-9** and **11:13-21** on the other two) and placing them in two cubical leather boxes (*tepillin*; cf. “*phylacteries*,” **Matt 23:5**) that were strapped to the forehead and left arm seems to have originated in the Babylonian captivity. These were worn especially at daily morning prayers. This was, however, to exchange the intended inner reality for an external ritualism. The word was to activate their lips, hearts, and hands, not to be trapped in a box.

2. (:10) Annual Observance

“Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year.”

Douglas Stuart: The exodus story is to be repeated on that day, presumably the seventh, special day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, regardless of how many other times in the year it may also be told. That way, at least annually, there will be a special focus on the Exodus for a week—at the beginning via the Passover rite and at the end with the seventh day’s special testimonial. What was the point? Not a desire merely that an important memory be preserved but a desire that a life-saving covenant be kept! . . . It triggered remembrance of the covenant law by which the Israelites were kept in proper relationship with God and for which he had brought them out of Egypt in the first place (to serve him, not just to go to a nicer place to live). Keeping his covenant was the end goal because thereby Israel kept itself within God’s salvation; keeping the feast was a means of being sure to be reminded to keep the covenant. God is ever an evangelist, who always seeks the rescue of his people from the penalty of sin and always seeks to keep them aware of their need to be rightly—dependently—related to him. Thus the feast must always be kept at the same time annually, never postponed, never rescheduled, never canceled, never abandoned (“*you must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year,*” v. 10).

II. (:11-16) **REDEMPTION OF FIRSTBORN SONS – APPRECIATING OUR REDEMPTION**

A. (:11-12) Remember the Promise of Redemption

1. (:11) Reason = Fulfilment of God’s Promise

“Now it shall come about when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you,”

2. (:12) Command = Redeem the Firstborn

“that you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD.”

B. (:13) Celebrate the Redemption of the Firstborn

1. Firstborn of a Donkey

a. Command

“But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb,”

b. Caveat

“but if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck;”

Wiersbe: The firstborn of an ass, being an unclean animal, could not be sacrificed to God, so it was redeemed by a lamb. Being a valuable work animal, the ass was spared only in this way, but if the animal was not redeemed, then it had to be killed.

Motyer: Death by breaking the animal’s neck seems a pitilessly cruel mode of dispatch and, one would have thought, not all that easy to accomplish.

2. Firstborn of Man

“and every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem.”

C. (:14-16) Perpetuate This Observance

1. (:14) By Communicating its Significance to Future Generations

“And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.’”

Tim Chester: Each of these acts of commemoration includes a moment when future generations are expected to ask about its meaning (**12:26; 13:8, 14**). The festivals do more than merely help Israel to remember a past act. They are re-enactments of the story. People are not simply observers, but participants. So they incorporate future generations into the people of God. As the Passover Festival was kept, the Passover event became an act which future generations were part of. It became an act which continued to shape their identity as God’s people.

2. (:15) By Connecting its Observance to its Historical Roots

a. Death of Firstborn of Pharaoh and the Egyptians

“And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast.”

b. Dedication of Firstborn to the Lord

“Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first-born of my sons I redeem.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The obligation of the firstborn to serve the Lord in some nonpriestly work around the sanctuary was later transferred to the Levites who became God’s authorized substitutes for each firstborn boy or man (**Num 3**). When the number of Levites was exhausted, additional males could be ransomed or redeemed at the price of five shekels apiece. **Verses 15-16** again reiterate the explanation: the firstborn were owned by the Lord; for he dramatically spared them in the tenth plague, and he had previously called them to be his firstborn in **4:22**.

3. (:16) By Continuing to Focus on the Redemption Accomplished by the Lord

“So it shall serve as a sign on your hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

John Oswalt: Although the people might fall into the trap of thinking that the receipt of the Promised Land was the end of the story, it was not. God was concerned to establish his kingdom in the hearts of human beings, and that could only happen if Israel retained an accurate understanding of the revelation that had been given to them at the outset of their national existence.

John Mackay: Again the insertion of these regulations increases the dramatic impact of the surrounding story, while emphasising the importance of remembering every aspect of it. In their past the people will find a constant reminder of what the Lord has done for them before (**verses 3, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16**) and from this they are called to look to the future with confidence awaiting what the Lord has committed himself to do for them in the land to which he is bringing them (**verses 5, 7, 11**). What awaits them is not just a hoped for prospect to which much uncertainty still attaches, but something so assuredly granted by the Lord that it is even now time to set out their responsibilities when they get there. Nothing was more certain to boost their faith than the fact that the discussion is based on a ‘when’ not an ‘if’.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Should the firstborn have any particular spiritual significance for believers today?
- 2) When you think of your deliverance from spiritual bondage what sorts of sins come to mind?
- 3) In what ways are you communicating God’s deliverance and redemption to future generations so that the significance is maintained and commemorated?

4) How can we increase our appreciation for the cost of our redemption?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryken: Firstborn sons were important in the ancient world, as they are in many cultures today, because they “signified the center and future of the family.” The eldest son had special responsibilities and privileges, including the right of inheritance. But God was not showing favoritism. The point of consecrating the firstborn was really to show that the whole family belonged to God. The firstborn represented all the offspring, including the girls as well as the rest of the boys. The firstborn stood for the family as a part representing the whole—the way, for example, that a captain represents his team at the beginning of a football game or an executive represents his corporation at the bargaining table. The same principle applied when the Israelites brought their first fruits to the Feast of Harvest (**Exod. 23:16, 19**). They offered their first and their best to show that the whole harvest belonged to God. In the same way, the firstborn was the first fruits of the family. To consecrate him was to consecrate everyone else who came from his mother’s womb.

This helps explain why God was so angry with the Egyptians. Pharaoh had tried to kill Israel’s sons by drowning them in the Nile (**Exod. 1:15, 16**). Not only was this a vicious attempt at genocide, but it was also a rejection of God’s paternal rights. Pharaoh was trying to take over God’s prerogative. In the end he was punished with the death of his own firstborn son, just as God had warned him (**Exod. 4:23b**). By afflicting the Egyptians with death, God was not being vindictive or throwing some kind of temper tantrum. On the contrary, he was rightly and justly defending his right to be a father to his sons.

God claims this same right over all his sons and daughters. He is our Father by virtue of creation. As our maker, he deserves our worship and our obedience. Near the end of his life, Moses asked, “*Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?*” (**Deut. 32:6b**). The answer is, “Yes!” Our Father-God is our Creator. We are his children by creation, which gives him the right to receive all our praise. But we also belong to God by salvation, which was the point of the ritual for redemption. God not only made us, but he also saves us. This gives us all the more reason to give our whole lives to his service. God is our rightful Father both by creation and by redemption.

David Thompson: As we come to **Exodus 13**, God gave specific information about what He wanted Israel to do when she got into the Promised Land. He wanted to remind her of His deliverance every time any firstborn thing was born. He wanted His salvific program to be remembered so He demanded that the firstborn of everything had to be dedicated to Him. This included the firstborn of humans and the firstborn of animals. That blood that covered the door kept the firstborn from being killed. This redemptive point is so significant that God established another ordinance to remind

Israel of this very point. All of the firstborn belonged to God because God redeemed all firstborn from death by that blood on the door (**Ex. 12:12-13**).

GOD WANTED ISRAEL TO ALWAYS REMEMBER THE SALVIFIC REALITY OF THE BLOOD SACRIFICE BY THE DEDICATION OF ALL THE FIRSTBORN CHILDREN.

This is the very point that Israel has overlooked. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, Israel could not conceive of the idea that she needed a righteousness that could only be found in His shed blood. Israel was religious, but she thought her own works and law religion would make her right with God. **She forgot about the blood. Had she gone back to this book of Exodus, that would have never happened** and she would never have rejected Jesus Christ. The Israelites needed to recognize God saved their firstborn by the blood of a lamb or sheep. God purchased her and thus He owns her and deserves the first and the best. In whatever God gave to Israel, whether children, animals, spoils of war or harvests, God wants the first and the best. He deserves it because He gave it. Now think about this for a moment. The only reason Israel is in a position to have anything is because of God. In amazing grace, God literally saved the nation and without that national salvation she would have been nothing.

APPLICATION - God never wanted Israel to forget about her great salvation experience, and neither should we. God saved us and without that we are nothing. God give us physical life, spiritual life, skills and many wonderful things. We owe Him everything. Certainly we should give Him the best of what we have and are. We should give Him the first and the best of ourselves, our possessions and our money.

Dale Crawford: Redemption

As we examine this ordinance we find the doctrine of redemption clearly described. Israel was released from Egypt because a price was paid. God wanted them to remember this truth.

I. God commanded Israel to consecrate all the firstborn sons - Exodus 13:1-2

A. Firstborn sons had a particular significance

1. The eldest son had particular responsibilities and privileges including the right of inheritance
2. Most important the firstborn was the representative of all the offspring
 - a. God referred to Israel as His firstborn

Exodus 4:22-23 – “*And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: 23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.*”

- b. Jesus is referred to the firstborn Son

Romans 8:29 “*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*”

Colossians 1:13-15 – “*Who hath delivered us from the power of*

darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: 14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: 15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:”

- c. Since the firstborn represented all the offspring when God took the firstborn of Egypt He was declaring His right over all.
- d. By demanding the firstborn of Israel God was demonstrating His ownership of all the sons and daughters of Israel.

Exodus 13:2 – *“Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.”*

B. God has ownership over all things

- 1. As Creator He is Father of all
- 2. As Creator of Israel He stood as their Father

Deuteronomy 32:6 – *“Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?”*

- 3. At the Exodus Israel acknowledged God’s rightful ownership over them by dedicating their firstborn sons – all firstborn offspring were to be dedicated to God including all of the firstborn males of the livestock.

- a. All of the firstborn animals were to be offered to God

Exodus 13:11-12 – *“And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, 12 That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD’S.”*

- b. The firstborn were to be offered as a sacrifice The exception was the donkey. The Israelites used the donkey as a pack animal but they were not allowed to eat them or use them as a sacrifice. They were ceremonially unclean. They could either break their neck or redeem them.

- c. The other livestock was to be sacrificed

Numbers 18:15-17 – *“Everything that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. 16 And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17 But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD.”*

d. To redeem was to buy back through the payment of a price. The donkey could be redeemed through the price of a lamb offered as a sacrifice. Later five shekels could be the price of redemption.

II. What about the firstborn sons?

A. God declared that all of the firstborn sons of Israel belonged to Him.

There were two ways this was fulfilled:

1. They could be surrendered to a lifetime of service like Samuel.
 - a. God fulfilled this aspect of His requirement through the Levites.

Numbers 3:41 – “*And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel.*”
 - b. Again we see the concept of a substitute.
2. God still required a redemption price

B. The firstborn of the Israelites fell in the same category as the donkeys

1. God had separated the animals into two categories – clean and unclean – ceremonially holy and unholy. Since the donkey was unclean it could not be sacrificed, only redeemed.
2. The Israelite sons could not be sacrificed, only redeemed. God was demonstrating to Israel that their sons were sinners in need of salvation
3. They had to be redeemed. A price had to be paid. Exodus does not define the price – it is assumed that Israel would follow the same rule as that of the donkey – a sacrificial lamb – sacrifice by substitution.
4. Mary and Joseph followed the law of redemption at the birth of Jesus

Luke 2:22-23 – “*And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)*”
5. Every time Israel consecrated a firstborn son they were reminded of God’s demand of a price. It taught them of redemption.

III. We too are in need of redemption.

Our redemption implies that we were held captive or in bondage to someone or something. A price had to be paid for our deliverance. From what were we delivered?

A. From the Law

1. From the demands of the law - we have been delivered from the requirement to meet its demands for justification

Galatians 3:10 – “*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*”

 - a. No one since the fall has been able to meet the demands of the law
 - b. We have been delivered from the obligation of perfect obedience – this was accomplished through the life of Christ
2. From the penalty of the law “*The wages of sin is death*”

- a. Every sin brings us under the wrath and curse of God. A full alienation from God
- b. **Galatians 3:10** – *“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”* This curse is the penalty of the law
- c. Christ redeemed us from this curse by becoming a curse for us
Galatians 3:13 – *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:”*
- d. The exalted and holy Christ became a curse for us – He came under the divine wrath to satisfy divine justice It is a fearful and wonderful thing to consider

B. We were delivered from sin –

- 1. We have already seen that we have been delivered from the penalty of sin
- 2. We have been delivered from the power of sin
 - a. By restoring us to the favor of God and restoring us to the image of God and enabling us to love Him and obey Him.
 - b. Jesus gave Himself that He might purify us a holy people
Ephesians 5:25-26 – *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”*
Titus 2:14 – *“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”*
- 3. We were freed from bondage to sin – no longer its servants
Romans 6:18 – *“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”*

C. We have been delivered from the power of Satan

- 1. Satan is said to be the prince and god of this world
- 2. His kingdom is the kingdom of darkness into which all men since Adam were born
- 3. They are his subjects – he has taken humanity captive
2 Timothy 2:26 – *“And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”*
- 4. Jesus has plundered Satan’s kingdom delivering His people from captivity.

D. In defeating Satan Jesus also has redeemed us from death

- Hebrews 2:14** – *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;”*
- 1. Death no longer has power over us

1 Corinthians 15:55 – *“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”*

2. We need no longer fear death

IV. How did this redemption take place?

A. Not by our self-efforts – we could never raise enough – our debt is too high. (an eternity in hell will not be sufficient to redeem a soul)

B. Not by the blood of the old covenant sacrifices

Hebrews 9:12 – *“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”*

C. Only through the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 3:24-25 – *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;”*

Ephesians 1:7 – *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;”*

D. Jesus has become our Redeemer able to meet the demands of a just and holy God

1. In pouring out His blood on the cross and surrendering His spirit into the hands of the Father, Christ expiated sin
2. At that very moment Jesus entered into heaven claiming redemption for His seed
3. This was demonstrated in the tearing of the Temple curtain
4. His resurrection testified to the fact that His sacrifice had been fully received by the Father and that our justification was accomplished.
5. No greater price could have been made for our redemption.

V. What is the consequence of this redemption?

A. We have been brought into another kingdom -- He led the captives into freedom

Ephesians 4:8 – *“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.”*

1. Why would we be stirred by the difficulties of the kingdom of which we are only passing through
2. We are heading to a glorious city

B. This enables us to keep an eternal perspective. He has redeemed us unto service

Hebrews 9:14 – *“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”*

C. It is a constant reminder of our dependence upon God

1. We cannot save ourselves – all of the fasting, sweating, praying in the world

will never be able to accomplish our redemption

2. If God has been able to accomplish this great work for us, shall He not also be able to see us through this present hour?

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Andy Wilson: Signs of Redemption

I. Introduction

A. Israel's exodus from Egypt was such an important moment in the historical outworking of God's plan of redemption that the Lord commanded that it be commemorated by a variety of feasts and rituals.

1. We learned about one of those feasts in Exodus 12, where the Feast of Passover was instituted.
2. That feast not only pointed back to what happened at the time of the exodus, but it also pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

B. The two practices that the Lord institutes in the text that we have just read also find their ultimate fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Like Passover, these are God-given signs that emphasize key aspects of the salvation that God provides for his people.
2. As we study this passage today, we will see that it has much to say to us about what our God has done to save us, as well as the function that God-ordained signs play in the life of faith.

II. The Feast of Unleavened Bread

A. While the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the consecration of the firstborn might seem unrelated, there is a reason why they are treated together in this passage.

1. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated in the spring, because that was when the exodus took place.
2. Spring was also the time when domestic animals typically gave birth.
3. This is why these two ordinances are set alongside each other in this passage.

B. After introducing the consecration of the firstborn in verses 1-2, Moses then gives instructions about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, saying to the people, "*Remember this day in which you came out of Egypt.*"

1. This is not the first time we have come across the word "remember" in our study of Exodus.
2. God did not want his people to forget how he had delivered them from the house of bondage.
3. And in order to help them remember, he instituted feasts and other practices that memorialized what he had done for them.
4. God has done the same thing for us, giving us the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
5. We do these things in remembrance of Christ and what he has done to secure our salvation.
6. The sacraments are not mere memorials, but they certainly do have a

memorial function.

7. They help us remember what our Savior did to save us from our sin.

C. God commanded the Israelites to celebrate a feast involving unleavened bread because this reminded them of how they had left Egypt in such haste.

1. The exodus happened so quickly that they did not even have time to let their bread rise before they started their journey.

2. And the reason why they made such a speedy departure was that the Lord brought them out by his “*strong hand*.”

3. You may have noticed that that phrase is repeated four times in this passage.

4. Whenever you see this kind of repetition, you should think about the reason for the repetition.

5. In this case, the repeated reference to God’s “*strong hand*” underscores the severity of Israel’s plight in Egypt.

6. Egypt was a house of slavery for God’s people.

7. They never would have been able to save themselves from their state of bondage.

8. The exodus only happened because God brought it about.

D. The same thing can be said of us.

1. We cannot save ourselves from our slavery to sin.

2. As Paul explains in **Ephesians 2**, apart from Christ we are all dead in our trespasses. 3. A dead person is utterly powerless.

4. Our only hope is for God to extend his strong hand and set us free by making us alive together with Christ.

5. This is why the gospel alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

E. As with the Feast of Passover, the Lord commands his people to teach their children the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

1. Once again, we see believers being commanded to instruct their children in the faith. 2. This is the primary thing that the Bible has to say about raising covenant children.

3. We need to teach our children who God is and what he has done for us.

4. This is something that Christian parents need to be reminded of.

5. It is not uncommon these days for Christian parents to focus upon other things, things like finding a church with a lot of kids the same age as their or finding a church that has an exciting youth program.

6. This is not to say that our kids cannot have friends or that they cannot have any fun, but we need to remember that the Bible does not emphasize these things when it comes to the spiritual nurture of covenant children.

7. Our focus in discipling our children should be upon catechizing them in the faith and teaching them how to participate in the church’s worship.

8. They need to know what Christians believe and why we believe it.

F. Another thing that we see in this text is that it places an emphasis upon the covenant

solidarity of God's people.

1. Even the Israelite children who were not alive at the time of the exodus were taught that they belonged to the people whom God brought out of Egypt.
2. They were participants in the exodus.
3. It was not just a story about what happened in the past.
4. It was their story too.
5. As **Douglas Stuart** explains, "In God's economy each generation of his people is expected to cultivate an identification with all the experiences of all the generations, and all the generations must identify with the events that have happened or will happen to any generation." [315]
6. This is especially important today, because we are living in a culture that has little regard for the past.
7. We need to realize that the story that is told in the Bible, along with the story that is unfolding across church history, is our story.

G. Moses tells the people that their regular observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread "*shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth.*"

1. You may know that some Jews took this statement to be a literal command.
2. They made little boxes, called phylacteries, and filled them with tiny scrolls and tied them to their bodies.
- . But that is not the point that is being made in this verse.
4. Moses is simply saying that this feast will be an aid in remembering what God has done.
5. It will help God's people to regularly think about and talk about God's truth.
6. This is why Moses says that "*the law of the LORD will be in your mouth.*"

H. This is one of the reasons why God gives his people signs and sets apart certain times for sacred use.

1. God uses these things to strengthen our faith and to stimulate a response of grateful obedience.
2. This is why it is so important for us to be in corporate worship each Lord's Day.
3. It is why our church's Session has followed the Reformed tradition's longstanding practice of having both morning and evening worship services on the Lord's Day.
4. Who among us can say that we don't need a double dose of God's Word each week?
5. Who among us would not benefit from participating in the Lord's Supper every week?
6. The better use you make of the means that God has appointed for your spiritual growth, the more you will find that his law is in your mouth.

III. The Consecration of the Firstborn

A. Having looked at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we turn now to consider what this passage tells us about the consecration of the firstborn.

1. To '*consecrate*' something is to set it apart as belonging to God.
2. God instituted this practice in order to remind the people of Israel that they all belong to him.

3. The firstborn were representative of all of the people.
4. This becomes clear when we remember that in **Exodus 4:22** God called all Israel "*my firstborn son*."
5. God's claim upon the literal firstborn among the Israelites was representative of his claim upon the entire nation.

B. The consecration of the firstborn also pointed to Jesus, whose parents consecrated him to the Lord in obedience to this law, as Luke tells us in his Gospel.

1. Jesus' consecration has relevance for you.
2. It means that if you have been united to Christ, then you have been consecrated to God in him.
3. This is why Paul says in **Romans 8** that Jesus is "*the firstborn among many brothers*." (v. 29)

C. God claims the people whom he redeems to be his own.

1. Of course, as Creator and Ruler of all things, God has a rightful claim over everything.
2. But he makes a special claim upon the people whom he chooses to save.
3. He sets us apart as distinct from the world.
4. The apostle Paul applies this principle when he exhorts the church in Corinth to avoid sexual immorality, saying, "*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" (**1 Cor. 6:18–20**)
5. If you are a Christian, then you have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. Sin is no longer your master.
7. You are not your own master.
8. You belong to God.
9. This is the reality to which the consecration of Israel's firstborn pointed.
10. Through Christ, God has purchased us out of our slavery to sin and self so that we might be slaves to righteousness.

D. In **verses 11** and following, Moses gives specific instructions for the consecration of the firstborn in Israel.

1. The firstborn among their animals were to be given to the Lord in sacrifice.
2. The one exception to this was donkeys.
3. While the Israelites used donkeys for transportation and work, donkeys could not be sacrificed because they were unclean.
4. For this reason, firstborn donkeys had to be redeemed by sacrificing a lamb in their place or they had to be killed in a non-sacrificial manner, by breaking their necks.

E. Moses also told the people that they had to redeem their firstborn children.

1. A lamb had to be sacrificed in place of every firstborn child in Israel.

2. This practice served as a perpetual reminder to God's people that they were under the same judgment as the Egyptians.
3. They too deserved to die when God entered Egypt in judgment, but in his mercy he spared them.
4. The redemption of the firstborn reminded Israel that the only reason why they were under God's blessing was because God had provided a substitute to bear the curse in their place.
5. This in turn assured them that they were accepted by God, because it showed them that their acceptance was not based upon anything in them but upon God's gracious provision.

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TEXT: Exodus 13:17-22

TITLE: DIVINE GUIDANCE

BIG IDEA:

DIVINE GUIDANCE USES PERPLEXING AND CHALLENGING PATHS TO BOTH PROTECT AND PREPARE US FOR WHAT LIES AHEAD

INTRODUCTION:

Illustration: I love the spooky Halloween oriented commercial where you have the four terrified victims trying to determine what route to take to safety – They discuss various options with the girl advocating for the only sensible option: “Why don’t we just get in the running car?” No, instead they decide to hide in the garage behind the chainsaws ... and then are forced to flee again when the bad guy cranks up his chain saw. So they are forced to take off again and their next choice makes equal sense: “Let’s head to the cemetery.” Sometimes the obvious route is not chosen.

This is a wonderful text about how God leads His beloved children. He leads in accordance with His perfect wisdom and His desire for our ultimate good. His ways are not our ways and we often cannot understand our seemingly wandering route while we are in the midst of the struggle. But God is accomplishing His purpose both to protect His children and to prepare us for the battles that lie ahead. He sovereignly and providentially gets us to the proper destination.

I. (:17-18) PERPLEXING ROUTE – DIVINE GUIDANCE DOESN’T ALWAYS IMMEDIATELY MAKE SENSE

A. (:17) Divine Guidance Doesn’t Always Take the Shortest Route

“Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt.’”

If you had checked Google maps, you never would have chosen the path that God directed for the children of Israel.

God knows what amount of stress and pressure and temptation our faith can endure. He plans our pathway accordingly.

Bruce Hurt: Travelers going east out of Egypt had two options “*the way of the sea*” or “*the way of Shur*.” On the Way of the Sea (Via Maris) route Israel could have walked to Gaza in only about ten days. From Succoth the fastest and shortest route to take to the Promised Land would be a northeast route of about 150 miles. But the **easiest** is not always the **best**! And so we see how God leads them in **Ex 13:21** “*going before them in*

a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way." What was this cloud? I personally think it was the Shekinah glory cloud. . . The Egyptians had fortresses on the Via Maris and would have engaged Israel in battle had they gone "*the easy way.*"

G. Campbell Morgan: A great principle of the Divine government emerges in these words, an under-standing of which will explain many experiences through which His people are called to pass. These people were but now released from slavery, and were undisciplined and untrained. Before they could be ready to withstand the opposition of new enemies, they had much to learn, and many experiences through which to pass. The near way geographically to their destination lay through the land of the Philistines, but to pass that way would inevitably have involved them in conflict. For this they were not in any way pre-pared. To have been thus plunged into it, would necessarily have filled them with despair, producing a change of mind which would have sent them back to Egypt. Therefore God led them round about, by a longer way, having its own difficulties as the sequel will show, but delivering them from this first peril. How constantly God does this with His people! He leads us by ways which seem to us to be long and tedious, when there are ways apparently so *much more direct to the goal where we know He wills we should be. Let us ever know that when He does so, He is avoiding for us perils of which we may not be conscious, but which are far graver than those through which we pass as we travel the pathway He marks out for us. The nearest way is not always the shortest. Our God never permits us, as long as we obey Him, to meet any danger unprepared. The length of the way, and the slowness of the method, are really making for quick and sure arrival.

B. (:18a) Divine Guidance Leads Through Paths of Suffering and Hardship

"Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea;"

It must have been quite a challenge for such a multitude of people to embark upon a lengthy journey of unknown route and unknown destination via terrain characterized as wilderness and desert. How would God provide for their basic needs? Yet God's leading was clear.

Remember how the Spirit led Christ into the desert for the purpose of being tempted by Satan.

Adam Clarke: Had the Israelites been obliged to commence their journey to the promised land by a military campaign, there is little room to doubt that they would have been discouraged, have rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and have returned back to Egypt. Their long slavery had so degraded their minds that they were incapable of any great or noble exertions; and it is only on the ground of this mental degradation, the infallible consequence of slavery, that we can account for their many dastardly acts, murmurings, and repinings after their escape from Egypt. The reader is requested to bear this in mind, as it will serve to elucidate several circumstances in the ensuing history. Besides, the Israelites were in all probability unarmed, and totally unequipped for battle, encumbered with their flocks, and certain culinary utensils. which they were obliged to carry with them in the wilderness to provide them with bread, etc.

C. (:18b) Divine Guidance Does Not Promote Disarray and Chaos – But Order and Discipline

“and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.”

This cannot mean they were equipped in military fashion to fight because the text has already made clear that they were not prepared for such confrontation with the enemy. This term “martial array” refers to the orderliness and discipline of their procession. This was not some chaotic mob scene.

J. Vernon McGee: the children of Israel left Egypt in an orderly manner. They did not come out of the land like a mob but in an organized way. They did not have an army but they lined up five in a row. If you had seen them going through the wilderness, you would have observed a most orderly group.

John Wesley: There were many reasons why God led them through the way of the wilderness of the red sea. The Egyptians were to be drowned in the Red-sea, the Israelites were to be humbled, and proved in the wilderness. **Deuteronomy 8: 2.** God had given it to Moses for a sign, **Exodus 3:12**, *ye shall serve God in this mountain.* They had again and again told Pharaoh that they must go three days journey into the wilderness to do sacrifice, and therefore it was requisite they should march that way, else they had justly been exclaimed against as dissemblers. Before they entered the lifts with their enemies, matters must be settled between them and their God; laws must be given, ordinances instituted, covenants sealed; and for the doing of this it was necessary they should retire into the solitudes of a wilderness, the only closet for such a crowd; the high road would be no proper place for these transactions. The reason why God did not lead them the nearest way, which would have brought them in a few days to the land of the Philistines, was because they were not yet fit for war, much less for war with the Philistines. Their spirits were broke with slavery; the Philistines were formidable enemies; it was convenient they should begin with the Amalekites, and be prepared for the wars of Canaan, by experiencing the difficulties of the wilderness. God is said to bring Israel out of Egypt as the eagle brings up her young ones, **Deuteronomy 32:11**, teaching them by degrees to fly.

II. (:19) PATRIARCHAL PROMISES -- DIVINE GUIDANCE FULFILLS GOD’S WILL

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, ‘God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you.’”

430 years is a long time to wait for the fulfillment of God’s promise – but the long time delay does not in any way compromise the integrity of the promise.

A. Nevin: And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. This rendered the march a kind of funeral procession, and such as no other history relates. Never was body so long

in its conveyance to the grave, for forty years were taken up in bearing Joseph to his burial. We read at the death of Joseph that “*they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*” The precious deposit, likely to be cared for by some of the descendants of his own family, was dear to all. It was a memento of the vanity of human greatness. It was also a moral as well as a mortal memento. Joseph was a very pious character; he had been highly exemplary in every relation and condition of life, and much of God, of providence, and of grace was to be read in his history. What an advantage to be always reminded of such a man in having his remains always in the midst of them! But the body would be above all valuable as a pledge of their future destination. It was a present palpable sign of God’s covenant with their fathers in their behalf.

Calvin: Assuredly the faith of the departed Joseph, even in his dry bones, preached loudly to his descendants of the promised deliverance, lest they should grow careless from the long delay; and when at length the Israelites were led forth, the bones or ashes of the twelve Patriarchs were like so many standard-bearers, going before the several tribes to encourage their confidence. Wherefore the cowardice of the people was still more detestable, so often basely turning their backs upon their journey, when they had in sight so eminent a ground for confidence. The words of Joseph, which Moses reports, “God will surely visit you,” etc., confirm the expression of the Apostle, (**Hebrews 11:22,**) that “*by faith — he gave commandment concerning his bones,*” because he thus takes upon himself the character and office of their surety, to exhort his nation to embrace the promise.

III. (:20-22) PROVIDENTIAL GUIDANCE – DIVINE GUIDANCE LEADS US ONE STEP AT A TIME WITH THE ASSURANCE OF GOD’S PRESENCE

A. (:20) Divine Guidance Can Look Challenging

“Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness.”

Thomas Coke: God is their Deliverer, and now becomes their Guide. The direct way was short; but God led them not by the shortest, but the safest way. If his ways seem winding, we may be satisfied he is a sure Guide. The Philistines were before them, and they must not see war as soon as they escape from slavery; they are not fit for such service yet. God knows how to proportion our trials to our strength, nor will he suffer his people to be tempted above what they are able. Besides, he had much to do among them, both in mercies and judgments; and a wilderness was the fittest place for his designs. Let us, therefore, commit all our ways unto the Lord.

B. (:21) Divine Guidance Is Clear and Reassuring

1. Presence of the Lord

“And the LORD was going before them”

2. Pillar of Cloud by Day

“in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way,”

3. Pillar of Fire by Night

“and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light,”

4. Promoting Travel by Day and by Night

“that they might travel by day and by night.”

Wiersbe: on pillars for guidance - We don't have this same kind of visible guidance today, but we do have the Word of God which is a light (**Ps. 119:105**) and a fire (**Jer. 23:29**). It's interesting to note that the pillar of fire gave light to the Jews but was darkness to the Egyptians (**Ex. 14:20**). God's people are enlightened by the Word (**Eph. 1:15–23**), but the unsaved can't understand God's truth (**Matt. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:11–16**). The Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Truth, guides us by teaching us the Word (**John 16:12–13**). Just as God spoke to Moses from the pillar, so the Lord communicates with us from the Scriptures by making them clear to us. There are times when we aren't sure which way God wants us to go, but if we wait on Him, He will eventually guide us. How foolish it would have been for the Jews to pause in their march and take a vote to see which route they should take to Mount Sinai! Certainly there's a place for community counsel and referendum (**Acts 6:1–7**), but when God has spoken, there's no need for consultation. On more than one occasion in Scripture, the majority has been wrong.

Youngblood: Like the burning bush (**Ex 3:2**), the pillar was the visible symbol of God's presence among His people. The Lord Himself was in the pillar (**Ex 13:21; 14:24**) and often spoke to the people from it ([**Exodus 19–20**]; **Nu 12:5–6; Dt. 31:15–16; Ps. 99:6–7**). The later hymn-writers of Israel fondly remembered it (**Ps 78:14; Ps 105:39**). A similar cloud of smoke came to represent the glory of the Lord in the Sanctuary throughout much of Israel's history (**Ex. 40:34–35; 1 Ki 8:10–11; Isa. 4:5; 6:3–4**)."

C. (:22) Divine Guidance Does Not Take a Day Off

*“He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day,
nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”*

Adam Clarke: This pillar or column, which appeared as a cloud by day, and a fire by night, was the symbol of the Divine presence. This was the Shekinah or Divine dwelling place, and was the continual proof of the presence and protection of God. It was necessary that they should have a guide to direct them through the wilderness, even had they taken the most direct road; and how much more so when they took a circuitous route not usually traveled, and of which they knew nothing but just as the luminous pillar pointed out the way! Besides, it is very likely that even Moses himself did not know the route which God had determined on, nor the places of encampment, till the pillar that went before them became stationary, and thus pointed out, not only the road, but the different places of rest. Whether there was more than one pillar is not clearly determined by the text. If there was but one it certainly assumed three different appearances, for the performance of Three very important offices.

1. In the day-time, for the purpose of pointing out the way, a column or pillar of a cloud was all that was requisite.

2. At night, to prevent that confusion which must otherwise have taken place, the pillar of cloud became a pillar of fire, not to direct their journeyings, for they seldom traveled by night, but to give light to every part of the Israelitish camp.

3. In such a scorching, barren, thirsty desert, something farther was necessary than a light and a guide. Women, children, and comparatively infirm persons, exposed to the rays of such a burning sun, must have been destroyed if without a covering; hence we find that a cloud overshadowed them: and from what St. Paul observes, **1 Corinthians 10:1, 1 Corinthians 10:2**, we are led to conclude that this covering cloud was composed of aqueous particles for the cooling of the atmosphere and refreshment of themselves and their cattle; for he represents the whole camp as being sprinkled or immersed in the humidity of its vapours, and expressly calls it a being under the cloud and being baptized in the cloud.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God so often seem to take you on a route that is circuitous and time-consuming rather than quick and direct?
- 2) What part of your life can be characterized as wilderness wanderings? What did God teach you during this time period?
- 3) How has the Lord used the Word of God to provide guidance in your practical life decisions?
- 4) What type of guidance has the Holy Spirit provided for you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Steven Cole: The Scenic Route to the Promised Land

We live in a culture obsessed with time-saving devices. . . Life is short, so I want God to get things done as quickly and efficiently as possible. It's unimaginable that He would be slow or inefficient in accomplishing His purpose!

Of course, from His eternal perspective, God is not inefficient or slow. He knows what He's doing and He accomplishes His purpose right on schedule (**Isa. 46:10**). But from our time-bound perspective, God's ways often seem incredibly wasteful, inefficient, and slow. To be faithful to the Lord and His cause, we need to divest ourselves of the

modern way of viewing things and understand how God works. We need to know His ways, which are not our ways (**Isa. 55:8-9**).

This is important because many Christians claim that God wants you to be instantly healthy, wealthy, and spiritually victorious. They deny that sickness, suffering, pain, or poverty ever come from the Lord's hand. If you're sick, they say, don't admit it—that's a negative confession. Rather, claim your healing by faith! If you're poor, envision living in a mansion and claim that by faith! If you struggle with problems, that's not God's will! Get slain in the Spirit or speak in tongues, and you will have instant spiritual victory! And, by the way, if you'll send a nice check to the TV preacher making these claims, he'll send you a special prayer cloth that you can use to get miraculous answers to your prayers.

That false teaching appeals to the flesh. Who doesn't want instant success and instant solutions to difficult problems? If you had your choice between instant spiritual victory or fifty years of a slow, difficult battle, who wouldn't choose the instant route?

Well, God would not! He had just delivered His people from 400 years in Egypt, much of it spent in horrible slavery. He delivered them right on schedule, according to His word to Abraham (**Gen. 15:13-14**), but that meant that many generations of Israelites lived and died crying out to God for deliverance, but without any indication that He heard their prayers.

Now, the Lord's plan was to lead Israel to the Promised Land. If Moses had looked at a map, he would have seen that the shortest route from Egypt to Palestine with no rivers or sea to cross is to go straight north through Gaza into the land. But rather than go that way, God led His people around by way of the wilderness to the Red Sea (or, Sea of Reeds; **Exod. 13:17-18**). He had His reasons (**Exod. 13:17**): "*The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.*" Ironically, they soon would need to engage in war (**Exod. 17:8-13**). But God knew that initially, they weren't ready, so He led them on this somewhat circuitous route that I'm calling, "the scenic route to the Promised Land." I've never been to the Sinai Peninsula, but the photos I've seen don't make me want to go there! But it was God's way for His people. The lesson for us is:

**God's way of dealing with us is to take us on "the scenic route,"
because His purpose is to teach us to trust and glorify Him.**

First we'll look at God's way and then at His purpose.

1. God's way of dealing with us is to take us on "the scenic route."

When we used to live in Southern California and wanted to get to the Bay area, if we had the extra time we enjoyed taking the more scenic route up Highway 1 along the coast. The fastest way there is Interstate 5 which goes right up the middle of the State. But it's hot and boring, so we preferred the scenic route. But there are four things about that scenic route that are also true of God's "scenic route":

A. The scenic route always takes longer.

It takes much longer to get to the Bay area up Highway 1 with its two-lane highway and many curves than to shoot up I-5. In Israel's case, it would have taken less than two weeks to go directly from Egypt to Canaan, but God's "scenic route" through the wilderness took them forty years!

The Bible is clear that God does not seem to be in the big hurry that we're in. He takes His time. For example, God called Abraham when he was 75 and promised to give him a son. But that son wasn't born until Abraham was 100 and his wife was 90, well past her childbearing years. Keep in mind that God's promise to Abraham was to make from him a great nation (**Gen. 12:2**). But God only gave him one son through whom to fulfill that promise.

Well then, surely Abraham's son Isaac must have had a large family, right? No, in fact at first, Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren (**Gen. 25:21**). After Isaac prayed, the Lord gave them twin sons, Esau and Jacob. But God rejected Esau and chose Jacob. Jacob deceived his father out of the birthright and had to flee from the Promised Land because his brother wanted to kill him. He worked there for his uncle Laban for seven years to gain Laban's daughter Rachel as his wife, only to be deceived so that he had to work seven more years.

Eventually, he returned to the land of promise, but had a slew of problems there. His ten oldest sons sold their brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt. He spent the better part of his twenties in an Egyptian jail before God elevated him to the second position in the land under Pharaoh. Finally, God led Jacob and his sons and their families down to Egypt, where we find them 400 years later when Moses' story begins. That's not exactly a fast track to fulfilling God's promise to Abraham to give him the land of Canaan and make of him a great nation!

As we've seen, the route to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt wasn't the quick way either. Moses was "*educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and a man of power in words and deeds*" (**Acts 7:22**). He sure seemed ready to go. But when he set about at age 40 to deliver God's chosen people, he failed miserably, fled for his life, and spent the next 40 years in the desert. Meanwhile, God's people languished in slavery.

You see a similar pattern in the life of David. He was anointed as king as a teenager, but he spent his twenties running from the mad King Saul. He finally became king at age 30.

After the 70-year exile of God's people in Babylon and their return to the land, 400 long years went by with no word from God. Finally, John the Baptist appeared on the scene, announcing the coming of the Messiah. Surely the Lord Jesus, who was without sin, would be ready to go by age 20! But, no, He was about 30 when He began His public ministry (**Luke 3:23**) and then it only lasted about three years before He was

crucified.

You see the same thing with the apostle Paul. He was converted in his early thirties, but then spent two or three years in Arabia (**Gal. 1:17-18**) and another six to eight years in Tarsus before he began teaching at the church in Antioch. Later, when Paul seemingly could have had maximum impact for the gospel through his missionary efforts, God left him confined in Caesarea for two years because of a greedy governor who was hoping for a bribe (**Acts 24:26-27**). Then, rather than being released, he was transferred to Rome, where he spent more time in confinement.

And, if you've read any history of the church or missionary biographies, you know that the spread of the gospel has not been quick. The scenic route to fulfilling the Great Commission has taken much longer than if God had hired a time management expert back in the first century!

B. The scenic route is not the most efficient way to get there (from our point of view).

The scenic route doesn't always make sense to us. Why didn't God choose Abraham when he was 25 and give him Isaac when he was 30? Think of all those "wasted" years! Why leave Joseph in that Egyptian dungeon for all those years? Surely, the cupbearer could have told Pharaoh about Joseph much sooner, but the cupbearer forgot (**Gen. 40:23**). And God could have given Pharaoh the dream that led to Joseph's release after two weeks or two months. But we read (**Gen. 41:1**), "*Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream*"

Why leave Moses out in the desert for 40 years while the Israelites continued to make bricks under the cruel Egyptian taskmasters? Wouldn't a couple of years of training have sufficed? Then, why not lead Israel directly into the Promised Land and save 40 years? God could have struck the Canaanites with a deadly plague and spared Israel the difficulty of conquering the land.

Why not get rid of the faithless King Saul and put the man after God's heart in power much sooner? Why not send the forerunner and the Messiah shortly after the exiles returned to the land? Why not have the Lord Jesus begin His ministry at 20 and let it go until He was 60? Think of how much more He would have accomplished! Why not have Paul released from the corrupt Roman governor so that he could take the gospel to Spain, as he wanted to do? From our point of view, the scenic route is not very efficient!

C. The scenic route is the most difficult route.

Sometimes when we used to drive up Highway 1, the road had been covered by mudslides. I recently saw on the news that it was completely closed because of a huge mudslide. But even when it's open, there are all those curves! Last summer we were in Maui, where the most scenic road is the road to Hana. I saw a T-shirt that read, "The Road to Hana: Turn left, turn right, repeat 620 times!" It wasn't exaggerating! Plus

there are 59 one-lane bridges in 52 miles! It's called "the Divorce Highway" because of the strain it can put on your marriage to drive it! But everyone agrees that it's the most scenic route on Maui!

As we've seen, God's scenic route was not the easiest way to get to the Promised Land. It would have been much easier if God had promised Abraham a son and six months later Sarah announced that she was pregnant. It would have been easier if Jacob had told Laban, "I'll work seven years for Rachel," and Laban had said, "Seven weeks is enough." It would have been easier for Joseph if after he resisted the seductive attempts of Potiphar's wife, he had been rewarded with the number two job in the land, rather than with years in an Egyptian dungeon. The same could be said for Moses, David, Paul, and other servants of the Lord. Why didn't these men claim their deliverance by faith and get on with enjoying the victorious life? God's scenic route takes longer, it's not the most efficient way, and it's the most difficult route.

D. The scenic route is the most beautiful in the long run.

That's why we take it! It's worth the longer time, the inefficiency, and the difficult hassles because in the long run, nothing is as beautiful. In California, straight, four-lane, 70 mile-per-hour I-5 just doesn't compare with Highway 1 up the coast!

The reason that God's scenic route for His saints is the most beautiful in the long run is because God is with you and there is nothing to compare with a life lived with Him. If Israel had traveled straight north into Canaan, even if God had taken out the Canaanites, they would have settled into a comfortable life in the land. As it was, they spent forty years camping with God and His people in the barren wilderness where they saw Him miraculously provide manna each morning and water from the rock. They had the pillar and the cloud of God's presence protecting and guiding them.

The logistics of providing for two million people in the barren desert were overwhelming! If you lined them up at 50 abreast, they would have stretched forty miles into the desert! To provide for that many people would have required 30 boxcars of food and 300 tank cars of water every day of their journey! But which in the long run would have been the more beautiful way of life: to be a part of that great company in the wilderness, seeing God provide for all your needs, leading you by the pillar of cloud and fire, and knowing that you were the objects of His loving care? Or, to settle down in suburban Jerusalem in a nice house with a two-donkey garage?

So, God's way is to take us on the longer, inefficient, difficult scenic route, which in the long run is the most beautiful. But, why? What is His purpose for taking us that way?

2. God's purpose for taking us on "the scenic route" is to teach us to trust in and glorify Him.

The basic aim of the fallen human race is independence from God. We want to save ourselves or at least to have a hand in the process. We want to direct our own lives,

perhaps with a little help from God, so that we can share the credit. But we don't like being totally dependent on God.

It all boils down to, who gets the glory? If I can help God in the process of salvation, then I can share some of His glory. If I can live the Christian life by my strength, then I can take the credit. But God says (**Isa. 42:8**), "*I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another*" And so He takes us on the scenic route to break us of our self-dependence so that we put our trust in Him and glorify Him. Note three things about trusting in the Lord:

A. Trusting in the Lord requires seeing your weakness and need, but His power and provision.

As we'll see next time (**Exod. 14:1-4**), the Lord specifically directed Moses to take Israel to a place where a large body of water was in front of them and the Egyptian army was bearing down behind them. They were trapped. Why would God do that? So that Israel would see their own utter weakness along with God's power and provision when He parted the sea and delivered them from Pharaoh's army.

So, they learned their lesson, right? In **Exodus 15:22**, after the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, Israel went three days into the wilderness and found no water. Surely they knew that if they trusted God, He could provide water, right? But instead they grumbled. They hadn't yet learned to trust in the Lord. In chapter 16, the people complained about being in the wilderness with no food and threatened to return to Egypt. But God provided manna. In chapter 17, again they needed water. But rather than trusting the Lord who had already miraculously delivered them and provided water and food, they grumbled. Then (**Exod. 17:8**), Amalek fought against Israel.

Why were they having all these problems? Weren't they God's chosen people? Weren't they the ones through whom God's promise to Abraham and His purpose would be fulfilled? Wasn't God leading them? Then why did He allow all of these problems? Because God's way is to take His people on the scenic route because His purpose is to build a people who trust in Him for His glory. But we don't trust Him as we should until we see our weakness and His faithful power and provision.

B. Trusting in the Lord requires remembering that He always keeps His promises.

We read (**Exod. 13:19**): "*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.'*" I chuckle whenever I read that verse. You know how hectic it is to leave for a family camping trip. You have to pack your suitcases and get the car packed with all the camping gear. There's always so much stuff! I wonder, "How am I going to get everything to fit into the car?"

So picture Moses getting ready to lead two million people out of Egypt and into the

wilderness. I'm sure that their wagons didn't have a lot of extra room. They're just cinching down the pile of stuff when Moses says, "We forgot Joseph's bones! We've got to make room for Joseph's bones!" Actually, it was his mummy! With all of their household goods and kids and animals and food and water for the trip, they had to find room for Joseph's bones! Why did Moses take Joseph's bones? **Genesis 50:24-25** tells us:

Joseph said to his brothers, "*I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.*" Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "*God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.*"

Carrying Joseph's almost 400-year-old mummy back to Canaan was a visible proof that God always keeps His loving promises. Every time they broke camp and moved to a new location in the wilderness over those 40 years (at least 41 different camps, **Num. 33:5-49**), Moses had to load and unload Joseph's bones! Perhaps some of the kids saw this old man loading and unloading that coffin and asked their parents, "Why is he doing that?" If the parents knew what was happening they would have replied, "Taking that coffin back to the Promised Land shows that God is keeping His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

You can't trust someone who doesn't keep his word. But if that person always keeps his word, you can trust that he will do it the next time. But remember, God doesn't operate on our timetable! It was 400 years before Joseph's bones made it out of Egypt! It would still be another 1,400 years before God sent the promised Savior. Now it's been almost 2,000 years since the crucified and risen Savior ascended with the promise (**Acts 1:11**), "*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*" But because God has always kept His promises, you can trust that He will keep that one, too!

C. When we trust in the Lord, He gets the glory and we get the blessings.

The familiar **Ephesians 2:8-9** makes this point: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*" In its entirety, being saved from God's judgment is a free gift of His grace (see, **1 Cor. 1:26-31**). That way, He gets all the glory, which He alone deserves. But what do we get? We get the blessing of His salvation! We get *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (**Eph. 1:3**). When we trust in the Lord, He gets the glory and we get the blessings.

Conclusion

When God's eternal Son came to this earth and took on human flesh, God led Him on "the scenic route." It was the most difficult way imaginable, the way of the cross. When Jesus began to tell the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the Jewish leaders and be killed and raised up on the third day, they thought that He had lost it! Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him (**Matt. 16:22**)! But Jesus rebuked

Peter (**Matt. 16:23**): “*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.*”

God’s way is “the scenic route.” If the route is long and hard, it’s so that you will learn more deeply to trust and glorify our gracious Lord!

Lee Cadenhead: Led Out of Egypt

We want to notice three things in the text:

- I. A Providential Route (v. **17-18**),
- II. A Patriarch Remembered (v. **19**),
- III. A Pillar Revealed (v. **20-22**)

I. A Providential Route (13:17-18)

“*And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them...*” God didn’t redeem them from Egypt and then let them fend for themselves. This nation is a son to him (**4:23**), and so like any good Father, he leads them, just like he does you and I when we’re miraculously delivered from the world.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **John 10:27***

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. **Romans 8:14***

The route that they take up is not ideal from the Israelites standpoint. They’re ultimately headed to Canaan land, but this is by far, the long way around. Not only that, this particular route is going to intersect with an enormous body of water, and no human means for passage. It is, however, the divinely appointed route nonetheless.

Sometimes the Lord takes us the long way around and we can’t understand why he does it. It looks to me like the Lord’s statement in **verse 17** is divine commentary for the reader in retrospect. It is likely that the children of Israel never even realized why they had to take this route. When they came to the Red Sea they certainly questioned the Lord’s wisdom (**14:10-12**). Even after seeing God’s power at the Red Sea and with the Promised Land in view they question his purposes again in **Numbers 14:1-4** at the first sight of opposition.

We may never understand why God leads us in a certain way, but we can still trust him! *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. **Romans 8:28*** With our scriptural hindsight we can see how God used this wilderness route to work “*all things*” together for good for Israel.

- a. He must take them southward to Horeb to keep his promise to Moses (**Exod 3:12**). The Lord will go to great lengths to see that his promises are kept including taking His people in a round-about path through a wilderness.

b. He takes them through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea to manifest His power and give them a testimony. This nation (and even heathen nations) will spend the rest of the Old Testament talking about the Red Sea crossing. Sometimes the Lord takes His people through troubling terrain to give them a testimony and prove His own sufficiency.

c. He takes them by the way of the Red Sea to destroy their enemies.

d. He carries them through the wilderness route to teach them some things that couldn't learn anywhere else (**Deut 8:2-3**). The forty-years of wandering following their unbelief at Kadesh-Barnea was not part of God's plan for Israel. However, their trek from Goshen to Kadesh-Barnea served a necessary and spiritual purpose. Every believer has to go through something like this after getting saved to learn how to walk with God and trust Him.

e. The purpose of this route that is mentioned in our text is so that they don't see war in the land of the Philistines and try to turn back right off. It's interesting that this should be mentioned seeing that they are fashioned by the Lord in to an army upon leaving Egypt (**6:26, 7:4, 12:17, 12:51**). They were armed and in military formation when they depart from Egypt (**13:18, 14:8**), but they were unprepared for the warfare that they would have encounter in the land of the Philistines. They would meet the Philistines in battle in the Promised Land, but they would train for the engagement from the wilderness.

Before an army is prepared for a foreign enemy they must first conquer themselves (thus the discipline of basic training). Among God's purposes in Sinai is the giving of the Law. And while the believer is equipped "*in Christ*" with all that is necessary for the victory (**Romans 6**), the lesson of the Law and our own fleshly wretchedness must be learned in the wilderness (**Romans 7**). With that lesson mastered they can go on to have victory over the Philistines (picturing the flesh), with an absolute confidence in the Spirit of God that's leading them and fighting for them (**Romans 8**).

II. A Patriarch Remembered (13:19)

Literally hundreds of years after the death of Joseph his bones are still present with the Israelites awaiting their promised burial in the land of Canaan. The arrangements that Joseph made for his bones is found in **Genesis 50:24-25**.

□ Joseph knew that it would be a while before they made their exit from Egypt because he gave commandment concerning his "bones" rather than his "body".

□ Yet he had faith that the Lord would bring them in to the land of promise (**Heb 11:22**).

□ Joseph is a great Old Testament type of Jesus Christ. The Lord didn't leave his bones in Egypt (the world) when He rose from the dead (**Luke 24:39, Acts 1:9**).

□ In the same manner, He'll not leave so much as a bone (**Eph 5:30**) when He removes his church from the world.

□ Joseph's great faith provided a testimony to the Hebrew people the whole time they were down in Egypt that they would be leaving, and all the time that they were in the wilderness that they would some day arrive in the land of promise (**Gen 50:24, Josh 24:32**).

III. A Pillar Revealed (13:20-22)

God led his people ("*went before them*") by His visible presence manifested in a pillar of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. From the description of **Exodus 14:24** and **Numbers 14:14** it looks like this is a singular cloud ("*thy cloud*") providing shade and protection in the form of a cloud and providing light and direction in the form of fire. The cloudy pillar makes for an excellent type of the Holy Spirit.

- a. It's given only after redemption (**Eph 1:13, Rom 2:4/2:22-28/5:5**).
- b. It guided them in their journey (**13:21, Rom 8:14**).
- c. It gave them light (**Neh 9:12, John 16:13**).
- d. It provided a covering (**Ps 105:39, Eph 1:13, 4:30**).
- e. God spoke to his people from the cloud (**Ps 99:7, Rev 2:3**).
- f. It was darkness to the Egyptians (**Ex 14:20, 1 Cor 2:11, 14**).
- g. It rested on the tabernacle where God dwelt (**40:33-35, John 1:14, Acts 2:4**).
- h. It was never taken away (**13:22, Neh 9:19, John 14:16, Eph 4:30**).

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James Barker: GOD LED THE PEOPLE ABOUT TEXT: EXODUS 13:17-22

Introduction:

1. The children of Israel were getting ready to leave Egypt for Canaan, the Promised Land.
2. The fastest and easiest route from Egypt to Canaan would be to travel along the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, but the Lord did not want the Israelites to take that route because it would have meant going through the territory of the hostile and warlike Philistines (**Exodus 13:17**).
3. Israel's experience in Egypt had not prepared them for war. Humanly speaking, the short and direct route would have meant their utter destruction.
4. We prefer the short route, the most direct route, but oftentimes the Lord leads us in an unexpected way. We prefer to go the fast way, and what appears to us to be the easy way.
5. But the Lord is omniscient and knows many things we do not know. For example, the Lord knew the Philistines were fierce warriors. And He knew the Israelites were inexperienced in battle.
6. But though the Lord sometimes does not lead us in the way we would prefer, the fact is He does lead us (**Ex. 13:17, 18**).
7. Three times in our text, we see the Lord leads His people.
 - "*God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines*" (**Ex. 13:17**).

• “*But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea*” (**Ex. 13:18**).

• “*And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night*” (**Ex. 13:21**).

I. SOMETIMES THE LORD LEADS US IN AN UNEXPECTED WAY

1. The most direct route is not always the best route (**Ex. 13:17, 18**).
2. When we pray, we should always ask the Lord to direct us, and He will always direct us the best way.
3. Sometimes, God’s ways do not seem to make sense to us, but we know that God will never lead us the wrong way.
4. “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (**Romans 8:28**).
5. The Lord often leads us in ways that seem unusual (cf. **Joshua 6:1- 21**).
6. The Lord is trying to teach us to trust Him more (**Judges 7:1-17**).
7. In **Exodus 13:17 and 18**, the reason is given for the longer route, but oftentimes in this life we never find out why God led us a certain way.
8. But we will surely find out when we get to heaven.
9. At the end of their 40-year journey, the LORD said to them, “*And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no*” (**Deut. 8:2**).
10. The Israelites probably wondered, “It very well might be difficult traveling through Philistine territory, but it will be difficult no matter which way we go. So what difference does it make?”
11. There is a very big difference between the perfect will of God and the permissive will of God.
12. There are no “shortcuts” in the Christian life. Sometimes a man will say that God has called him to preach, but the man does not want to go to Bible college. The dean of my Bible college used to say, “A call to preach is a call to prepare.” . . .
18. There are many reasons why the Lord led Israel the way He did. For one thing, the longer route would make them appreciate the Promised Land. **W. Graham Scroggie** said, “Great blessings easily come by are generally little thought of. It is the man who does not earn his wealth who often squanders it. The things we value most are the things which have cost us most. We should never pray that we may be easily enriched, for it is not the gold which drops from the sky which we value, but that which we dig from the earth. The long road teaches us to appreciate what we find at the end of it.”
19. The Lord taught us to pray, “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*” (**Matthew 6:13**). That is what the Lord was doing for the children of Israel, and that is what He does for us.
20. During their long journey through the wilderness, God was preparing Israel. They had been slaves in Egypt, but now God was transforming them into a great nation.

21. “Travail must precede birth. Struggle must go before sovereignty. Training must be undergone in order to accomplish anything worthwhile. Only the long road brings us to Canaan” (Scroggie).

II. WE MUST TRUST THAT GOD WILL LEAD US

1. God has mapped out a specific route for us, but we must have faith to follow His pathway. **Psalm 37:23** says, “*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*”

2. **Exodus 13:19** says, “*And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.*”

3. Back in **Genesis 50:25**, Joseph said, “*God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence*” (cf. **Joshua 24:32**).

4. Joseph’s statement reveals his faith in the promises of God – “*God will surely visit you...*” Joseph believed that the children of Israel would reach the Promised Land just as the LORD had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

5. That is why **Hebrews 11:22** says, “*By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*”

6. God did not forget about Joseph’s bones, and God will not forget about you and me. Our Lord said, “*Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows*” (**Luke 12:6, 7**).

7. God led the children of Israel, and God leads us too.

8. Away from the mire, and away from the clay, God leads His dear children along; Away up in glory, eternity’s day, God leads His dear children along. – **George A.**

Young

9. I was amazed at all the great hymns that speak of being led by the Lord.

Unfortunately, one of my favorites, “*Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah*” is not in our songbook.

10.

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield. – **William Williams**

11. We should not be surprised at all the beautiful hymns that speak of being led by God, when we consider the hundreds of Scriptures which teach this wonderful promise.
12. *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters"* (**Psalm 23:1, 2**).
13. *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (**Proverbs 3:5, 6**).
14. *"Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day"* (**Psalm 25:5**).
15. *"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way"* (**Psalm 25:9**).
16. *"For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me"* (**Psalm 31:3**).
17. *"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye"* (**Psalm 32:8**).
18. *"O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles"* (**Psalm 43:3**).
19. *"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death"* (**Psalm 48:14**).
20. *"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I"* (**Psalm 61:2**).
21. *"If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"* (**Psalm 139:9, 10**).
22. *"And the LORD shall guide thee continually"* (**Isaiah 58:11**).

III. HOW DOES GOD LEAD US?

1. In **Exodus 13:21 and 22**, we see that the LORD led the children of Israel by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.
2. **Romans 8:14** and **Galatians 5:18** teach that today God leads us by His Holy Spirit.
3. Our Lord said in **John 16:13**, *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."*
4. In **Exodus 13:11**, God promised the Israelites that He would bring them into the Promised Land. In **John 14:1-4**, our Lord has promised to return and bring us home to heaven.
5. In **Exodus 13:22**, the Bible says God never took away the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. In **John 14:16**, our Lord has promised to never take away His Holy Spirit.
6. *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you"* (**John 14:16, 17**).
7. God leads us with His Word.
8. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (**Psalm 119:105**).
9. *"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple"* (**Psalm 119:130**).
10. The Lord leads us as we pray and ask Him for direction. You will remember how Abraham's steward prayed in **Genesis 24**:

11. *“And he said O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master” (Genesis 24:12-14).* That prayer was answered immediately and specifically when Rebecca came out with her pitcher and everything went precisely the way Abraham’s servant prayed (**Gen. 24:15-20**).

12. God leads us by His providence. We see that in the life of Joseph, and Boaz and Ruth, Mordecai and Esther, and Daniel, and many others in the Bible.

13. In preaching and when soul winning, I often quote **Ephesians 2:8, 9** – *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

14. But consider the next verse – *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

15. God has already mapped it all out for us.

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Joseph H. Gilmore: He leadeth me: O blessed thought!

He leadeth me, O blessed thought
O words with heavenly comfort fraught
Whate'er I do, where'er I be
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me

Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom
By waters still, over troubled sea
Still 'tis His hand that leadeth me

He leadeth me, He leadeth me
By His own hand He leadeth me
His faithful follower I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me

Lord, I would place thine hand in mine
Nor ever murmur nor repine
Content, whatever lot I see
Since 'tis thine hand that leadeth me

He leadeth me, He leadeth me
By His own hand He leadeth me
His faithful follower I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me

And when my task on earth is done
When by thy grace the victory's won
Even death's cold wave I will not flee
Since God through Jordan leadeth me

He leadeth me, He leadeth me
By His own hand He leadeth me
His faithful follower I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me

His faithful follower I would be,
For by His hand He leadeth me

For by His hand He leadeth me

TEXT: Exodus 14:1-14

TITLE: BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

BIG IDEA:

**DESPERATE SITUATIONS CALL FOR FAITH INSTEAD OF FEAR IN
LIGHT OF GOD'S CONTROL AND HIS DESIRE TO GLORIFY HIS NAME**

INTRODUCTION:

God is not bashful about leading His people into seemingly impossible situations. In this text we find the Israelites, no sooner than having boldly departed from Egypt, now pinned between the deep waters and the oncoming pursuit of Pharaoh's mighty chariots. Not surprisingly they panic and start firing off sarcastic complaints against the leadership of Moses and the plan of God. Why has God abandoned them? Why has He put them in such jeopardy? They allow their present circumstances to erase all thoughts of the promises of God and His past demonstrations of faithfulness. They fail to trust in His sovereign control. Moses reminds them that they need to take courage; to stand firm; to have confidence in the Lord's conquest of their enemies; and to look to the Lord for deliverance.

Bruce Hurt: Why did God lead Israel to this place which was militarily speaking a place of sure defeat? Because God knows that the place of desperation can become for us the place of dependence on Him! It is that place that we come to where we can see absolutely no way out, and then in utter desperation we have to cast ourselves completely, totally, upon Jehovah. In the place of desperation we come to understand the passage "*Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.*" (**Ps 55:22+**)

Mark Vroegop: The book of Exodus is not about Israel; it is not about Moses; and it is not about Egypt or Pharaoh. The story of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt is meant to tell you something about God. While Israel's suffering in slavery and their deliverance through the Ten Plagues is a significant part of the book of Exodus, the real storyline is the declaration that Yahweh ("*I AM*") is the one true God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a covenant-keeping God, and the powerful nation on the earth will not stand in God's way from drawing His people to Himself. God is going to glorify His name on the earth, and He will use Pharaoh and the Exodus in order to send a very clear message. . .

The consecration of the firstborn, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and especially the presence of God in the cloud and the pillar of fire are meant to demonstrate that Israel belongs to God. They are His precious possession. God did not deliver them in order to abandon them. He did not redeem them only to desert them. God is going to provide.

I. (:1-4) THE PURPOSES OF GOD BRING GLORY TO HIS NAME (GOD IS IN CONTROL)

A. (:1-2) Israel = Sitting Ducks

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea.’”

John Davis: The journey of Israel up to this point was in a southeasterly direction. If they had continued on this course, it would have carried them beyond the eastern border of Egypt and perhaps into direct conflict with Egyptian border forces. Through Moses, God ordered a change of direction which to many Israelites must have seemed strange and indeed risky, for their course was to turn in a southwesterly direction which in a short time would place great bodies of water between themselves and the Sinai peninsula to the east.

Mark Vroegop: This location will become the nexus of Israel’s faith, Egypt’s defeat, and God’s glory. We can see the now when we look at the situation through the lens of biblical history, but at the time and in the moment the choice of this location must have seemed misguided or even a mistake.

Steven Cole: While we cannot know for certain where the exodus took place, we can trust the biblical account that reports the mighty miracle that God did to deliver Israel through a deep body of water that subsequently drowned the pursuing Egyptian army.

Jamieson, Robert, D.D.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David.: The Israelites had now completed their three days’ journey, and at Etham the decisive step would have to be taken whether they would celebrate their intended feast and return, or march onwards by the head of the Red Sea into the desert, with a view to a final departure. They were already on the borders of the desert, and a short march would have placed them beyond the reach of pursuit, as the chariots of Egypt could have made little progress over dry and yielding sand. But at Etham, instead of pursuing their journey eastward with the sea on their right, they were suddenly commanded to diverge to the south, keeping the gulf on their left; a route which not only detained them lingering on the confines of Egypt, but, in adopting it, they actually turned their backs on the land of which they had set out to obtain the possession. A movement so unexpected, and of which the ultimate design was carefully concealed, could not but excite the astonishment of all, even of Moses himself, although, from his implicit faith in the wisdom and power of his heavenly Guide, he obeyed. The object was to entice Pharaoh to pursue, in order that the moral effect, which the judgments on Egypt had produced in releasing God’s people from bondage, might be still further extended over the nations by the awful events transacted at the Red Sea.

B. (:3) Pharaoh = Licking His Chops

“For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Pharaoh assumed that Israel's divine help had run out and that they were hopelessly entangled on a dead-end trail since the desert, the sea, and marshes barred their way out of this trap.

Scott Grant: The Lord, after leading them away from the quickest way, now has the people wander in what seems like an aimless manner. He even has them turn back into Egyptian territory. Then he has them camp by the sea - a dead end. This was so that their wandering would appear aimless to Pharaoh. No doubt it also appears aimless to the Israelites.

For us, life may seem filled with aimless wandering and dead-end streets. We can't seem to lay hold of any direction in life. What we want never comes to pass, if we can ever figure out what we want. What we try ends up failing. And we're left to wonder, "Where is the Lord? Is he really leading my life?" Sometimes, the leading of the Lord seems aimless.

Douglas Stuart: But how could Pharaoh be expected to conclude that the Israelites were suddenly unable to leave Egypt after he had just been so severely taught the power of Israel's God in the ten plagues? What would give him the sense that suddenly he could gain victory over the Israelites when their God had just shown total superiority to him and his gods? The answer requires appreciating Egyptian religion in its ancient Near Eastern context. To all the ancients (except those Israelites who were beginning to understand the only true God) the gods and goddesses that controlled the world were arbitrary and capricious, quick to change their actions and attitudes, constantly vying with one another for power, not omnipresent but manifesting themselves at given locations and then leaving those locations unpredictably. James could say of Satan, "*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" (**Jas 4:7**) because Satan, who is finite and cannot be in all places at once, will soon lose interest in trying to tempt someone who resists him and will move on to someone else more likely to yield to temptation. Likewise, the Egyptians' gods were considered beings who might not always be present among their people. Accordingly, Yahweh knew that it would be natural for Pharaoh to think that he, Yahweh, after having expended great effort to demonstrate his power to the Egyptians, might now no longer be directly involved in helping the Israelites so that he, Pharaoh, could once again assert his power over them unhindered. Indeed, the Israelites themselves were not above assuming at times pessimistically that they had been abandoned by Yahweh. Once again all of this was a plan of God announced in advance, so that Moses and the Israelites would not (if they could maintain their faith) be surprised and discomfited by the coming Egyptian pursuit. The purpose of the plan was to "*gain glory over Pharaoh*" as well as "*all his army.*" Previously the vaunted Egyptian army was not subject to the same sort of humiliation that Pharaoh, the Egyptians in general, their land, and their gods had endured. Now it was time in God's plan to include the army in the scheme of humiliation. Because the Israelites were already organized as an army and needed to think of themselves in terms of their upcoming military role, it hardly should come as a surprise that God would want them to see his sovereignty in a military encounter as a means of encouraging them toward the military challenges that lay ahead for them. A military defeat of the Egyptians also

would demonstrate final proof of God's power to Egypt ("*and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord*").

C. (:4) Lord = Springing the Trap

1. Hardening Pharaoh's Heart so that He Chases After the Israelites

"Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them;"

2. Honoring God's Name through the Slaughter of Pharaoh and His Army

"and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army,"

Wiersbe: What seemed like an easy victory to Egypt would turn out to be an ignominious defeat, and the Lord would get all the glory.

3. Highlighting the Dominion of the Lord

"and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD."

D. (:4b) Israel = Carrying Out the Plan

"And they did so."

II. (:5-9) THE PURSUER OF GOD'S PEOPLE SALIVATES AT OPPORTUNITIES TO EXERCISE DOMINION (OUR CIRCUMSTANCES CAN LOOK DESPERATE)

A. (:5) Second Thoughts

"When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?'"

Wiersbe: It dawned on Pharaoh and his officers that, by allowing their Jewish slaves to escape, they had threatened, if not destroyed, Egypt's whole economy.

Jamieson, Robert, D.D.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David.: The heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, etc. — Alas, how soon the obduracy of this reprobate king reappears! He had been convinced, but not converted - overawed, but not sanctified by the appalling judgments of heaven. He bitterly repented of what he now thought a hasty concession. Pride and revenge, the honor of his kingdom, and the interests of his subjects, all prompted him to recall his permission to reclaim those runaway slaves and force them to their wonted labor. Strange that he should yet allow such considerations to obliterate or outweigh all his painful experience of the danger of oppressing that people. But those whom the Lord has doomed to destruction are first infatuated by sin.

B. (:6-9) Fierce Pursuit

1. (:6-7) Marshalling His Forces

"So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him;"

and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.”

John Davis: The chariots were open at the rear and consisted of a semicircular standing-board made of wood. This was encircled by a rim that stood approximately two and one-half feet above the standing-board. The chariots had two wheels and were drawn by two small horses. . . they were usually manned by two men: a charioteer and a warrior.

2. (:8-9) Trapping the Israelites

a. (:8) The Chase Scene

“And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly.”

Look how quickly boldness turned to fear and panic

David Guzik: The idea behind the Hebrew words with boldness (*ruwn yad*) includes the idea of rebellion against authority (**1 Kings 11:26–27**). The rebellious nature of Israel was good when it was against Pharaoh and all it stood for; it was bad when it was against the LORD, Moses, and all they stood for. The trouble with most rebels is that they rebel against the wrong things.

b. (:9) The Confrontation by the Sea

“Then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.”

III. (:10-14) THE PEOPLE OF GOD CAN SMELL CATASTROPHE (FAITH NOT FEAR MUST BE OUR RESPONSE)

A. (:10-12) The Panic of Fear Cries Out in Complaints

1. (:10) Complaints to the Lord

“And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD.”

Gispén: The narrative now becomes very vivid and gripping. As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites noticed the swirling clouds of dust and saw the Egyptians in the distance (cf. **13:20**). To the east was the sea, to the south and west were the mountains, and the north was blocked by Pharaoh’s armies.

John Gill: had they prayed unto him in this their distress for help and assistance, protection and preservation, with an holy and humble confidence in him for it, they had acted a right and laudable part; but their crying out to him seems to be only an outcry of

the troubles they were in, and rather the effect of despair than of faith and hope; and was by way of complaint and lamentation of their miserable condition and circumstances, as appears by what follows, which shows what temper of mind they were in.

Michael Barrett: And I say sometimes the providence of God will bring us into circumstances that make no sense to us when we examine them by sight. No matter what it is that we know to be true, when sight takes over, when we allow the circumstances to overwhelm us, to bear down upon us, no matter how well we believe and how true it is what we believe, that old sight, that old sight just begins to control us. And it brings us to despair. So there was Israel between the sea and the mountains and the chariots of Pharaoh. Barring a supernatural intervention they were doomed. No place to turn. No place to look except up. And that is what God was seeking to teach them, no place to look.

2. (:11-12) Complaints to Moses

a. (:11) Why Have You Led Us Into Peril?

“Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt?’”

Wiersbe: Unbelief has a way of erasing from our memory all the demonstrations we’ve seen of God’s great power and all the instances we know of God’s faithfulness to His Word.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Moses was a much more immediate target than the Lord, so they complained to him (v. 11). Were there “*no graves at all* [double negative] *in Egypt?*” They mocked in the most satirical tone possible (since Egypt specialized in graves and had about three-fourths of its land area available for grave sites.) Then followed the crepe-hanging with its “I-told-you-so” pseudoprophets (v. 12). Suddenly the hardships of their Egyptian bondage were forgotten.

b. (:12) We Were Better Off Under Bondage in Egypt

“Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

Wiersbe: These verses introduce the disappointing pattern of Israel’s behavior during their march from Egypt to Canaan. As long as everything was going well, they usually obeyed the Lord and Moses and made progress. But if there was any trial or discomfort in their circumstances, they immediately began to complain to Moses and to the Lord and asked to go back to Egypt.

B. (:13-14) The Antidote of Fear Requires Looking to the Lord for Victory

1. (:13a) Reject Fear – Embrace Courage

“But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear!’”

John Hannah: Moses, recognizing that fear was distorting their memories and arousing their passions against him, sought to reassure them that the Lord would deliver them by fighting for them (cf. **15:3; Neh. 4:20; Ps. 35:1**) as they remained firm in confidence. Surprisingly, as they came to their greatest moment of deliverance, the people of God were full of distrust and fear.

2. (:13b) Reject Reliance on Self – Embrace Faith in God’s Salvation

*“Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD
which He will accomplish for you today;”*

Spurgeon: These words contain God’s command to the believer when he is reduced to great straits and brought into extraordinary difficulties. He cannot retreat; he cannot go forward; he is shut up on the right hand and on the left; what is he now to do? The Master’s word to him is, *“Stand still.”* It will be well for him if at such times he listens only to his Master’s word, for other and evil advisers come with their suggestions. Despair whispers, *“Lie down and die; give it all up.”* But God would have us put on a cheerful courage, and even in our worst times, rejoice in his love and faithfulness. Cowardice says, *“Retreat; go back to the worldling’s way of action; you cannot play the Christian’s part, it is too difficult. Relinquish your principles.”* But, however much Satan may urge this course upon you, you cannot follow it if you are a child of God. His divine fiat has bid thee go from strength to strength, and so thou shalt, and neither death nor hell shall turn thee from thy course. What, if for a while thou art called to stand still, yet this is but to renew thy strength for some greater advance in due time. Precipitancy cries, *“do something. Stir yourself; to stand still and wait, is sheer idleness.”* We must be doing something at once—we must do it so we think—instead of looking to the Lord, who will not only do something but will do everything. Presumption boasts, *“If the sea be before you, march into it and expect a miracle.”* But Faith listens neither to Presumption, nor to Despair, nor to Cowardice, nor to Precipitancy, but it hears God say, *“Stand still,”* and immovable as a rock it stands. *“Stand still;”*—keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders, cheerfully and patiently awaiting the directing voice; and it will not be long ere God shall say to you, as distinctly as Moses said it to the people of Israel, *“Go forward.”*

Douglas Stuart: From the point of view of God’s attributes, Moses’ speech alludes to five:

- (1) God is a dispeller of fear, a comforter of those who are afraid.
- (2) God is a deliverer from distress.
- (3) God invites and expects his people to trust in him (*“Stand firm ... you need only to be still”*).
- (4) God removes danger.
- (5) God is a warrior against the forces of evil.

The timing and application of these attributes are under God’s control, not man’s, but

Moses could offer strong assurances to the Israelites in this instance because of what God had already said through him to them in regard to his plan to humiliate Egypt yet again, a last time.

3. (:13c) Reject Walking by Sight – Embrace Expecting Victory

*“for the Egyptians whom you have seen today,
you will never see them again forever.”*

4. (:14) Reject Fleshly Activity – Embrace Looking to the Lord for Victory

“The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How much discomfort or pressure does it take for us to take our eyes off the Lord and start to complain and question His guidance and goodness?
- 2) When have you faced a seemingly hopeless situation and found that God provided the deliverance? How has God shown Himself strong in your weakness?
- 3) How would you evaluate the theological implications of your complaints and grumbings before God?
- 4) What is your thought process when overwhelmed by the panic of fear?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

F B Meyer: Often God seems to place His children in positions of profound difficulty—leading them into a wedge from which there is no escape; contriving a situation which no human judgment would have permitted, had it been previously consulted. The very cloud conducts them thither. You may be thus involved at this very hour. It does seem perplexing and very serious to the last degree; but it is perfectly right. The issue will more than justify Him who has brought you hither. It is a platform for the display of His almighty grace and power. He will not only deliver you, but in doing so He will give you a lesson that you will never forget; and to which, in many a psalm and song in after days, you will revert. You will never be able to thank God enough for having done just as He has.

Bill Bright - God's People in Trouble

In **Exodus 14:1–4**, the Israelites experienced an unrecognized blessing. As you read, notice the human viewpoint of the people and God's viewpoint as seen in Moses.

1. How did the Israelites react to apparent danger (**Exodus 14:10–12**)?

2. Notice how Moses reacted. Why do you think he commanded the people as he did (**Exodus 14:13, 14**)?
3. What did God accomplish in their hearts and minds through this experience (**Exodus 14:31**)?
4. Think back to a crisis in your life. How did those around you respond?
 - How did you react?
 - How could you have improved your attitude?
 - List ways God has worked through difficulties in your life, and has shown these difficulties really to be blessings.

Taking the Proper Attitude

1. List some things the Bible guarantees when you are tempted or tested (**1 Corinthians 10:13**).
2. How can the Bible's guarantee in **Romans 8:28** be true that everything will work out for good to those who love God? When have you ever doubted God's work in your life? Why?
3. What response to tribulation does God expect from you, according to **Romans 5:3–5**? What are the results of tribulations? (See also **James 1:3**.)
4. What is the purpose of unrecognized blessings according to:
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4**
 - Hebrews 12:5–11**
5. Read **1 Thessalonians 5:18** and **Hebrews 13:15**.
 - What response does God command in all situations?
 - How can you rejoice and give thanks when sorrow and tragedy come?
 - Contrast this with the attitude of the Israelites in **Exodus 14:1–12**.

LIFE APPLICATION

- 1 List the methods by which an attitude of trust can become a reality for you. (See **Ephesians 5:18**; **Galatians 5:16**; **1 Thessalonians 5:17**; **Romans 10:17**.)
- 2 With what trial in your life do you need to trust God right now?
- 3 What do you think the unrecognized blessings in that trial could be?
- 4 How can you receive those blessings?

Joseph Exell: The Biblical Illustrator – Faith and Fear

As man is capable of different forms of actions, so is he susceptible of various kinds of emotions. There are two kinds of emotions which govern mankind more than any others--faith and fear. These comprehend almost all the interests, and sway almost all the actions of life. They are often opposed to each other, and frequently fear conquers faith. Fear is a power governed more by sense than faith; it is more selfish and timid than it. Faith is a more spiritual and religious power than fear, and must conquer all fear and all opposing powers before men can be powerful and triumphant.

I. Let us observe, first, the **triumph of fear or feeling over faith**.

1. Faith is often opposed and conquered when immediate danger appears, and when it cannot point to immediate deliverance.
2. When the superficial inclination of man is opposed and self-denial demanded, faith often is vanquished, and feeling triumphs.
3. Faith is often conquered by sense or feeling when reason cannot comprehend and explain things in God's dealings towards His creatures.
4. Feeling often overcomes faith when religion appears to militate against what men consider their present interest.
5. Feeling sometimes gets the advantage over faith on the ground of ease and indulgence.
6. Faith also is often conquered for want of free and open heart and mind to receive truth and conviction. Prejudice and narrowness of mind are deadly enemies to faith, as they are to the advancement of truth and right life everywhere.
7. I mention another ground on which faith is too often conquered by feeling--namely, because it looks to the future for its full reward. Feeling has no patience to wait; it must be satisfied with its objects now; whilst faith rises above the visible and the present to the unseen and the future.

II. We shall now notice the **triumph of faith over sense and feeling**. Though faith is above feeling, it is not necessarily opposed to it; it works through it, and makes it subordinate to its influence and end. The unity of the two is essential to make men strong and happy; when they are divided the happiness of men is marred, and their strength of heart and character is shorn.

1. When the mind is profoundly convinced of truth it conquers. In the degree the mind is capable of deep conviction, it is strong, and this also is one of the strongholds of faith. When the mind becomes thoroughly imbued with the importance and truth of anything, it possesses the first qualification of conquest over all opposition and difficulty; and never till then can great things be accomplished.
2. Another condition under which faith proves itself triumphant is a deep conviction of need. Conviction of need, either personally or relatively, is both the reason and power of any and every effort, and no great sacrifice and conquest will be accomplished without.
3. For the development and triumph of faith, it is requisite as a condition that the soul should be convinced of the failure and insufficiency of all sensuous and finite things to satisfy its requirements.
4. It is requisite that the moral perception and feeling of the soul should be opened and awakened to see and feel things as they are before faith can conquer. Though faith is a power of confidence in the dark, it is nevertheless a power that thrives in light, and demands all the evidence the case in hand permits.
5. Faith conquers whilst the soul lives in close union with God, and carries with it a consciousness of His presence; for conscious communion with God is the power as well as the life of the soul, and so long as this is enjoyed faith is triumphant.

III. We come now to the **triumph of God over nature**--“See the salvation of the Lord, which He will show to you to-day.” Such a salvation was not wrought in the ordinary course of nature. Apparently the forces and laws of nature were against the possibility of it; it was a Divine display of Divine triumph of God over nature.

1. The event is represented as authentic and real. It is not an allegory, or any ideal manifestation representing a potential possibility, or a thing to excite human fancy.
2. The event was a manifestation, and produced in subordination to the purpose of mercy.
3. The event was produced for a moral and religious end. God had repeatedly promised to deliver them, and the act was a fulfilment of an old and repeated engagement. The promise was made and performed on the ground of religion.
4. The event is in harmony with its conditions. The event is not professed to be the production of ordinary power, which would be inconsistent; for it is an extraordinary one, and there must be some equality between the power of production and the production itself. The event is professed to be an extraordinary manifestation of an infinite power; and unless this power itself is denied in the fact of its existence, it is hard to guess how the event can be considered impossible. The event is professed to have been produced for a wise and sufficient reason.

Lessons:

1. The dealings of God are suitable always to the occasion. He works in the right time and place, when and where the thing is needed.
2. It is possible to be in a condition which is beyond all human and natural deliverance.
3. God sometimes delays His deliverance to an extreme hour.
4. Where duty is clear, difficulties should not prevent an effort to perform it.
5. The difference between the real and the unreal is seen most clearly in extreme conditions.
6. There are things in life which we meet once, and we pass on and never meet again.
7. Genuine and deep-rooted faith shows its superiority in circumstances that baffle sensuous reasoning. (*T. Hughes.*)

Mark Vroegop: Being afraid is one thing, but there are times when fear can cross a line, and I think we see it here. The circumstances of the moment do not look good, but it is important to learn from Israel’s failure. There is a reason why this is recorded in the Bible; it is to remind us that God is worthy to be trusted.

I’m sure that you have times in your life when it is really tempting to give in to fearful panic. I’ve faced seasons and situations like that for sure. In those moments I find it helpful to do a few things:

- I remind my soul that just because I feel something doesn't make it true. The older I get, the less I trust my feelings or emotions. I try to remind myself that I've been here before and "freaking-out" isn't helpful. In fact, it can be sinful.
- I rehearse what God has done. This begins with rehearsing the Gospel – the greatest moment of deliverance in my life. But it also involves rehearsing the ways God has taken care of me in the past. My journal records many lists of the ways God has answered prayer, but those lists are there because I need to be reminded about what God has done.
- I choose, by faith, to believe that God has purposes for me beyond what I can see. And while the circumstances may not be easy, they are always for my good.

So I try, God helping me, to move beyond what I "see" and "feel" to what I "believe." I try to not let my eyes direct my emotions or my emotions to direct my heart.

TEXT: Exodus 14:15-31

TITLE: ARE THERE ANY RIVERS THAT JUST SEEM UNCROSSABLE?

BIG IDEA:

**AS WE STEP OUT IN FAITH THE POWERFUL SALVATION OF THE LORD
GLORIFIES HIS NAME**

INTRODUCTION:

The crossing of the Red Sea is one of those classic bible stories that is foundational for the Christian faith. God directs His people into desperate circumstances where no way out is humanly visible. Caught between the deep waters of the Red Sea and the oncoming pursuit of the Egyptian army, the people of God must look to God in faith for deliverance.

Lizz Wright: God Specializes

Have you any rivers
That seem uncrossable?
And have you any mountain
That you cannot tunnel through?

God specializes
In things thought impossible
And He will do what no other
No other power but holy power can do

Ryken: All good stories have a climax, but the book of Exodus is such a great adventure that it has not one, but three.

- The first climax is Israel crossing the Red Sea in **chapter 14**;
 - the second is God giving his Law at Mount Sinai in **chapters 19** and following;
- and the third is the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle at the end of **chapter 40**.

John Mackay: The Exodus, the going out of the Israelites from Egypt, is now complete. Their departure from the land on the night of the Passover and their passage through the Red Sea have to be thought of as two parts of the one event in the same way as the crucifixion and the resurrection are both required to constitute the gospel message. The escape from Egypt delivered the Lord's people from the oppression of the demonic forces that were distorting God's creation order for their own ends. The earthly embodiment of these forces in the army of Pharaoh has now been divinely destroyed with an overwhelming display of sovereign power. *"The Egyptians you see today you will never see again"* (14:13).

By going through the waters the people were all united into the bond of the covenant as mediated by Moses. *"Our forefathers were all under the cloud and ... they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (1 Cor.

10:1–2). Through Moses the Lord had done extraordinary things on their behalf, and so they were from that time forward under obligation to acknowledge Moses' leadership and obey his instructions.

Standing on the other side of the sea, the people might have thought that all their difficulties were now over, but having been brought by divine power into a new relationship with God, they now have to learn how to live in terms of the covenant bond God has forged between himself and them. They are moving to the land of promise, but their slowness to learn means that they will be delayed along the road. Salvation does not ordinarily lead straight to glory: there is still on earth a preparatory process that the Lord leads his people through to make them ready for their full enjoyment of the inheritance.

I. (:15-16) GET MOVING – STEP OUT IN FAITH TO ACCOMPLISH GOD'S MISSION

A. (:15) Mobilize God's People

1. Time to Stop Praying for Guidance

*"Then the LORD said to Moses,
'Why are you crying out to Me?'"*

You have the guidance you need; any additional time spent crying out to the Lord would be a delaying tactic; you need to exercise faith and move out

Ryken: Probably the best way to understand this is to recognize that as Israel's prophet, Moses represented the people before God. He was their mediator in the covenant. The rebuke that God gave him, therefore, was really meant for all Israel. The hour of their salvation had come. This was no time for crying and complaining; it was time to move on. When **Charles Spurgeon** preached on this verse, he said, "Far be it from me ever to say a word in disparagement of the holy, happy, heavenly exercise of prayer. But, beloved, there are times when prayer is not enough—when prayer itself is out of season.... When we have prayed over a matter to a certain degree, it then becomes sinful to tarry any longer; our plain duty is to carry our desires into action, and having asked God's guidance, and having received divine power from on high, to go at once to our duty without any longer deliberation or delay."

2. Time for Action = Go Forward!

"Tell the sons of Israel to go forward."

Douglas Stuart: In saying "Tell the Israelites to move on," God was asking for a breaking of camp, rounding up of animals, packing of belongings, an orderly departure by ranks. All this would take many hours, and, indeed, the remainder of that day and almost the entire evening were used in the process of getting the Israelites out of their encampment and into and across the sea (**vv. 19–22**).

Ian Paisley: God's Marching Orders

To Go Back Is Destruction

Never be tempted to go back when God commands, "*Go forward*". To turn back is disobedience to God's commandment and certain destruction. If Israel had turned back they, and not the Egyptians, would have been destroyed.

It Is the Only Way of Escape

Israel was shut up to going forward, on the right hand and on the left high mountains, behind them their bloodthirsty enemies and before them the Red Sea. God's way seemed impossible but it was possible, for God promised to part the sea. What God promises He will surely perform. Escape is certain if we go forward.

If You Would Have God with You

God is only with us when we go His way. To disobey God is to depart from God. In God's path alone is God's presence.

Go forward! Keep going forward! Keep on going forward!

Wade Horton: Victory is won by going forward. "Go forward!" God will take care of the enemy.

B. (:16) Make a Way Where There Seems to be No Way

1. Divide the Sea to Make a Way to Move Forward

"And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it,"

Douglas Stuart: Again the staff of God plays an important role in a miracle, symbolizing God's power and presence and reminding all concerned that it was not Moses but God who performed the supernatural. Again as well, the language of stretching out the hand refers to using the staff. As the staff had affected the Nile in first plague, turning water to blood (esp. **7:17–20**), and in the second, producing frogs from the Nile (**8:1–15**), now it would affect an even greater body of water, the Red Sea, causing it to divide.

2. Direct God's People to Walk by Faith to Overcome the Greatest Obstacle

"and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land."

Bruce Hurt: This passage reminds me of **Don Moen's** famous song "[God Will Make a Way](#)" (of course in this case God will make a way Israel could see)....

Oh, God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me
He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side

With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way, He will make a way
By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
And rivers in the desert will I see
Heaven and Earth will fade but His word will still remain
And He will do something new today

Adrian Rogers: Do you know what God did to that dead-end? He turned it into an eight-lane super highway, and, dry-shod, they went through the Red Sea. God knows the way through the wilderness. Have you any that seem to be uncrossable? Have you any mountains you cannot tunnel through? God specializes in things that seem to be impossible. He knows a thousand ways to make a way for you. "*I am the Lord thy God. Is there anything too hard for Me?*" (**Jeremiah 32:27**) And, that so-called impossibility is God's opportunity to display His glory and His might, if you are living in the Spirit, and if you have your eye on that pillar of cloud and that pillar of fire.

II. (:17-18) PRIORITIZE GOD'S HONOR – LOOK FOR GOD TO GLORIFY HIMSELF

A. (:17a) Strategy = Hardening Hearts – Leads to Foolish Presumption

1. Harden Hearts – cf. 14:4

“And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians”

2. Foolish Presumption

“so that they will go in after them;”

B. (:17b-18) Showdown = Seeking Honor

“and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen.”

John Currid: The second half of the verse is dominated by four instances of the preposition *beth* being used to convey instrumentality. It literally reads, ‘*I will be glorified [kābēd] by Pharaoh, by his army, by his chariots and by his cavalry.*’ This is a statement of the ultimate purpose and significance of the Red Sea incident.

David Guzik: God was not finished answering Pharaoh’s question from **Exodus 5:2**, when Pharaoh asked “*Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?*” God used the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea to speak to Egypt as much as He used it to speak to Israel. This is an aspect of the spiritual life rarely reflected upon, yet **Ephesians 3:10–11** tell us that God uses His people to teach angelic beings. When God delivers us from a temptation or crisis, it is as much a testimony to our invisible adversaries as it is to us. God uses each victory in our life to tell our unseen enemies of His power and ability to work in and through frail humanity.

III. (:19-20) MAINTAIN SEPARATION BETWEEN GOD'S PEOPLE AND THE WORLD

A. (:19-20a) God Maintains the Separation

1. Function of the Angel of God

“And the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them;”

2. Function of the Pillar of Cloud

“and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.

So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night.”

C H McIntosh: The pillar of the cloud. *“It was a cloud and darkness”* to the Egyptians, but *“it gave light by night”* to Israel. How like the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Truly that cross has a double aspect, likewise. It forms the foundation of the believer's peace; and, at the same time, seals the condemnation of the guilty world. The self-same blood which purges the believer's conscience and gives him perfect peace, stains this earth and consummates its guilt. The very mission of the Son of God which strips the world of its cloak, and leaves it wholly without excuse, clothes the Church with a fair mantle of righteousness, and fills her mouth with ceaseless praise. The very same Lamb who will terrify, by His unmitigated wrath, all tribes and classes of earth, will lead, by His gentle hand, His blood-bought flock, through the green pastures, and beside the still waters forever.

Douglas Stuart: In these verses God shows himself a protector of his people through the pillar, not merely a guide to them. That God should lead his people through the wilderness is important; that he should protect them from harm on the way is equally as important. Once the Israelites could see the Egyptian chariots approaching them, it was only a matter of minutes until they would be overtaken. Something therefore had to prevent the Egyptians from surrounding and re-enslaving the Israelites, to allow God's people the many hours they needed to break camp, form ranks, and cross the Red Sea.

B. (:20b) Separation Provides Protection

“Thus the one did not come near the other all night.”

Wiersbe: The pillar moved between the Israelites and the Egyptians, indicating that God had become a wall of protection between His people and their enemies. The pillar gave light to Israel but darkness to the enemy, for the faithless people of Egypt couldn't understand the ways of God.

IV. (:21-29) CROSS OVER IN SAFETY VS DESTRUCTION -- PARTING OF THE SEA WITH TWO VERY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

A. (:21-22) Safety for Israel

1. (:21a) Role of Moses

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea;”

2. (:21b) Role of the Lord

“and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.”

Youngblood: miracles issue from God and occur in accordance with His timing as He controls the forces of nature to accomplish His will.

3. (:22a) Role of God’s People

“And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land,”

4. (:22b) Role of the Walled Up Waters

“and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

John Davis: How wide an area was provided for the crossing is not given in the text of Exodus. It might well be that this was a considerable passageway in view of the fact that many Israelites had to cross.

B. (:23-28) Destruction for Egyptians

1. (:23-25) Transition from Pursuit to Panic

a. (:23) Pursuit – False Confidence

“Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea.”

Douglas Stuart: (:23-25) -- Four difficulties thwarted the Egyptian army’s attempt to capture the Israelites: they pursued into the sea, they suffered from God’s direct debilitation of their minds, they had trouble with chariot wheels (possibly a synecdoche for any number of chariot failures), and they suffered a sense of defeatism.

b. (:24-25a) Perplexity – Unexplained Difficulties

“And it came about at the morning watch, that the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty;”

c. (:25b) Panic – True Realization – but too late

“so the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.’”

2. (:26-28) Total Destruction

a. (:26-27) Role of Moses

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.’

So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it;”

b. (:28) Role of the Lord

“then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained.”

Gispen: Verse 28 gives the impression that Pharaoh himself did not follow the Israelites into the sea.

Ryken: This was all part of God’s strategy. He lured the Egyptians into chasing Moses across the desert, and when they finally caught up, it was right at the spot where God planned for them to meet their watery doom. There were no survivors (cf. **Ps. 106:11**). A rushing wave swept over them, and the next thing anyone knew, their bodies were washing up on the seashore. And God was glorified! Some may think it was harsh for God to drown an entire army, but it was right and just. Pharaoh and his soldiers were cruel men, bent on destroying God’s people. Was it not right for God to punish evil men for killing innocent children? It was especially appropriate for them to die by drowning because they had once tried to drown the children of Israel in the Nile. What happened to them at the Red Sea was divine retribution. These men deserved to be punished for their sins. And God is glorified when he judges people for their sins because this displays his divine attribute of justice.

God was also judging Egypt’s gods, and this too was for his glory. It is ironic that the Egyptians were defeated at daybreak because that is when their sun god was supposedly rising in the east. But Ra could not save them. Nor could Pharaoh save them, even though he too was revered as a god. According to one ancient Egyptian inscription, “He whom the king has loved will be a revered one, but there is no tomb for a rebel against his majesty, and his corpse is cast into the water.” This inscription was a threat to drown Pharaoh’s enemies, but in the end the Egyptians were the ones who were lost at sea! And God did this for the praise of his justice.

C. (:29) Safety for Israel

1. Successful Outcome

“But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea,”

2. Supernatural Miracle

“and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.”

V. (:30-31) SEE AND BELIEVE

A. (:30a) Historical Fact of Deliverance

"Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians,"

B. (:30b-31) Spiritual Lessons Associated with Seeing and Believing

1. (:30b) Sight of the Dead Egyptians

"and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore."

2. (:31a) Sight of the Miraculous Power of the Lord

"And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians,"

3. (:31b) Spiritual Lessons

a. Fearing the Lord

"the people feared the LORD,"

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The fear of the Lord (v. 31) was the signal of a responsive attitude of submission and love equivalent to putting one's whole trust in him.

Oswalt: The event gave them good and sufficient reasons to believe the trustworthiness and the goodness of God, something they would not have believed without that experience.

b. Believing in the Lord and in His Appointed Leader

"and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses."

Douglas Stuart: What was important for Israel was not merely that they were safe and the Egyptians were not; what mattered was that faith saves, and God had shown them how faith in him could pay off to their lasting benefit.

James Butler: The Red Sea miracle for the Israelites had a great effect upon them. Our text points out several of the effects. Like the resurrection of Christ is to the Christ believer, so the Red Sea miracle was a capstone of doctrine for the Israelites.

First—The Perception of the Miracle

"Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians."

Second—The Piety From the Miracles

"The people feared God."

Third—The Persuasion From the Miracle

"And believed the LORD and his servant Moses."

Wiersbe: They were now constituted as a nation with Moses as their leader. Through this “*baptism*,” the people of Israel were identified with Moses, just as in water baptism God’s people today are identified with Jesus Christ. The miracle of the Exodus became a part of Israel’s confession of faith when they brought their gifts to the Lord (**Deut. 26:1-11**).

John Hannah: The people often fluctuated between trust and complaining, between belief and unbelief (**4:31; 5:21; 14:10-12, 31; 15:24; 16:2-4; 17:2-3**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have you ever used prayer as an excuse to delay obeying what you already knew God wanted you to do?
- 2) In what specific ways does the Lord want you to “*go forward*”?
- 3) How does the Lord honor Himself and make His name known in the judgments He dispenses?
- 4) How have you seen the great power of the Lord manifested in your life in the deliverance He has brought about for you over sin?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

F. B. Meyer: Dare to trust Him; dare to follow Him! And discover that the very forces which barred your progress and threatened your life, at His bidding become the materials of which an avenue is made to liberty.

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where, in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?
Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene
Till the night of your fear is gone;
He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,
When He says to your soul, “Go on.”
And His hand will lead you through—clear through—
Ere the watery walls roll down,
No foe can reach you, no wave can touch,
No mightiest sea can drown;
The tossing billows may rear their crests,

Their foam at your feet may break,
 But over their bed you shall walk dry shod
 In the path that your Lord will make.
In the morning watch, 'neath the lifted cloud,
 You shall see but the Lord alone,
When He leads you on from the place of the sea
 To a land that you have not known;
And your fears shall pass as your foes have passed,
 You shall be no more afraid;
You shall sing His praise in a better place,
 A place that His hand has made.

—Annie Johnson Flint.

Scott Grant: The Powerful Salvation of the Lord -- (14:16-31)

Purpose of salvation (14:16-18)

Earlier, we saw how the faith of Joseph sustained an entire nation (13:19). Now we see how the faith of another man, Moses, benefits the nation. As Moses acts in dependence on the Lord, the sea will part and the nation will pass through it. Each person's faith makes a difference in other people's lives.

The Lord keeps promising that the Egyptians will pursue the Israelites, and he keeps speaking of it as if it's good news. Being pursued by an enemy doesn't seem like good news, unless, of course, the enemy is being led right into a trap, which is the case here. The Egyptians are pursuing, and will ultimately be destroyed, so that the Lord may be honored, or glorified. He is glorified through his salvation of the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians. Three times in the overall narrative the Lord says he will be glorified. This is the greater purpose that our salvation serves. The Lord saves us, and through that salvation he glorifies himself, and thereby gives others the opportunity to believe in him as well. He wants the Egyptians to know that he is the Lord (14:4 also). The Lord's salvation of us as individuals, then, serves a much greater and grander purpose: the glorification of the Lord.

Protection for salvation (14:19-20)

As the pillar moves to block the progress of the Egyptians, the God who leads becomes the God who protects. The Egyptians, who were in headlong pursuit, are now stuck. One of the ways we can understand the Egyptians in our own lives is to picture them as demonic agents. Satan and his forces are the enemy. The enemy is in headlong pursuit of us, but he can't touch us (1 John 5:18) - meaning, he can take nothing eternal away from us. So when the spiritual enemy bears down, we have nothing to fear. We're protected.

Victory of salvation (14:21-29)

Just as he did in the beginning, the Lord divides the waters, and dry land appears (Genesis 1:9-10). In the middle of the chaos of the sea, solid ground appears. In the middle of the chaos of our lives, God creates solid ground. The Israelites walk through

the sea on dry land. The sea becomes like a wall on either side, but God does not take away the sea. All he does is give the Israelites some solid ground to walk on in the midst of the sea.

God does not remove the chaos from our lives. There is chaos all around us. We walk right in the midst of it. But God shows us that he is in control of even the chaos and confusion. The chaos then becomes manageable for us, not overwhelming. The Lord doesn't remove the chaos; he just gives us some solid ground to walk on in the midst of the chaos. But the ground is solid, all the way through. And the chaos doesn't overwhelm us.

And one day, there will be no more chaos. When John was given a vision of the new heaven and the new earth, the first thing he was struck by was what wasn't there: "*There is no longer any sea*" (**Revelation 21:1**).

In the middle of the sea of chaos, who is it that is confused? Not Israel but the Egyptian army. The Lord confuses the Egyptians as they pursue the Israelites into the sea. The Lord confuses Satan as well. He thought he won a great victory when, by influencing Judas, he sent Jesus to be crucified (John 13:2). But it was in actuality the scene of his greatest defeat, for death could not hold the Savior, whose atoning sacrifice and resurrection from the dead give eternal life to those who believe in him.

Being confused, the Egyptians flee, recognizing that they are in over their heads against the Lord, literally and figuratively. Satan flees when we resist him in the strength of the Lord, for he's in over his head (**James 4:7**).

The Egyptians are not only confused, they are destroyed. Pharaoh takes his best shot, using his best men and his best chariots, and he's utterly defeated. Similarly, Satan takes his best shot at us, but he is utterly defeated, because he can't take us away from the Lord. **First John 3:8**: "*The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*" Similarly, Satan's destruction is sure (**Revelation 20:10**).

For those of us who believe in Christ, however, the Lord will make a way through the chaos. What's the chaos in your life? Is your financial situation chaotic? The Lord will make a way. Are you looking out at what seems like a chaotic sea of expectations that you have no way of meeting? The Lord will make a way. Are you looking the possibility of a lifetime of singleness and wondering how you are going to make it through the chaos of loneliness? The Lord will make a way. The Lord will make a way through the chaos. . .

Appreciation of salvation (14:30-31)

Twice the verb "*see*" is used in these verses. The people "saw" the dead Egyptians who were washed up on the seashore (**14:30**). They also "saw" the great power of the Lord (**14:31**). So they saw the Lord's salvation of them, which was powerful indeed. If it hadn't been for the Lord's seemingly strange leading of them, they wouldn't have seen the powerful salvation of the Lord. The Lord's leading in our lives may seem

similarly strange, but it is only "strange" because he wants to reveal himself to us. If the leading weren't "strange," the salvation wouldn't be powerful.

And seeing the powerful salvation of the Lord, what happened to the people? They *"feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord."* Because they saw, or because they perceived, they believed. A healthy spiritual faith is based on healthy spiritual eyes that take in and appreciate the salvation of the Lord.

The last time that the text of Exodus reported that they believed was in **4:31**, when Moses first returned from the wilderness and announced the Lord's plan to deliver them. But shortly thereafter, all hell broke loose, and the people were despondent because of increasing affliction and the plagues. But as all hell broke loose, as hell took its best shot at God's people, God saved his people. And the people had the tremendous benefit of seeing God's salvation in the face of hell's best effort. Although they believed earlier, there is even more reason for belief now. There is every opportunity for a deeper faith.

A few twists

The Lord, in his strangely wonderful leading, leads us to the place where we see and appreciate his powerful salvation of us in Jesus Christ - past, the present and future. So, what do you think of Jesus? Isn't it worth a few twists in the road, if the road leads to a better look at him?

Ryken: The Greatest Escape

As Christians, Israel's great escape is part of the history of our own salvation. However, we have experienced an even greater escape—the greatest escape of all. We have been saved from our bondage to sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here again we see the order of salvation, in which God takes the initiative. It is while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. God's saving work comes first, and then we are called to respond in faith.

It is noteworthy that the New Testament describes Christ's saving work in terms of the exodus. Not long after Jesus was born, his parents fled to Egypt. According to the Gospel of Matthew, their eventual return fulfilled the word of the prophet: *"Out of Egypt have I called my son"* (**Matt. 2:15b**, kjv, quoting **Hos. 11:1**). Originally this prophecy referred to the exodus. However, there is a deep spiritual connection between what happened to Israel under Moses and what happened later in the person and work of Christ. Jesus is the perfect and ultimate Israel. One of the ways God showed this was by having Jesus recapitulate Israel's escape from Egypt. Later, as the crucifixion drew near, Jesus described his death as an "exodus" (**Luke 9:31**, literal translation). He was making another connection. Jesus is the new Moses—"worthy of greater honor" (**Heb. 3:3**)—who leads God's people out of their bondage to sin and into the promised land of eternal life.

The most significant connection in the present context is the one that the Apostle Paul made when he wrote, *"I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were*

all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1, 2). Paul was making a connection between the exodus and baptism. For the Israelites, passing through the Red Sea was a type of baptism, and thus it was “a forecast of our final deliverance in Christ.” Once we were enslaved in the Egypt of sin, but now Christ has set us free. All of this is symbolized in the Red Sea event of baptism. . .

What happened at the Red Sea ought to help us clarify our relationship to Christ. The only “Red Sea experience” that really matters is the one that Jesus had when he passed through the walls of death and came out victorious on the other side. This means that baptized Christians have already had their “exodus experience.” We had it at Calvary and in the garden tomb, because when Jesus died and rose again, he did it for us. We were included in these saving events when we were baptized into him, and now we are safe on the other side. All that remains for us to do is what the Israelites did: fear God and trust him as we go forward.

Sadly, those who have not yet come to Christ are still standing on the shores of the Red Sea. How will they ever escape? Only by looking to Jesus. When the Israelites saw what God had done for them, they put all their trust in him. God calls us to do the same thing. He calls us to see Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and to believe in him. Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes ... has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).*

Grant Van Leuven: Have Faith in Your Savior (PCA sermon)

Main Point of Text: The Israelites see God’s promised salvation and thus fear Him and believe in Him and Moses.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
(Heb 11:1).

Move 1: Believe in Christ’s power to destroy your enemies. **Vss. 23-25, 27-28.** The LORD did all this: Jesus (**1 Cor. 10**). Miraculous! Mighty! Will do again: **Rev. 20:14-15; 2 Thes. 1:6-9.**

Move 2: Believe in Christ’s power to save you from death. **Vss. 21-22, 29. 1 Cor. 10:1-2:** all baptized in cloud and sea, yet walked “*on dry land*”. Christ our Passover rescues our covenant families.

Move 3: Believe in Christ’s ministers who preach His promises to you. **Vs. 21, 26-27, 31.** God’s power, used Moses as in the plagues. Rod of God in Moses’ hand. **Numbers 16:5** with **2 Tim. 2:19.** Believers of Moses’ message entered Promised Land. **1 Tim. 5:17. Eph. 4:7-12.**

Move 4: Believe Christ’s promises will come to pass. **Vs. 30** the promise of **vs. 13.** “*Lip of sea*” hearkens back to Moses left on “lip” of river. **Vs. 31:** They feared Egyptians and Sea, but because they feared God more, they lived. And their holy fear and healthy faith grew. Faith was exercised by their walk through the Red Sea. Seeing was believing. Seeing came from following in the dark. **2 Cor. 5:7.**

Conclusion: “*By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*” (**Heb. 11:29**). **John 17:20; 20:29-31**

Sermon Point: Have faith in your Savior.

TEXT: Exodus 15:1-21

TITLE: VICTORY HYMN CELEBRATING GOD'S TRIUMPH

BIG IDEA:

THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DELIVERANCE SHOULD CELEBRATE GOD'S

- **VICTORY**
- **POWER**
- **UNIQUENESS**
- **DOMINION**

INTRODUCTION:

This song of Moses artfully sets the standard for how believers should worship and praise their Redeemer for His powerful deliverance. The echoing refrain by the women under the direction of the prophetess Miriam serves to reinforce and enhance the worship experience. We need to reflect constantly on the Lord's victory, His majestic power, His uniqueness as the one true God and His eternal dominion over all.

John Mackay: Having looked with awe at the doom the Lord had brought on the Egyptians, the Israelites give voice to their wonder and gratitude at what has occurred. They had seen no future before them but capture and death at the hands of the pursuing Egyptians, but the Lord had intervened. His people had survived, and their enemies, who thought their power invincible, have been wiped out. The people gladly join in singing two songs that are composed for the occasion, the first by Moses (**verses 1–18**) and a second briefer one by Miriam (**verse 21**). The 'Song of Moses' found here is often referred to as such, because the title seems warranted by the parallel scene in **Revelation 15** where beside a sea of glass mixed with fire the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb are sung to the accompaniment of harps (**Rev. 15:1–4**). However, there is another Song of Moses in the Pentateuch (**Deut. 32:1–43**) and it is preferable to reserve the title for that and to use instead the traditional Hebrew title 'The Song of the Sea' for **Exodus 15:1–18**. . .

The exalted language of poetry conveys better than mere prose the joyful exuberance of the Israelites as they express their thanks to the Lord who, true to his covenant commitment, has taken pity on them and delivered them from the grasp of the tyrant. The Song of the Sea does more, however, than look back with gratitude. It also looks forward with confidence. The God who has already done so much for them will surely not desert them or prove powerless when they move into the land he has promised them. The people of God may still argue in the same way in the light of the greater deliverance that has been secured in Jesus Christ. "*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*" (**Rom. 8:31–32**).

Constable: The Exodus was one of the foundational events of Israel's religion. It marked the liberation from Egyptian slavery, which in turn made possible the formation

of a relationship of covenant between Israel and God. And nowhere is the Exodus given more powerful expression than in the Song of the Sea (**Exodus 15:1-18**), a great victory hymn celebrating God's triumph over Egypt at the sea. To this day, the ancient hymn continues to be employed in the synagogue worship of Judaism. Its continued use reflects the centrality of its theme, that of God's control over the forces of both nature and history in the redemption of his people.

When one reads the Song of the Sea, one immediately gains an impression of the joy and exhilaration expressed by those who first used its words in worship. But what is not immediately evident to the modern reader is the subtle manner in which the poet has given force to his themes by the adaptation of Canaanite mythology. Underlying the words and structure of the Hebrew hymn are the motifs of the central mythology of Baal; only when one understands the fashion in which that mythology has been transformed can one go on to perceive the extraordinary significance which the poet attributed to the Exodus from Egypt.

The poet has applied some of the most central motifs of the myth of Baal. These motifs may be summarized in certain key terms: conflict, order, kingship, and palace-construction. Taking the cycle of Baal texts as a whole (see further Chapter IV), the narrative begins with conflict between Baal and Yamm ("Sea"); Baal, representing order, is threatened by the chaotic Yamm. Baal's conquest of Yamm marks one of the steps in the process of creation; order is established, and chaos is subdued. Baal's victory over Yamm is also the key to his kingship, and to symbolize the order and consolidate the kingship, Baal initiates the construction of his palace. And then, in the course of the myth, conflict breaks out again, this time between Baal and Mot. Baal is eventually victorious in this conflict, establishing once again his kingship and the rule of order. It is important to note not only the centrality of these motifs in the Baal myth, but also their significance; the motifs as a whole establish a cosmological framework within which to interpret the Baal myth. . . a cosmology, developing the origins and permanent establishment of order in the world, as understood and believed by the Canaanites. Its central celebration is that of creation.

In the Song of the Sea, the poet has developed the same central motifs in the structure of his song. The song begins with conflict between God and Egypt (**Exodus 15:1-12**), but the way in which the poet has transformed the ancient motifs is instructive. "Sea" is no longer the adversary of order, but God uses the sea (Hebrew **yam**) as an instrument in the conquest of chaos. After the conquest, God is victorious and establishes order; his kingship is proclaimed in a statement of his incomparability (**Exodus 15:11**). But then the theme of conflict is resumed again, as future enemies are anticipated (**Exodus 15:14-16**). They, too, would be conquered, and eventually God's palace and throne would be established as a symbol of the order achieved in his victory (**Exodus 15:17**). Finally, God's kingship would be openly declared, as a consequence of his victories: "*the Lord shall reign for ever and ever*" (**Exodus 15:18**). The Hebrew expression for this statement of kingship is *yhwh ymlk*, directly analogous to the celebration of Baal's kingship in the Ugaritic texts: *b'l ymlk*.

It is one thing to trace the motifs of the Baal myth in the Song of the Sea; it is another to grasp their significance. The primary significance lies in the cosmological meaning of

the motifs; the Hebrew poet has taken the symbolic language of creation and adapted it to give expression to his understanding of the meaning of the Exodus. At one level, the Exodus was simply the escape of Hebrews from Egyptian slavery; at another level, it marked a new act of divine creation. Just as **Genesis 1** celebrates the creation of the world, so too **Exodus 15** celebrates the creation of a new people, Israel. And when one perceives this underlying significance of the poetic language employed in the Song of the Sea, one is then in a position to understand better another portion of the biblical text, namely, the reasons given for the observation of the sabbath day.

I. (:1-18) SONG OF MOSES (SONG OF THE SEA)

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said,”

Tone of celebration, rejoicing, boasting in the Lord

A. (:1b-5) Celebrating the Victory of the Lord

1. (:1b) Victory in Judgment

*“I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.”*

Spurgeon: Note, that they were singing, singing a very loud and triumphant song; and you would have thought that they would have kept on singing for the next forty years. It was such a triumph, such a deliverance, God’s arm was made so bare before their eyes, that you would have thought that their jubilation would have lasted throughout a lifetime, at the least. On the contrary, it lasted a very little while. Yet what a song it was that they sang! *“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”* What a song of triumph that is which is sung by souls saved from sin, and death, and hell, by the great atoning sacrifice of Christ! Oh, when we first realize that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we do, indeed, “feel like singing all the time”, for our sins are washed away, and we have a notion that we shall always keep on singing till we join in the song of the glorified in heaven.

G. Campbell Morgan: That was natural, inevitable. There are moods of the soul that can only be ex-pressed in poetry and in music. They are the great moods, whether of joy or of sorrow, of gleam or of gloom. This was a moment of high experience. The hour was full of the sense of the greatness of life. The shackles were gone, the enemies were destroyed; freedom was theirs, and opportunities were before them. This sense of the greatness of life was created by the sense of the greatness of God. What could they do other than sing? In such experiences prose becomes useless, poetry is the only method of expression; monotone is insufficient, harmony is necessary. An examination of the song will show that it was a glorious celebration of their King, on the part of this newborn nation. It had its backward and its forward look, and in each case the supreme fact was God. He had triumphed gloriously. All the power opposed to Him, and so to them, had proved weak in His mighty grasp. Moreover, He would fulfil all His purposes, bringing them in and planting them in the mountain of His inheritance. When,

looking back, God is seen, and forward, His purposes and power are recognized, the soul can sing, even though the threatening dukes of Edom, men of Moab, and inhabitants of Canaan are all about it. Such moments of high vision and glorious praise are full of value, even though presently there may be much of darkness and declension. Whenever they come, let us avail ourselves of them to the full.

2. (:2) Victory in Salvation

*“The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will extol Him.”*

Wiersbe: On three special occasions recorded in Scripture, the Jews sing, “*The Lord is my strength and song; and he is become my salvation*” (**Ex. 15:2**): when God delivered Israel from Egypt, when the Jewish remnant laid the foundation of the second temple (**Ps. 118:14**), and when the Jews are regathered and return to their land to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom (**Isa. 12:2**). In each instance, the Lord gives strength, salvation, and a song.

J. Ligon Duncan: Now, remember this is an important assertion for the children of Israel because he is connecting the worship of the God of Israel with the worship of the patriarchs all the way back to Abraham. This is not some new god who has never been heard of before. This is the same one true God who revealed Himself to Abraham and Isaiah and to Jacob and now to us here at the Exodus and these realities are followed up with this doxology, this praise of the God of the Exodus. “He’s the same God our forefathers worshiped and I’m going to worship Him too,” Moses says.

3. (:3-5) Victory as a Conquering Warrior

*“The LORD is a warrior;
The LORD is His name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
The deeps cover them;
They went down into the depths like a stone.”*

Thompson: Here is a “Lord is” statement that some people do not like. Many people want a passive-love God, not an active-warring God. God is a **warrior** and people need to live in fear of this fact. If God decides to go on the offensive against someone or some nation, they are doomed. God had many unconventional weapons available for Him to use.

Douglas Stuart: The statement “*the Lord [Yahweh] is his name*” clarifies for the singer and audience of the song the identity of this one, supreme and highly exalted God: it is Yahweh, the God of the patriarchs, the creator of the world and all in it, and the sole God of the people of Israel. All other gods were distorted imitations of him fabricated in the minds and sculpting shops of those who worshipped them. “Name” conveys

identity, and the song asserts the identity of the one who has delivered Israel as none other than Yahweh.

Constable: It is interesting that Moses described the Egyptian pursuers as being thrown into the sea (**Exodus 15:4**) and sinking like a stone (**Exodus 15:5**) and lead (**Exodus 15:10**). The same image describes Pharaoh's earlier order to throw the Hebrew babies into the Nile River (**Exodus 1:22**). God did to the Egyptians what they had done to the Israelites.

John Mackay: The waters here present no threat to the Lord, nor are they viewed as active in the situation. They are at most part of his armoury, which he uses to accomplish his purpose. He is the lord of creation, and the waters do what he commands. Those who oppose him are consigned to the deepest depths like a stone tossed into the sea never to be seen again.

B. (6-10) Celebrating the Power of the Lord (His Weapons)

1. (:6) Majestic in Power

*"Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power,
Thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy."*

2. (:7-8) Fierce in Power

a. (:7) Unleashing the Power of Divine Wrath

*"And in the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow
those who rise up against Thee;
Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, and it consumes them as
chaff."*

John Mackay: The comparison with the burning of stubble is a common one in Scripture (**Isa. 5:24; 33:11; 47:14; Joel 2:5; Mal. 4:1**) and signifies rapid and complete removal.

b. (:8) Unleashing the Power of Nature

*"And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up,
The flowing waters stood up like a heap;
The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea."*

3. (:9-10) Supreme in Power

a. (:9) False Confidence of the Enemy

*"The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them;
I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them.'"*

John Mackay: **Verse 9** presents the arrogant claims of the enemy (see **verse 6**). Pharaoh's pretensions are held up to ridicule in a series of staccato statements which invite comparison with the outcome. How little substance there was to all he said! In the face of divine opposition he was unable to carry out what he had intended.

b. (:10) Futility of Fighting Against God

*“Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.”*

John Mackay: Verses 10–12 take up the theme of Yahweh’s incomparable deeds and person. In contrast to the ineffective bluster of the Egyptians, the Lord merely blew with his breath (*‘blast’*, 15:8; *‘wind’*) and catastrophe enveloped them. They went down as quickly as a lead weight (a poetic variation on stone in verse 5).

C. (:11-13) Celebrating the Uniqueness of the Lord

1. (:11) Unique in His Person and Work

*“Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD?
Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working
wonders?”*

John Hannah: *Who is like You?* (Cf. Pss. 35:10; 71:19; 77:13; 89:6; 113:5; Micah 7:18).

Gispen: The song now rises in profound gratitude. No one was like Jahweh, the gods of Egypt had been defeated, none among the gods of the nations could do what He had done. He glorified Himself (cf. v. 6) by showing Himself to be holy, separated from all those gods, exalted above all people and enemies, destroying His enemies (v. 12) but blessing His people (cf. v. 13). Because of His holiness God was above all that was created and all that was sinful. He revealed His holiness in the punishment of sin and the redemption of His people (and the world) from the power of sin (cf. Rev. 15:3-4). That is why He was feared with trepidation among all nations, and why the songs that were sung to His glory spoke of the impotence of all gods before His omnipotence and because He worked wonders that amazed the nations. Once more Moses came back to this special wonder. It was as if the earth itself (of which the sea is considered to be a part) swallowed the Egyptians, because Jahweh merely stretched out His hand and showed His power effortlessly.

Douglas Stuart: You are infinitely superior to all real and false superhuman beings, including angels heavenly and fallen, and even to what the pagans think their nonexistent gods are. The repetition of *“who is like you”* emphasizes through rhetorical questioning the fact that God has no one like him.

2. (:12) Unique in His Judgment

*“Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand,
The earth swallowed them.”*

Guzik: on **Your right hand** - Obviously, this is the use of anthropomorphism, understanding something about God by using a human figure of speech, even though it does not literally apply. This idea of the right hand is used in the Scriptures more than fifty times, including these passages:

- **Psalm 45:4:** God's right hand teaches us
- **Psalm 48:10:** God's right hand is full of righteousness
- **Psalm 77:10:** Remembrance of the years of the right hand of the Most High
- **Psalm 110:1:** The Father invites the Son to sit at His right hand
- **Habakkuk 2:16:** The cup of God's judgment is held in His right hand
- **Ephesians 1:20:** Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father

3. (:13) Unique in His Salvation and Guidance

*"In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed;
In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation."*

D. (:14-18) Celebrating the Dominion of the Lord

1. (:14-15) Dominion Reflected in the Dread of the Nations

"The peoples have heard, they tremble;"

Douglas Stuart: These verses address yet another aspect of the divine deliverance at the sea: its impact on the peoples/nations that the Israelites knew they would have to encounter as they proceeded to conquer the promised land. Because Moses grew up as an Egyptian princeling and spent the first forty years of his life exposed to royal concerns, he would have been well acquainted with political/military/economic events in Canaan and its environs. The Egyptians were obsessed with keeping Asia Minor from becoming a threat to their well being and thus kept constant tabs on what was happening in the four regions listed in these verses. The conquest of the promised land would of necessity involve the elimination of opposition from these regions. The predominant tense/aspect found in the Hebrew in these verses continues to that of the perfect so that the entire section could, if desired, be translated as if what is described were a foregone conclusion (again in the mode of the so-called prophetic perfect), thus:

a. Philistines

"Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia."

b. Edomites

"Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;"

c. Moabites

"The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them;"

d. Canaanites

"All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away."

John Mackay: Moses then goes on to describe the reaction of three groups, listed in roughly the order in which Israel encountered them as they travelled to Palestine.

‘*Chiefs*’ seems to have been the appropriate technical term for the Edomite rulers (**Gen. 36:15–19, 40–43**). Edom lay east of the rift valley, extending from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Dead Sea. Its people were descended from Esau, but they did not permit the Israelites to pass through their territory on their way to Palestine (**Num. 20:14–21**), and subsequently displayed great hostility to them. Here the reaction of their leaders is described as one of distress and dismay when confronted by an unexpected threat.

The focus then moves north to Moab, which lay to the north of Edom, on the east of the Dead Sea. There the ‘*leaders*’ (literally ‘*rams*’; probably reflects a local usage) are similarly affected by immense terror. ‘Seize’ is the same word as ‘*grip*’ in the previous verse. The fulfilment of this prophecy is found in **Numbers 22:2–4**, after which Moses relates how Balak, the king of Moab, tried to frustrate the advance of Isaiah by acquiring the services of the prophet Balaam (**Num. 22–24**).

The third people group to be mentioned are the Canaanites who inhabited the central region of Palestine, west of the Jordan, will also lose courage in the face of conflict (**Josh. 2:9, 24; 1 Sam. 14:16; Isa. 14:31**). Perhaps the first line of **verse 16** refers to all the peoples affected and not just the Canaanites. They will experience ‘*terror*’—which may give rise to fear of an untimely death from divine judgment (**Ps. 55:4; 88:15**)—and ‘*dread*’, which leaves them quaking as they sense that God is at work in the events that have engulfed them (**Ps. 14:5**).

2. (:16-17) Dominion Reflected in the Deliverance of God’s People

a. (:16a) Deliverance Observed by the Terrified Enemy

*“Terror and dread fall upon them;
By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone;”*

b. (:16b) Deliverance Experienced by God’s Redeemed People

*“Until Thy people pass over, O LORD,
Until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased.”*

c. (:17) Deliverance Intended for Dwelling with God

*“Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance,
The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.”*

Douglas Stuart: Three great biblical themes conclude the song:

- God’s creation of a people (**v. 16b**),
- God’s eternal holy dwelling place as the home for that people (**v. 17**),
- and the eternal reign of God supreme over all things (**v. 18**).

3. (:18) The Eternal Dominion of the Lord
“The LORD shall reign forever and ever.”

Douglas Stuart: The final verse of the song is a sort of recapitulation of the lessons it states throughout. God is supreme over all other beings and forces. And the Israelites, still in the process of getting to know him and about him and to use his newly re-revealed name, Yahweh, to distinguish him from all other gods and idols were expected to come increasingly to realize that he is eternal and that their association with him had eternal consequences. The New Testament develops this concept in greater detail, especially with the added emphasis on God’s people sharing his reign (**2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4, 6; 22:5**; cf. **Dan 7:18**). The unstoppable, unintermittible, eternal reign of God is a widely represented topic within the Bible (e.g., **Pss 10:16; 45:6; 48:14; Heb 1:8; Rev 1:18; 11:15**) and an assurance to all who place their faith in him.

II. (:19) STORY BEHIND THE REJOICING

A. (:19a) Destruction of Egyptian Army

“For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them;”

B. (:19b) Deliverance of Israel

“but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.”

Deity is exercised in two key areas:

- God executing judgment on the wicked
- God effecting salvation for His people

Christ demonstrates His Deity by virtue of the Father having committed to Him both functions of salvation and judgment.

III. (:20-21) SONG OF MIRIAM

A. (:20) Musical Celebration

1. Led by Miriam

a. Prophetess

“And Miriam the prophetess,”

b. Sister of Aaron

“Aaron’s sister,”

John Hannah: Since Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83 at the time of the Exodus (**Ex. 7:7**), Miriam was probably in her 90s because she was a young girl when Moses was born (**2:4, 7-9**).

2. Accompanied by Instrument of Choice and Involvement of All the Women

a. Instrument of Choice = Timbrel

“took the timbrel in her hand,”

Gispén: A tambourine was a small drum with bells or pieces of metal that tinkled when the instrument was struck or swung; Egyptian tambourines had handles, as seen in illustrations that have been found of Egyptian dancers and priestesses with tambourines.

b. Involvement of All the Women

*“and all the women went out after her
with timbrels and with dancing.”*

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Miriam led the women perhaps in an antiphonal response, repeating the song at the conclusion of each part or strophe, accompanied by timbrels and dancing.

B. (:21) Verbal Celebration – Focus on the Lord’s Person and Work

“And Miriam answered them,”

1. Focus on the Lord’s Person

“Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;”

2. Focus on the Lord’s Work

“The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When you remember your redemption, does it cause you to burst forth in songs of praise?
- 2) What role should singing God’s praises play in our worship experience?
- 3) How do you testify to the Lord as your strength, song and salvation?
- 4) How does the fact of the Lord’s eternal dominion over all help to calm our unsettled concerns regarding the current political climate?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Keil and Delitzsch: The song is composed of three gradually increasing strophes, each of which commences with the praise of Jehovah, and ends with a description of the overthrow of the Egyptian host (**Exodus 15:2-18**). The theme announced in the introduction in **Exodus 15:1** is thus treated in three different ways; and whilst the

omnipotence of God, displayed in the destruction of the enemy, is the prominent topic in the first two strophes, the third depicts with prophetic confidence the fruit of this glorious event in the establishment of Israel, as a kingdom of Jehovah, in the promised inheritance.

John Davis: The song of Moses is one of the most beautifully written sections of Exodus. It sets the spiritual and theological standard for all subsequent praise.

Trent Cornwell: A Song of Worship

Introduction –

The Song of the Sea **Verses 1 through 18** of this great chapter record for us the song of Moses and the people of Israel.

Verse 21 is ascribed to Miriam and the women folk of Israel who apparently sing an antiphonal response to Moses and the men - Miriam's brief song, you'll notice in **verse 21** is identical to the opening lines of Moses' song, and it may well be short hand for a complete repetition of the song of Moses and the men

1. God's name represents His global reputation.

- a. God revealed His agenda regarding His own name as it applied to His purpose with Pharaoh's life (**Exodus 9:16; Romans 9:17; Psalm 106:8**).
- b. Did it work? Did God accomplish His goal of global fame through the deliverance of His people from Egypt?
 - i. Words of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law (**Exodus 18:1, 8-12**)
 - ii. Rahab's testimony (**Joshua 2:10-11**) "Confessions of a Prostitute"
 - iii. Prayer of the Levites back from exile (**Nehemiah 9:9-10**)
 - iv. Isaiah's historical narrative (**Isaiah 63:11-14, note vv. 12 and 14**)
 - v. Daniel mentioned in his prayer that God had gotten Himself worldwide fame through the Exodus – 1500 years after the fact! (**Daniel 9:15**).
 - vi. The Philistines in Samuel's day were aware and fearful of the God of Israel because of what He had done years ago in Egypt (**1 Samuel 6:6**).
- c. Only One God is so awesome that the unbelievers can see His power and know that He is real
 - i. The enemies in Palestine would hear about the great victory won by their God
 - ii. Esau and his family would know that the God of Israel was alive and working
 - iii. All those in Canaan would melt away in fear
 - iv. They would hush their mouths and know that God was great
 - v. The lost world would know that God's people had been purchased by Him and were receiving His promise

2. Being redeemed should move us to praise! 15:1-6

- a. They sung to recognize who had done great things
- b. The singing took the emphasis off of them and their power and placed it on the Lord God of Heaven who did it all
 - i. Moses is not mentioned!
 - ii. He is the Chief Worshipper!

- c. It was an involuntary expression of the heart. They could but tell of what He had done!
- d. Why? “for He hath” **v1**
 - i. It is God that has won the victory HE hath triumphed gloriously: The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.
 - ii. He is our Strength
 - iii. He is a Warrior.
 - iv. It was all the power of God
- e. We could continue a reading of this chapter, this song and see the following
 - i. God is referred to in this chapter 31 times in only 27 verses
 - ii. They recognized that it was all God
 - iii. They take no credit for anything that happened
 - iv. They do not even mention how quickly they ran or how they took care of their family
 - v. This is a story of praise to God for all that He has done
- f. How often does God get the credit and the glory for the victories that you experience in your life?
 - i. Are you quick to think of yourself, your abilities, and your hard work
 - ii. Do you look to give honor and glory to God for all that you are able to accomplish
 - iii. Do you see God actively involved in your life, your family, and your career
 - iv. Do you worship God for what He is doing in your life

3. Redemption should lead us to Worship & Loyalty v. 7-11

- a. The world has many gods but only One is glorious in holiness
- b. Only One is awesome in praise
- c. Only One is the great God of
- d. The wind from His nostrils that congeals the sea. **v. 8**
- e. Only One comes and redeems His people
 - i. That means He finds us
 - ii. He delivers us
 - iii. He does the work
 - iv. He pays the price to get us out of slavery and death to freedom and life
 - v. Only One leads and directs our paths
- f. It was God that was going to give them what He had promised them

4. The Enemies’ Plans are to Stop Our Praise

- a. They determined to chase after and destroy God’s people
- b. They planned on getting their stuff back
- c. They planned on getting vengeance
- d. They thought that they in their power could do something
- e. How often do you fall into the trap of thinking of what you can do
- f. The enemy does have real plans to destroy you
 - i. He is a thief come to steal to kill and to destroy **John 10:10**
 - ii. He is like roaring lion **I Peter 5:8**
 - iii. Our fight is against Satan and his army and not against people **Ephesians**

6:12

- iv. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that things and circumstances are just happening
- v. It is easy to look out and see who or what to blame
- vi. You are called to love and serve Jesus. You are not to get discouraged and want to quit.
- vii. You are to realize that in your life you are fighting to make much of Jesus and His power. Do not let Satan defeat you
- g. How often do you think that the enemy is more powerful than he is.
 - i. You think that he really can catch you
 - ii. Take your stuff away
 - iii. Destroy you

5. Redemption puts God's Glory on Display 19-21

- a. We, like Miriam, should encourage others to sing
- b. We should realize why we are singing
- c. We should pay attention to whom we are singing
- d. We should worship and magnify the Lord for what He has done
- e. Even our children should learn from our songs what a great God we serve

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/43142231430.pdf>

James Smith: The Song of Moses:

This is the first song on record, and blessed be God, it is a song of salvation. Henceforth and forever singing shall have a chief place in the service of God. The sentimental songs of the world are deceitful nymphs which steal away the adoration and praise that should rise only to God. Salvation and song, like the Siamese twins, go together With the work of Luther, Wesley, and Moody came streams of new songs of praise. “*Then sang Moses this song*” (v. 1). The causes lie behind. Let us look back and consider this song as—

I. A Song of Redemption.

They had been redeemed by blood out of Egypt, as a house of bondage. Delivered by the great power of God. All true praise has its source in the redeeming power of Christ's Cross. Out of the depths of His infinite love and mercy comes this key-note of our first song unto God, and we shall sing in the same key in Heaven. “*Unto Him who hath loved us, and washed us, and redeemed us to God by His own blood*” (Rev. 1:5).

II. A Song of Victory.

In looking back they saw their enemies buried in the depths of the sea, where all our sins are cast. Our sins, like blood-thirsty Egyptians, were hotly pursuing us, and when there was no hand to help us He made bare His arm and wrought for us a great deliverance. Ours is a victory over sin, over the world, over death and the grave. He “*giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 15:57). They saw them again no more.

III. A Song of Praise.

“Moses sung this song unto the Lord.” This was no mere exhibition of musical skill, but a pouring forth of the heart’s gratitude and thankfulness unto God. He had led them out, He had brought them through, He had overwhelmed their united foe. He deserves the praise, and He shall have it, and no stranger shall intermeddle with it. Trust Him at all times, and pour out your heart before Him.

IV. A Song of Testimony.

Notice the “my’s” in **verse 2**. There is a clear and decided ring about this. *“The Lord is my Shepherd.”* When a certain young lady said, “I wish I could trust my mother’s God,” she was bearing a good testimony both to her mother and her mother’s God, although she herself had no personal acquaintance with Him. The sweetest music of earth is like the croaking of frogs compared with the deep, sweet melody of a heart at peace in God. *“My God, I will praise Thee” (Psa. 118:28).*

V. A Song of Dedication.

“I will prepare Him an habitation” (v. 2). Moses decided to build Him a house, a resting-place among the people. This is natural, if God has taken us in, surely we should take Him in. If He has given us a habitation in Himself we ought to provide Him a habitation in our hearts. Are we not the *“habitation of God through the Spirit?” (Eph. 2:22)*. Is it not His intense desire to *“dwell in us and walk in us?” (2 Cor. 6:16)*. Did not Jesus say, *“If a man love Me we will come and make our abode with him?” (John 14:23)*. He has gone to prepare a place for us, let us now prepare a place for Him, and let that place be the throne of your heart.

VI. A United Song.

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel. “They differed in many things, but they agreed in ascribing salvation to the Lord.” *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Psa. 107:2)* and do so. There may be as many different shades of Christians as there were colours in Joseph’s coat, but the sleeve need not say to the collar, “I have no need of you.” All one in Christ, saved by the same blood, justified by the same God, and sanctified by the same Spirit, singing the same song. Let us praise God.

VII. A Song on the Other Side of the Sea. After the Egyptians had been overwhelmed in the deep.

The destruction of the wicked will not hinder the song of the saved. The rushing together of the waves of judgment seem to send up a deep and solemn Hallelujah. In the Revelation (**chap. 15:3**) we hear the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb blending in one. On the other side we, too, shall sing the new song with a fresh and fuller meaning. A song that shall ring through the highest Heaven and down through the eternal ages with gathering power and sweetness. *“PRAISE YE THE LORD!”*

Steven Cole: If God has saved you, joyfully sing His praises.

Scholars suggest different ways of analyzing this song, but I think the easiest is to see **verses 1-12** as rejoicing in what God had done in delivering Israel from Egypt, while **verses 13-18** rejoice by faith in what God is going to do when He gives Israel the land

of Canaan. **Verses 13-15** use the past tense; **verse 16** uses the present, while **verses 17 & 18** are in the future tense. But it all describes by faith how God will fulfill His promise to Abraham to give his descendants the land. **Verse 19** recaps the great deliverance described in **chapter 14**, while **verses 20 & 21** tell how Miriam led the women in singing this song and dancing. There are three main lessons:

A. Singing about God's salvation should be joyful.

This is the first recorded song in the Bible and its mood is decidedly joyful, as seen in the women playing the timbrel (like a tambourine) and dancing. You get the impression that these people were happy about something! The singing was both congregational (v. 1, "*Moses and the sons of Israel*") and personal (v. 1, "*I will sing to the Lord*"). Worship should be both: if God has saved you, you should joyfully sing because you personally have experienced His great salvation. But, also, you should join with others who have experienced His salvation so that the corporate singing magnifies your experience by a factor of how many hundreds or thousands of saved people are combining their voices in praise.

B. Our joyful singing should exalt the Lord who has saved us from a terrible past and promised us a glorious future.

1) THE LORD HAS SAVED US FROM A TERRIBLE PAST.

2) THE LORD HAS PROMISED US A GLORIOUS FUTURE.

C. Our joyful singing should exalt the Lord for His attributes and His actions.

1) EXALT THE LORD FOR HIS AWESOME ATTRIBUTES.

This song is filled with God's attributes: He is highly exalted (v. 1). He is Yahweh (11 times in the song), the self-existent, eternal One, as He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. He is the only God (v. 11). He is powerful (vv. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10); holy (v. 11); loving (v. 13); and, sovereign over all (v. 18).

2) EXALT THE LORD FOR HIS ALMIGHTY ACTIONS.

He has become our salvation (v. 2). He is the covenant-keeping God of Abraham (v. 2). He is a warrior, who hurled Pharaoh's mighty warriors and their horses into the sea (v. 1, 3). His burning anger consumes rebellious sinners who are enemies of His people (vv. 7, 14-16). He works wonders (v. 11). He guides the people whom He has redeemed to His holy habitation (vv. 13, 16). He gives them an inheritance (v. 17). He dwells with His people (v. 17). He reigns forever (v. 18)!

TEXT: Exodus 15:22-27

TITLE: NO WATER . . . BITTER WATER . . . SWEET WATER . . . ABUNDANT WATER

BIG IDEA:

OUR CIRCUMSTANCES ALWAYS CHANGE, BUT OUR FAITH IN GOD'S PROVISION SHOULD NEVER WAVER

INTRODUCTION:

How quickly their change in circumstances caused a reversal in attitude of God's people -- from faith and thanksgiving and praise and worship to despair and complaining over a lack of resources. God in His providence brings us into bitter trials in order to test our faith and perfect our character.

John Davis: The response of the people of Israel to this situation is somewhat amazing, for in the matter of three days they had forgotten the care and the provision of God. In spite of the fact that the cloud was there to guide them and remind them of the presence of God, they murmured. This was quite a change of attitude. Just three days earlier they were exalting their God with songs and praises. Now they had quickly forgotten and despair had set in. They had murmured once before on the western shore of the Red Sea (cf. **14:11-12**), and sadly enough, there would be numerous other occasions when their frustration and despair would exhibit itself in constant murmuring against God's chosen men (cf. **Num. 14:2; 16:41**).

John Mackay: it is God's normal way of working that entering into glory does not immediately follow salvation. Rather there is a time of preparation to make his people ready for the inheritance he will bestow on them. That was the method he followed in the case of the Israelites. Free they indeed were from the hand of Egyptian control, but they had still much to learn. For one thing their faith was still very weak, and it would take time for their trust in the Lord to develop so that they would be able to face every set of circumstances without hesitation. They were therefore led into times of difficulty and testing so that their spiritual faculties might be developed through use. It was one thing to sing the praises of their Deliverer, and quite another to live out that faith when confronted with the problems of ordinary living. Overcoming the latter challenge would bring them to a clearer understanding of themselves and of what it meant to have faith in the Lord.

I. (:22-24) TRIALS TEST OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

A. (:22) Challenge of No Resources – No Water to Drink

*“Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea,
and they went out into the wilderness of Shur;
and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.”*

3 days is a long time to go in the wilderness without water.

Wilderness is the place of testing and trial.

They were following the leadership of Moses; had the expectation that under God's direction, he would be able to lead them in a productive way and provide for their needs. Now that belief was being challenged.

Douglas Stuart: Once across the Red Sea, the Israelites went to Shur. This is a vast, rugged, and sparsely populated wilderness region in the northern Sinai, stretching from what in modern times is the eastern side of the Suez Canal to the Negev of Israel. It was past the boundary fortifications the Egyptians had built to protect Egypt proper and thus represented freedom from the likelihood of any further Egyptian pursuit. One of the demands the Israelites had all along sought from the Egyptians, to go "*into the wilderness*," was now a reality. Much remained, however, before the second part of their demand, to serve Yahweh, would be accomplished.

Wiersbe: Expect Trials to Come

They forgot that life is a pilgrimage during which we must learn new lessons and fight new battles. One great victory doesn't settle everything; we need challenging new experiences that will help us mature and glorify God. Yes, life is a school, and the Lord knows just when to give us an examination.

Spurgeon: Spurgeon's Sermons, vol.9, p.383, Sermon XXII, Marah; Or, The Bitter Waters Sweetened, "It is a notion, I have no doubt, of very young Christians who still have the shell upon their heads and are scarce hatched, that their trials are over now that they have become winged with faith; they had far better have reckoned that their trials have begun with tenfold force, now that they are numbered with the servants of the Most High."

B. (:23) Challenge of Deceptive Resources – Water Turned out to be Bitter

"And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah."

Constable: we may in our journey have reached the pools that promised us satisfaction, only to find them brackish. That marriage, that friendship, that new home, that partnership, that fresh avenue of pleasure, which promised so well turns out to be absolutely disappointing. Who has not muttered "Marah" over some desert well which he strained every nerve to reach, but when reached, it disappointed him!

Adrian Rogers: Now, God led them to this place of bitterness by His providence. They were not there by mistake. They were not there by happenstance. They were not there because of bad luck. They were not there because they could not read a map. The way that they got to this place was by the providence of God, for they were led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were exactly in the place that God wanted them, by His unfailing providence. . .

Do you know why God brought them to this place of bitterness? It was a place of test. It was a place where God was going to prove them. That wilderness was God's proving ground. When the Ford people, the Pontiac people, and the Chrysler people, or whomever it is—when they build an automobile, what do they do? They put that automobile out on the proving ground, and they ride it over those rough roads and those potholes. And, they ride it through water; and they ride it through heat; and they ride it through all of these things—hundreds of miles—screeching, turning, twisting, jamming on the breaks, and spinning it around. They want to see: Can it stand the test? Is it safe for the road? They're proving the automobile. They're testing the automobile. Now, God, unknown to them, was testing them. You see, God is a strange teacher. He gives the test first and the lesson afterwards. And, that's what He did to these people. He gave them a test. And, I want you to know how they did on the test? They failed it miserably. . . And, how did they fail the test? Well, they failed the test by murmuring when trouble came. And, I want to tell you something, friend: When God gets ready to prove you—when God gets ready to test you—He's not going to test you in the good times; because that's not a test. . . The test is how do you behave when God brings you to bitterness—when God brings you to Marah, where there's no water. There, the Bible says, God brought them, that He might test them. Now, He didn't test them that He might know what was in their hearts. He already knew what was in their hearts. He wanted them to know what was in their hearts. He wanted them to understand the weakness and the frailty of their human nature, if, indeed, it was there in them.

C. (:24) Complaints Against Spiritual Leadership

“So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’”

John Hannah: This response is amazing in light of their recent deliverance and triumphal songs of worship. They were so privileged; yet hardship quickly induced them to impugn Moses (cf. **Ex. 14:10-12; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 14:2; 16:11, 41**).

Wiersbe: To tempt God means to deliberately adopt a disobedient posture and dare Him to do anything about it. On more than one occasion in their wilderness wanderings, the Israelites invited the judgment of God by their obstinate attitude and their persistent grumbling.

Timothy Greene: The people know that to grumble against Moses is really to grumble against the Lord (cf. **14:31**) It's just that Moses is someone they can “get at.” And so instead of saying, “Let us cry out to the Lord and put our trust in Him,” the people choose to say, “Let us make demands of the Lord and put Him to the test.” How often do we do the same thing? How often do we essentially make our own demands of the Lord instead of surrendering ourselves to the Lord's will and trusting implicitly His promises and His purposes? The people “grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘*What shall we drink?*’” In other words: “If you are Yahweh's servant, give us water now.”

Philip Ryken: It is not a sin to bring God our problems. He invites us to talk things over with him through prayer. What is a sin, however, is to have a complaining spirit that poisons our communion with Christ and thus robs us of the joy of serving God.

John Mackay: Grumbling arises from an attitude of dissatisfaction with one's lot and an inability to do anything about it. Inner discontent expresses itself in hostile complaining. While this reaction shows the ingratitude of the people at all that had been done for them, and also their forgetfulness—it was only days before that they had passed through the Sea—the principal problem is their lack of awareness of the spiritual dimension of their situation. Thinking it was as mundane a matter as lack of water, they give vent to their feelings against Moses. At root their problem was not giving the Lord his due place in their lives—and in their problems. After all, it was the Lord whose instructions Moses was carrying out.

II. (:25-27) SPIRITUAL LEADERS KNOW HOW TO SECURE GOD'S PROVISION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

A. (:25a) Cry Out to the Lord for Provision

“Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.”

Deliverance comes from the Lord; we must humbly express our dependence on Him and anticipate that He will provide for our needs. Waters were not just tasteless and able to quench thirst, but sweet and desirable.

Wiersbe: Moses took the right approach, the way of faith: he cried out to the Lord and then followed God's orders. God can solve our problems by changing things (like making the bitter waters sweet), by giving us something else (like the wells of water at Elim), or by giving us the grace we need to bear with our difficulties and not complain.

Douglas Stuart: Yet another miraculous sign is described here, and in just half a verse. This supernatural demonstration of God's presence and provision is not notably different in kind from the demonstrations earlier used by Moses to convince the elders of Israel and then the people in general that he had been sent from God. Moses needed something to assure the people that all was well; God told him what to do, and when he did it, God's care was demonstrated. Speculation about how a tree [NIV: piece of wood] could eliminate mineral salts from a large body of water is just as fruitless as speculation about how the Nile could turn to blood or how a staff could turn into a snake and back again: it was a supernatural, not a natural event; a miracle, not a prescientific application of a natural remedy. Nothing in the text suggests that the tree symbolized anything in particular (such as the tree of life or the like). Rather, Moses' faith in being willing to do what God commanded him, without understanding why or how it would work, is what is implicitly commended here.

B. (:25b) Change Your Attitude to Embrace God's Testing

“There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them.”

Cannot continue on in the tone of grumbling and complaining.
Need an attitude adjustment.

Verse 26 gives the content of the statute and regulation referred to here.

Douglas Stuart: The NIV wording “*a decree and a law*” does not refer to two things but to one; this is a classic case of *hendiadys*, the expression of a single concept by two or more words used in grammatical parallel.

Timothy Greene: When we put God to the test, our motives are never good. When we put God to the test, we’re being selfish, and proud, and rebellious. But whenever God “tests” us, His purposes are always loving. God’s “testings” are a powerful way—and sometimes the “only” way—of teaching us, and convicting us, and maturing us, and growing us. God’s “testings” open our eyes to our sinfulness, and they also help us to see our need to depend upon Him trust in Him. So when God let the Israelites go three days without water in the desert and then brought them after all that to a supply of water that was undrinkable, He was testing them. What would this reveal about their hearts – about their willingness to trust Him and obey Him? Well, when the people responded by grumbling against Moses, this revealed plenty about their hearts. In similar situations later on, this might have been the end. But on this occasion, God still isn’t finished. God still has plans to use this test, even including the failure of Israel, as an opportunity to teach and grow His people.

C. (:26) Commit to Obedience and the Lord will Deliver

1. Priority of Obedience

“And He said,

*‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God,
and do what is right in His sight,
and give ear to His commandments,
and keep all His statutes,”*

2. Prevention of Harm

“I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians;”

3. Provision of the Lord

“for I, the LORD, am your healer.”

Timothy Greene: If “*disease*” is a theological word, shorthand for the wrath of God—the curse of God’s law—poured out on sinners, then what does it mean that God is our “*healer*”? It means that He is the one who forgives us.

Philip Ryken: Now God revealed himself as *Yahweh-rophe*, the God who heals. In the Old Testament *rophe* refers to wellness and soundness, both physically and spiritually. It means “to restore, to heal, to cure ... not only in the physical sense but in the moral and spiritual sense also.” At Marah God demonstrated his healing power by curing the bitter waters. But this was intended to teach the Israelites to trust him for every kind of healing. Part of God’s identity is wrapped up in his ability to heal. He is the God who forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases (**Ps. 103:3**).

The power to heal is another confirmation that Jesus is the Savior. Jesus was famous for his healing miracles. He went around “*preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people*” (**Matt. 4:23**). Everyone Jesus healed received a physical blessing. But this pointed to a deeper reality—namely, that Jesus is the remedy for everything that ails our sin-sick souls. He is the doctor of our salvation. Whatever healing we need—physical healing for disease and disability, spiritual healing for sin, or emotional healing for the wounds we receive from others—we are to look to Jesus. Some of our diseases will not be healed until the resurrection, but they will all be healed, because Jesus has promised to heal them.

D. (:27) Continue to Follow the Lord’s Leading and He Will Abundantly Provide
“*Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.*”

Happy ending to this stage of their journey.

John Mackay: The name ‘Elim’ means ‘large trees’, referring to the trees which took advantage of the abundant supplies of underground water. This was a very pleasant site indeed, and no doubt all the more welcome after their disappointment with Marah.

Gispén: The numbers may have a symbolic meaning in this context. . . It is perhaps best to think rather of the numbers as symbolizing the fullness of the blessings God bestowed on His people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How often in your own life have you seen spiritual mountaintop experiences followed by some type of season of testing?
- 2) How do you guard against complaining against God?
- 3) In what ways do we undermine the spiritual leadership that God has provided for us and question its legitimacy?
- 4) Is it sinful to express your doubts and struggles to the Lord?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Complaining doesn’t solve problems, and if we try to run away from a difficult situation (“Back to Egypt”), we’ll meet the same problems in the new place and still have to solve them. Of course, the heart of every problem is the problem in the

heart, and the hearts of many of the Jews were not right with God. They remembered the food they ate in Egypt but forgot the wonders God had performed (**Ps. 106:7**), and some of them had begun to worship the gods of Egypt that Jehovah had humiliated and judged (**Josh. 24:14; Ezek. 20:6-9; 23:8**). Imagine worshiping idols and then complaining to God about your problems!

Moses took the right approach, the way of faith; he cried out to the Lord and then followed God's orders. God can solve our problems by changing things (like making the bitter waters sweet), by giving us something else (like the wells of water at Elim), or by giving us the grace we need to bear with our difficulties and not complain. The third approach is what produces lasting spiritual growth (**2 Cor. 12:7-10**). . .

If life were nothing but tests, we would be discouraged. If life were all pleasure, we would never learn discipline and develop character. The Lord knows how to balance the experiences of life, for He brought His people to Elim where they found plenty of water and opportunity for rest. Let's be grateful that the Lord gives us enough blessings to encourage us and enough burdens to humble us, and that He knows how much we can take.

John Davis: Quite often the Sinai peninsula is illustrated by barren desolate scenery. While much of the territory is indeed devoid of vegetation, it should not be concluded that this is an impassable desert. There are wells and springs at intervals of a day's journey all down the west coast from the Suez region to Merkhah. While vegetation is many times scarce, it can be found in significant quantities in the wadis or where there is a permanent water source. There is a rainy season lasting up to twenty days during the winter. This coupled with mist, fog, and dews helps to support some vegetation even among the rocks of this peninsula. There is some proof for the fact that in antiquity the Sinai peninsula supported a greater abundance of trees such as tamarisk and acacia. The presence of more vegetation and trees would have produce additional rain. According to **Judges 5:4** the Lord provided some rain to help Israel to survive this wilderness experience.

Dale Crawford: God turns the bitter to sweet

A. God sweetened the bitter waters of Marah

1. The water was bitter, undrinkable, perhaps brackish – whatever it was it could not quench the thirst. It might be good to point out that none of the pleasures of this world will satisfy, no matter how much they promise to quench the thirst of our flesh. In the end they will only prove bitter, especially to the believer.
2. God provided a tree whose branches were used to make the water sweet
3. This can be compared with the Tree of Life, Jesus Christ who took our lives that were vile and corrupt – full of bitterness and decay and He has made them sweet. Jesus is the ultimate sweetness to the believer Majestic sweetness sits enthroned upon the Saviors brow; His head with radiant glories crowned His lips with grace o'er flow. No mortal can with Him compare, Among the sons of

men; Fairer is He than all the fair Who fill the heavenly train.

B. God is able to take all of our trials and turn our mourning into joy

1 Peter 1:7-8 – *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:”*

1. God turns our bitterness to sweetness
2. **A.W. Pink** points out that for the Christian all of the things we once found sweet have become bitter. “The pleasures of sin, the attractions of the world, no longer satisfy. The things which formerly charmed us now repel us. The companionships we used to find pleasing have become distasteful.”
3. In Christ, however, we have found sweetness. Refreshing waters.

C. God demands that we trust Him

1. God made an ordinance with them that day – that they obey Him

Ex. 15:25-26 – *“there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, 26 And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*

2. God also demands that we trust and obey Him –
 - a. Salvation does not grant absolute freedom We have simply changed masters – Our new Master is glorious to serve.
 - b. He blesses those that trust Him - This is the testimony of Scripture **Isaiah 26:3** – *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”*
Psalms 9:10 – *“And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.”*
Psalms 18:30 – *“As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him.”*
Psalms 115:11 – *“Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.”*

3. When adversity comes we can rejoice in God’s rich provision

Psalms 5:11 – *“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”*

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/1108174926.pdf>

Kevin Landis: The Wilderness Journey

1. A Journey into the Wilderness. **15:22 Cf. 1 Pet.1:11**
2. A Journey into the Heart. **15:22-24; 16:1-3 Cf. Deut.8:2, 16**
3. A Journey into Grace. **15:25; 16:4 Cf. Jn.1:14, 16**
4. A Journey into Faith. **15:25, 26; 16:4 Cf. Prov.3:5, 6; 2 Cor.5:7; Heb.11:17-19**

Alan Carr: Very often learning lessons is a bitter experience. Yet, while this is true, it is also true that experience is the best teacher. You can tell a child repeatedly that fire, the stove, etc is hot, but they never really get it until they have been burned. When this happens, they can relate to what hot means. It is a lesson they will never forget as long as they live, but it was a bitter lesson to have to learn. Unfortunately, we all seem to possess this same characteristic. We have to be burned before we can learn! It may be that someone here tonight is going through a time of trial. If so, in these verses, you will learn some good lessons if you will allow the Lord to teach them to you. If everything in your life is sailing along smoothly, then look out! One day soon, you will come to your own Marah. When this happens, you may need the lessons we can learn right here....I suppose they, like a lot of people in our day assume that once you sign up to follow the Lord, everything is going to be perfect and that there will be no bumps in the road. Unfortunately, this is just faulty thinking! According to God's Word, life is a mixture of good and bad - **Job 14:1; Job 5:7; Eccl. 2:17; 23**. While this outlook may seem depressing, we are also aware that life has its wonderful moments as well. . .

They forgot about the plagues, their deliverance, the miracle at the Red Sea. They forgot that up until that time, the Lord had been in absolute control. They forgot that God is Master of life. Both of the good times and the bad. We will cruise through life enjoying the Lord's blessings and many time we will take them for granted! But, just let a difficulty come and we wring our hands, hang our heads in defeat and worry about what to do! We forget that the same God who was in control in the good day is still on the throne in the bad day! He is in charge of all of life - **Rom. 8:28!** (Ill. The Disciples on the boat, **John 6:1-21**. They rejoiced in His miracles, but when the storm came, they forgot what they had just seen Him do.) Sounds just like us, doesn't it?...Every experience, whether good or bad, x-rays our heart and reveals us exactly as we are. This bitter time at Marah revealed certain characteristics about the Israelites that they probably would rather have not known. However, I am afraid that we are just as guilty of some of these same things. Let's face it, you can learn a lot about yourself when the bottom falls out of your life!

TEXT: Exodus 16:1-8

TITLE: WHY COMPLAIN AGAINST GOD?

BIG IDEA:

GOD DIRECTS BOTH OUR TRIALS AND HIS GRACIOUS PROVISION TO MANIFEST HIS SUPREME GLORY

INTRODUCTION:

The entire book of Exodus is all about God getting glory for Himself – enhancing His reputation in the eyes of both His covenant people and His defeated enemies. It is also a record of how prone God’s people are to forget His faithfulness and goodness and fall into the sin of grumbling and complaining. We will unpack this Big Idea statement by first considering the trial itself; then God’s gracious provision; and finally, the manifestation of His supreme glory.

Philip Ryken: By this point in Exodus, we have come to expect God to do things for his own glory. If we learn nothing else from this book, we learn that we are saved for God’s glory. At every stage of Israel’s deliverance, God did what he did—and did it the way that he did—to receive all the glory and praise. However predictable it becomes, there is no more important lesson than this: God disposes all things for the ultimate good of his glory. Every time he provides, he adds a little more weight to his reputation.

God does the same thing for us. There is glory in the ordinary providence of God. Every time he takes care of our needs or spares us from danger, every time he enables us to repent of our sins or to believe in his promises, every time he works things out in a way that seemed impossible, we see a little bit more of his glory. Or at least we ought to. If we are not giving God the glory, after all he has done for us, what more is it going to take?

I. (:1-3) GRUMBLING OF GOD’S PEOPLE OVER TRIAL OF LACK OF FOOD

A. (:1) Next Stage on the Wilderness Journey

“Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.”

Thomas Constable: The wilderness of Sin evidently lay in the southwestern part of the Sinai peninsula (**Exodus 16:1**). Its name relates to Sinai, the name of the mountain range located on its eastern edge. **Aharoni** believed that Paran was the original name of the entire Sinai Peninsula.

B. (:2) Next Round of Grumbling Against Spiritual Leaders

“And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.”

David Guzik: They lost sight of God's future for them, and they also twisted the past to support their complaining. This thinking is common among those who complain.

G Campbell Morgan: What a startling change from the song of yesterday! Therein the human heart is revealed. It seems incredible that so soon they should have descended from the height of glorious song, to the level of mean murmuring. Yet so it was, and so often still it is. What had happened? Had God changed? Was He not still the glorious King? Or had they encountered some enemy more powerful than Pharaoh, some obstacle more impossible to overcome than the sea? No, none of these things had happened. They were hungry! That was all. It is very mean and unworthy. Had they forgotten God? No, not wholly, but they were allowing the near, and the trivial, to make them for the moment unmindful of Him. This is a very revealing story. Again and again, indeed almost invariably, when the people of God are found murmuring, it is over some experience through which they are called to pass, which is of the most trivial nature by comparison with the great things of life. This kind of thing spreads. Notice that the whole congregation joined in the unworthy business. Unanimity is not always proof of wisdom or of rightness. In an hour when the prevailing mood is that of dissatisfaction, it is a good thing if some lonely singer celebrates the Lord in song. We may at least be perfectly assured that unanimous murmuring, whenever we hear it, is wholly wrong. Therefore let each one refuse to join therein. If singing is impossible, let there at least be silence. That is always better than murmuring. The sequel shows how unnecessary the murmuring was. It always is.

C. (:3) Next Expression of Despair

1. We Were Better Off in Egypt

“And the sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full;’”

Steven Cole: Grumblers often exaggerate how good life was when they were enslaved to sin and don't see the eternal benefits of trusting in God. The grumblers compared their lack of food in the wilderness with the pots of meat and bread to the full that they enjoyed in Egypt (**Exod. 16:3**). Hello? They were slaves in Egypt, but they make it sound as if things were great back then! But life wasn't as idyllic as they're making it sound! But, let's assume for the sake of argument, that life was smoother when you were an unbeliever. Maybe your job was going well, but when you became a Christian, you got fired and now are in a crummy job or no job. Maybe your romantic life was satisfying, but now you can't find a suitable Christian girl or guy to date. Maybe your relationship with your parents was okay back then, but now it's strained. You feel like life was a lot better back then and you're tempted to “go back to Egypt”! Does the Bible address that situation? Read **Psalms 73**! The psalmist was despairing as he saw the prosperity of the wicked, while he was encountering new problems every day since he had begun to follow the Lord. He says that he almost stumbled, until he went into the sanctuary of God. There he gained the eternal focus: He realized that God would cast down the wicked to destruction, but He would receive the psalmist into eternal glory.

So if you're grumbling and tempted to go back to the world, get to "the sanctuary." Get alone with God and His Word and regain the eternal perspective! God leads you into places of need so that you will look to Him to meet those needs.

Tim Keller: What you see in **verse 3** is very important. It is the language of **addiction**. It's the language of **denial**. When they were actually in Egypt, when they were actually under the lash, they hated it. They cried out against it. They were miserable, and now they're out of there, and yet you see, when they think back about Egypt, they remember it fondly. They think of it as something good. They think of it as something desirable. They think of it as something they wouldn't mind going back to. That is the language of addiction, in that they're still addicted. When you think back into your addiction, when you think back into that situation with the delusional thinking that screens out all the misery and says, "That really wasn't so bad," even though they were technically out of slavery, in their hearts internally, in their spirits they were still slaves. This leads us to a principle. You can get people out of slavery in an instant. Zap! It happens like that. They cross the Red Sea. It's a legal thing. It's a political thing. It's a military thing. You can get people out of slavery in an instant, but you can't get the slavery out of people except through a long process. You can get the people out of slavery quickly, immediately, but you can't get the slavery out of the people quickly. It takes a process. Though legally they were free, actually they hadn't learned how to be and think and work out their liberation into their lives, and that's the reason why they don't go right to the Promised Land, and Moses knows that.

2. Your Leadership Has Been a Disaster

"for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Philip Ryken: The word "grumbling" hardly does the Israelites justice. The Hebrew word was not designed to express a disgruntled complaint. Quite the contrary, it described an open rebellion. When the people murmured against Moses, it was mutiny against Almighty God. They were repudiating their relationship with him. In fact, they wished that they were dead (**Exod. 16:3**). The way they figured, if they were going to die anyway, it would have been better to die back in Egypt. Starving in the desert was a fate worse than death. In effect, they were saying that they wished they had never been saved.

Douglas Stuart: As the Israelites saw themselves, their families, and their flocks growing thinner and as they saw day after day no likely source of food in the wilderness in which they were traveling, it became obvious to them that they were going to die unless something dramatic happened to reverse their plight. Their month's journey had involved much care and effort, which now began to look to them as if it had all been expended in vain. So although their words were essentially rhetorical rather than literal (they didn't really wish they had died in Egypt and didn't want to die in the wilderness either but wanted something done to give them food to eat) they made a comparison in their complaint between the simplicity of dying where they were and the absurdity of going to all the trouble they had gone to in the past month and then dying anyway. This

was the first time the Israelites made the “if only we had died in Egypt argument,” but it would not be the last (see **Num 11:4, 18; 14:2; cf. 20:3; Josh 7:7**). Their reference to dying “*by the Lord’s hand*” recalls the plagues and the destruction of the Egyptians at the sea—they had been spared from all of those dangers but were now rhetorically arguing that perhaps they would have been better off eliminated by a plague or by drowning.

II. (:4-5) GRACIOUS PROVISION FROM GOD IN RAINING BREAD FROM HEAVEN

A. (:4) Daily Provision

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.’”

Steven Cole: The manna didn’t just float down into everyone’s mouth. It was free and abundant, but the people had to get up and gather it every day before the sun melted it. It was a test of faith to see whether they would obey God or not (**Exod. 16:4, 19-20, 27-29**). They were to gather about two liters each every morning, but on Friday morning, they were to gather four liters so that they didn’t need to gather any on the Sabbath. This wasn’t the full instruction regarding the Sabbath that would follow later, but it was a test to see if Israel would obey God’s command and trust Him to provide each day and twice as much for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was God’s gift so that the people could rest that day (**Exod. 16:29-30**).

Douglas Stuart: God was teaching them a concept: that he was their ultimate provider, the one who from heaven gave them not necessarily what they expected but what they really needed. Thus his satisfying them with the bread of heaven becomes a theme of Scripture that not only refers to the manna described in this account (cf. **Ps 105:40; Neh 9:15**) but to the ultimate provision of eternal sustenance, Christ himself (**John 6:31–58**).

This great gift also involved a test. The NIV translation of the end of **v. 4** obscures the point of God’s statement. It should be translated “*so that I can test them to see whether or not they will walk by my law.*” In other words, the people’s willingness to obey the manna-gathering law (*tôrāh*) would show God whether or not they would be inclined to keep his covenant law (*tôrāh*) as revealed at Mount Sinai. It was not just a test to see if they could follow instructions but a test to see if their hearts were inclined to be his covenant people. The test itself required faith for an agricultural people. Farmers know that if one harvests only enough food in a day to meet the needs of that day, eventually one has no food because no crops or animals produce food every day. Now they were being asked to restrain their natural tendency to gather as much as was available to gather in anticipation of the time when no gathering would be possible. God was teaching them to trust him every day afresh, and they were challenged to think about his provision in a way that had never before been part of their planning pattern.

B. (:5) Double Portion on the Sixth Day

“And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

Philip Ryken: This was partly a lesson about **contentment**. By giving everyone the same rations, God was teaching his people to be satisfied with their daily provision. How much is enough? We live in a culture of accumulation, where enough is never enough—we always want a little bit more. But all we really need is our daily bread, which God has promised to provide. As God sustains us from one day to the next, we are called to live in daily dependence upon his providence. Why does God tell us to trust him for our daily bread? **Maxie Dunnam** writes, “He does it for our sakes, that we may know the peace and strength that come from continual dependence upon Him, the joyful life that is ours when we trust Him and see the truth of our trusting. The happiest people I know are not people who don’t have any needs, but people who experience the meeting of their needs by God.”

III. (:6-8) GLORY OF THE LORD MANIFESTED IN PROVIDING BOTH BREAD AND MEAT IN TIME OF TRIAL

A. (:6) Testimony of God’s Faithfulness Revealed Each Evening

“So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, ‘At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt;’”

B. (:7) Testimony of God’s Faithfulness Revealed Each Morning

“and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?”

Woodrow Kroll: The truth is, most of us don't mind complaining at all. Yet we need to remember that when we complain, ultimately the person we're finding fault with is God. He is sovereign, so everything that comes into our lives must first meet His approval. When we complain, we are telling God, "You've made a mistake. You shouldn't have allowed this to happen to me." But God is too wise to make a mistake and too loving to permit unnecessary heartache.

When you are next tempted to complain, remember that you have a sovereign God who loves you. All that you experience is to shape and mold you into the best person you can be. Instead of complaining, be happy that God cares enough about you even to allow you hardship under His watchful eye.

Ultimately, all our complaints are directed against God.

Phillip Ryken: God gave his people bread to show that he was Lord. This was something that he had already proven to his enemies. He showed the Egyptians who was Lord by drowning them on their chariots in the sea. Now he was going to show his own people the same thing, only he would do it by meeting their needs. The meat and the bread would give them a personal, firsthand acquaintance with his lordship. The

Israelites already knew that God was the Lord of Israel, but now they would learn it again by their own experience. Another way to say this is that God would show Israel **his glory**. God's glory is his reputation. It is his honor, the weightiness of his character, the sum total of all his divine perfections. To know that he is the Lord, therefore, is to know him as the God of glory. To help his people see how glorious he is, God gave them a glimpse: "*Then Moses told Aaron, 'Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.' ' While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud'*" (vv. 9, 10). Once again Aaron served as God's spokesman. He gathered the people into God's presence and then pointed them to God's glory. What the people saw was the Shekinah, the glorious cloud of God's presence and protection. God was glorified in the cloud, which was a visible manifestation of his invisible majesty. But God was also glorified in sending the manna and the quail. His miraculous provision added to his reputation as the God who hears and the God who cares. Every time God provides for his people, it is for the praise of his glory. By this point in Exodus, we have come to expect God to do things for his own glory. **If we learn nothing else from this book, we learn that we are saved for God's glory.** At every stage of Israel's deliverance, God did what he did—and did it the way that he did—to receive all the glory and praise. However predictable it becomes, there is no more important lesson than this: God disposes all things for the ultimate good of his glory. Every time he provides, he adds a little more weight to his reputation.

C. (:8) Testimony of God's Faithfulness Communicates Key Spiritual Lessons

1. Lesson #1 = God Provides Abundantly All You Need

"And Moses said, 'This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning;'"

2. Lesson #2 = God Hates Your Grumbling Against His Goodness

"for the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him."

Philip Ryken: Israel's attitude is a warning against the great sin of complaining. It is always wrong to make the worst of things or to make baseless accusations against good people. But when the Israelites complained to Moses, what they were really doing was grumbling against God. "*They continued to sin against him,*" wrote the psalmist, "*rebellious in the desert against the Most High*" (Ps. 78:17). Moses and Aaron recognized this. So rather than getting defensive, they helped the people see what they were really doing: "*Who are we, that you should grumble against us?*" "*Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord*" (Exod. 16:7b, 8b).

3. Lesson #3 = God Takes Your Grumbings Personally – When You Attack Your Spiritual Leaders You Really are Attacking God

*"And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us
but against the LORD."*

John Mackay: After Moses had received this message from the Lord, he presumably called a meeting of the elders, and, using Aaron as his spokesman, told them what the

people were to expect. So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, *“In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt”* (16:6). The additional details contained in the message to the people show that **verses 4–5** have only been a summary of what the Lord had said. The need to know the Lord (6:3) is again emphasized. The reality of his saving activity on their behalf will be emphasized by the provision he will make for the people in the evening. Also, at dawn the next day when they would begin their regular activities, there would be a further reinforcement of the lesson the Lord would teach them. And in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord. This is the first occurrence of the term ‘*the glory of the Lord*’. It refers to a visible sign of the Lord’s presence with his people. It is not limited to the theophanic presence that is described in verse 10 because that occurred immediately, not the next day, but takes in all that they would directly experience of the Lord’s power and love in the provision of the manna.

The Lord was impressing the Israelites with the reality of his presence and provision because he has heard your grumbling against him. Although their complaints had been expressed against Moses and Aaron, because they were being faithful to their divine commission, the people were in fact rebelling against the Lord himself. Who are we, that you should grumble against us? This protest of Moses and Aaron was designed to impress on the people the reality of their position as those redeemed and ruled by the Lord. So important was the need to recognize this that it is repeated in the next verse with additional information as to what would be given them in the evening and in the morning. This is the first mention of ‘*meat*’, that is ‘*flesh*’. Moses also said, *“You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord”* (16:8). They had wrongly attributed their difficult situation to the bad intentions of Moses and Aaron. Now the Lord will conclusively demonstrate that all their circumstances were in his control, and that it was to him alone they should turn in difficulties.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we content with the Lord’s promise to daily provide what we need for our sustenance?
- 2) In what ways do we tend to exaggerate our situation as we complain and grumble?
- 3) How objective are we in evaluating our current situation as compared to the former days?
- 4) How is Jesus in view in this passage as the manna from heaven and our daily bread? What lessons about Jesus can you learn from the text?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tim Keller: Moses is saying, “In the physical wilderness, manna was the physical sustenance God gave, but it points to the fact in the personal wilderness, the spiritual wilderness, the emotional wilderness (the sort of wildernesses people in this room are going through now or will go through soon), the manna points to the spiritual strength which comes to us through ...” What? What did Moses say the manna represents? “... every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” What that means is you have to learn to turn truth into bread. In the wilderness times, that’s the time to turn truth into bread. What is every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord? The Bible. The Scripture. The words of the prophets, the apostles, and so on. You may believe it. It’s cognitive. It’s truth you subscribe to, but Moses says in the times of wilderness, you have to turn it into food. You have to chew it. You have to digest it. You have to work it into your system. You have to taste it. In other words, you have to think. That’s why we call it thoughtful strength. God’s strength in the times of wilderness is a thinking strength. It’s not a stupid strength. (Food in the Desert)

Bruce Hurt: Quotations on Murmuring –

- The frog and the murmurer, both of them are bred of the mud. - Thomas Adams
- A grouch always looks as if he were weaned on a pickle. - Anon.
- Discontent generally arises more from our desires than from our wants. - Anon.
- It is better to be mute than to murmur. - Thomas Brooks
- Murmuring is a time-destroying sin. - Thomas Brooks
- Murmuring uncrowns a man. - Thomas Brooks
- Oh, that we could but convince men that a murmuring spirit is a greater evil than any affliction, whatever the affliction! - Jeremiah Burroughs
- Complain to God you may, but to complain of God, you may not. - John Flavel
- If we growl all day we shouldn’t be surprised if we end up dog tired at night! - Vance Havner
- One hour in heaven and we shall be ashamed we ever grumbled. - Vance Havner
- Those who complain most are most to be complained of. - Matthew Henry
- Complaining about our lot in life might seem quite innocent in itself, but God takes it personally. - Erwin W. Lutzer
- God’s people may groan, but they may not grumble. - C. H. Spurgeon
- Ten minutes’ praying is better than a year’s murmuring. - C. H. Spurgeon
- The murmurer is his own martyr. - George Swinnock
- Complain without cause and you will have cause to complain. - Thomas Taylor
- Murmuring often ends in cursing. - Thomas Watson
- Our murmuring is the devil’s music. - Thomas Watson

(Source - *Complete Gathered Gold*)

Warren Wiersbe: In our pilgrim journey through life, we live on promises and not explanations. When we hurt, it’s a normal response to ask “**Why?**” but that is the wrong

approach to take. For one thing, when we ask God that question, we're assuming a superior posture and giving the impression that we're in charge and God is accountable to us. God is sovereign and doesn't have to explain anything to us unless He wants to. Asking "Why?" also assumes that if God did explain His plans and purposes to us, we'd understand everything perfectly and feel better....**Explanations don't heal broken hearts, but promises do**, because promises depend on faith, and faith puts us in contact with the grace of God....When circumstances are difficult, we're prone to pray, "Lord, how can I get out of this?" when we ought to be praying, "**Lord, what can I get out of this?**" It isn't important that we get our way, but it is important that God accomplishes His purposes and receives all the glory (**Matt. 6:33**). God permits trials so that He can build godly character into His children and make us more like Jesus. Godliness isn't the automatic result of reading books and attending meetings; it also involves bearing burdens, fighting battles, and feeling pain.

Arthur Pink: God takes note of the discontent of our hearts — as well as the murmuring of our lips. Not only is discontent a grievous sin against God, but it unfits the Christian for the discharge of holy duties, preventing the exercise of those graces which are necessary in order thereunto.

- It silences the lips of supplication, for how can a murmurer pray?
- It destroys the spirit of submission, for complaining is a fretting against the Lord.
- It quenches faith, hope and love.
- Discontent is the very essence of ingratitude, and therefore it stifles the voice of thanksgiving.
- There cannot be any rest of soul, until we quietly resign our persons and portions to God's good pleasure.
- Discontent corrodes the strings of the heart, and therefore it arrests all growth in grace.

Discontent is usually over temporal matters, and this is a sad intimation that material things are sought after more eagerly than are spiritual things. It argues a lack of confidence in the care of our heavenly Father to provide for us the things which are needed.

Steven Cole: Raining Bread from Heaven

God has infinite supplies of grace in Christ to meet all your needs, but you must daily make the effort to lay hold of Him.

1. God leads you into places of need so that you will look to Him to meet those needs.
 - A. When you recognize a need in your life, your choices are to grumble or to go to the Lord in thankful prayer.
 - B. Grumbling reveals the inward condition of your heart.
 - C. Grumbling has a way of spreading among God's people, so be on guard.

D. Grumblers often exaggerate how good life was when they were enslaved to sin and don't see the eternal benefits of trusting in God.

2. When you look to the Lord, you'll see His grace and glory to be your sufficiency.
3. The manna points to Jesus Christ, the true bread of life that comes down out of heaven to satisfy your soul.
4. You must daily make the effort to lay hold of Christ as bread for your soul.

John Newton:

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace
Might more of his salvation know
And seek, more earnestly, his face.

I hoped that in some favored hour
At once he'd answer my request
And by his love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Lord, why is this, I trembling cried
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
'Tis in this way, the Lord replied
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ
From self, and pride, to set thee free
And break thy schemes of earthly joy
That thou may'st find thy all in me.

TEXT: Exodus 16:9-15

TITLE: ANTIDOTE TO GRUMBLING AGAINST THE LORD

BIG IDEA:

GOD PUTS A STOP TO GRUMBLING BY MANIFESTING HIS PRESENCE AND HIS PROVISION

INTRODUCTION:

Despite God's demonstrated faithfulness and goodness, God's people are quick to grumble and complain. When tough times of testing pop up, we have a tendency to pop off. Somehow we have difficulty translating our theology regarding the Lord's benevolent care of His own into a positive mindset when immersed in a difficult situation. Here the Israelites are reminded that God is fully aware of their grumbling and finds it extremely inappropriate in light of His presence and provision. Are we grumbling or are we grateful?

J. Ligon Duncan: Our Lord and our God, you have provided the bread of Heaven. Not just something temporal and miraculous for Your people in the wilderness long ago. Not just in a testing sign of Jesus divinity in the days in which He fed the five thousand, but you have permanently provided for the needs of your people in Jesus Christ. Grant that we would trust Him and in Him.

Douglas Stuart: God was testing his people throughout the exodus events: leading them in odd directions without fully explaining why (**14:1–4**), surprising them with potentially destructive enemy attacks even after they had left Egypt (**14:10ff.**; cf. **17:8ff.**), requiring them to walk into and through deep ocean water (**14:15ff.**), and taking them to locations that lacked the necessities of life (as in **15:23ff.** and **16:2ff.**). All of these challenges were part of a plan to develop a people's willingness to trust him. Explaining everything in advance would have run counter to that plan. It was necessary for Israel to learn faith while confused, while afraid, while desperate—not just in theory but under pressure of actual conditions where survival was uncertain and faith was tested to the limit.

The manna story represents yet another testing story: it is introduced as such (**16:4**) and features details that describe the way at least some Israelites failed the test at first (**16:20, 27–30**). Because the schedule for gathering the manna seemed counterintuitive to ancient agrarians, it provided a way of testing Israel to see if they would obey not only those commandments that made perfect sense to them but also those that did not.

I. (:9-10) REMINDER OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD SHOULD STOP ALL GRUMBLING

A. (:9) The Lord Responds to Our Grumbling

“Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel,

'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumbings.'

Richard Donovan -- Sermonwriter.com: By gathering together in Yahweh's presence, they will demonstrate their readiness to hear what Yahweh has to say.

Douglas Stuart: To "*come before the Lord*" means to gather to whatever place or object represents Yahweh's presence among them. At this point in their history, it was the pillar of cloud. They must go right up to it and thus show they were ready for a meeting with Yahweh directly, not just through his intermediaries, Moses and Aaron.

B. (:10) The Lord Reminds His People of His Presence

"And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud."

Steven Cole: God's glory was a revelation of His greatness and power. Whenever in the Bible people got a glimpse of God's glory, the uniform response was fear. When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, "*they fell face down to the ground and were terrified*" (Mt. 17:6). When John later saw the risen Savior in His glory, he reports (Rev. 1:17), "*When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.*" In his Gospel, he wrote (John 1:14), "*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Jesus reveals God's grace and glory to us. When we see all that He is for us, it's enough. We have in Him all that we need.

II. (:11-15) RECOGNITION OF THE PROVISION OF GOD SHOULD STOP ALL GRUMBLING

A. (:11-12) The Lord Responds to Our Grumbling

1. Hearing

*"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
'I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel;'"*

2. Feeding

*"speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat,
and in the morning you shall be filled with bread;'"*

3. Teaching

"and you shall know that I am the LORD your God."

J. Ligon Duncan: God's providence is learned by the children of Israel through a daily, re-enacted dependence upon Him.

B. (:13-14) The Lord Provides Needed Sustenance on a Daily Basis

1. Provision of Meat in the Evening

"So it came about at evening that the quails came up

and covered the camp,”

Steven Cole: The quails mentioned here migrate regularly between south Europe and Arabia across the Sinai Peninsula. They are small, bullet-headed birds, with a strong but low flight, usually roosting on the ground or in the low bushes at nightfall. When exhausted, they would be unable to... take off again. The birds are good eating, and were a favorite delicacy of the Egyptians.

Douglas Stuart: The only mention of quail in the chapter comes in this verse. It is brief and obviously of secondary importance to the manna because the quail represented a one-evening supply of meat, whereas the manna was to be a daily occurrence for forty years and the more important food supply for that entire generation of Israelites.

2. Provision of Manna in the Morning

*“and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.
When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.”*

C. (:15) Identification of God’s Gracious Provision

1. Identification Unknown

*“When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another,
‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was.”*

2. Identification Revealed

*“And Moses said to them,
‘It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.’”*

Kevin DeYoung: Calvin gives eight evidences of the miraculous here:

- 1) The manna did not appear until Moses said it would.
- 2) It was not interrupted by the weather or the seasons for 40 years.
- 3) There was enough to feed millions of people every day.
- 4) There was twice as much on the sixth day.
- 5) It spoiled if you tried to keep it.
- 6) The other nations did not have it.
- 7) Once the Israelites got to the edge of Canaan, it stopped.
- 8) The portion in a special vessel before the Lord did not rot.

No, this is not just plant lice—whatever that is. This is a miracle.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of pressures cause you to grumble or complain against God?
- 2) How does God remind you of His presence with you in the midst of trials?
- 3) Would you be comfortable having to depend on God for supplying your daily food without a storehouse of food that provides you security for the future?
- 4) How does God reveal His glory in your context?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kevin DeYoung: Grumbling and Gathering

There was a book that **Jerry Bridges** put out about 10 years ago called *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*. It's a very good book with a great title. There are certain sins in the church that we tend not to tolerate, and rightly so: adultery, stealing, violence, and lying. And then there are sins that we can easily overlook: envy, pride, anger, impatience, and worry—and we could certainly add grumbling to that list. It's one of those “respectable” sins. It seems that it's a sin that ordinary, good Christians still do. Maybe it's not our most pleasant habit, but it's a rather respectable sin. As I said last week, grumbling is a sin that we universally dislike in others, and almost invariably approve when in ourselves.

Let me be clear: when I say grumbling, I don't mean groaning, lamentation, disappointment, or even criticism or disagreement. Especially in the Psalms, the Bible is full of examples of godly people who say, “I'm scared. I'm hurt. I'm upset. I wish this were different. Lord, would you do something? I don't like this.” There are many examples of a biblical, godly way to offer a groan or lamentation, or to express your hurt or disappointment.

Grumbling, however, is not a humble cry for help, but saying to God, “I know how to run the universe a bit better than you do.” Instead of saying, “This really hurts, but I'm ready to receive whatever I must receive from God's hand”, grumbling says, “This stinks, and I'm ready to rebel against God's heart.” That's the difference. . .

They grumble, and he responds with grace. “You're thirsty. I'm going to give you water.” He's not happy about it, but “I'm going to give you water.” “You're hungry? I'm going to give you birds that fall like dust for one night. They're going to cover the ground just like the plagues covered the ground.” It's the same Hebrew language. “Just like locusts or hail would rain down on the earth, I'm going to rain down manna from Heaven. You don't think I'd treat you any differently than I treated the Egyptians? I rained down plagues on them. I'll rain down bread for you. Sweet bread, like honey. I'm giving you donuts every morning for 40 years. What's your problem?”

It takes trust, especially for an agricultural people. Farmers, especially in an agrarian

society, are thinking, “We’ve got to store up. We don’t know what the next day is going to bring. We don’t know when the weather is going to change.” You don’t just live day to day. You want to store something up for those lean seasons. That’s the better part of wisdom—but not here, when the Lord is proving, testing, and shaping them. They need to trust. It might be easy for us to live day to day with food if we know that all we have to do is drive over to Meijer. Sometimes I feel like we go there six times a week. But they need to trust without food left in their sacks. They have to trust that there will be more manna from Heaven tomorrow morning when they get up. Will you obey both the commands that make perfect sense to you and the commands that don’t?

Do you think that Jesus had manna on his mind when preaching the Sermon on the Mount? “When you pray, here’s what I want you to pray: give us this day our daily bread—not our weekly bread, our monthly allotment, enough for the next year, but for today.” Or how about when he said, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, saying ‘What shall we eat?’” He’s got manna on his mind, just like in the wilderness. You wake up, and ask, “Lord, can you give us enough to eat today?” There it is. By noon, it’s burnt away. Just when you’re anxious about tomorrow, he’ll say, “Don’t worry about tomorrow. You’ll get more bread then.”

We don’t really believe that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and his mercies are new every morning if we demand a blueprint of his grace ahead of time. “God, I want to see the next week of graces for me. I want to see tomorrow’s mercies today. The manna today was cool. The last 20 years—I get it. What about tomorrow?” God says, “You don’t get it. Walk by faith, not by sight. What is worry and anxiety except living out the future before it gets here?” Going ahead to tomorrow, three weeks from now, four months from now, and ten years from now, and wondering what your kids are going to be like, what your marriage is going to be like, if you will get married, what is going to happen, how this illness is going to work out, and what the diagnosis might say is trying to borrow mercies that God hasn’t meant to give you yet. He’s given you bread and mercy for today. When you get to tomorrow (or a year from now), whatever trials or surprises are there, he’ll give you some more manna for that day. Can you trust him to provide? You can.

Richard Donovan -- Sermonwriter.com: Manna is mentioned three times in the New Testament:

- In **John 6:31-33**, shortly after using five barley loaves and two fish to feed five thousand people, Jesus reminded the crowd that their ancestors had eaten manna in the wilderness—as it was written, “*He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.*” *He went on to say that it wasn’t Moses who gave the people the bread from heaven, but “my Father”* (**John 6:32**). He said, “*For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world*” (**John 6:33**). When the crowd asked Jesus to give them that bread always (**John 6:34**), he responded, “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will not be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty*” (**John 6:35**).

- **Hebrew 9:4** mentions that there was, in the ark of the covenant, a golden pot that

contained the manna that Yahweh commanded Moses to save as a memorial (**Exodus 16:32-34**).

- In **Revelation 2:17**, Jesus promises those at Pergamum, “*To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna*” The hidden manna represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven (**John 6:48-51**). He provides spiritual sustenance for those who put their faith in Him (**MacArthur on Revelation 2:17**).

Christians have sometimes linked Yahweh’s giving manna to Israel and Jesus’ giving the Lord’s Supper to the church. While the manna served to meet Israel’s physical needs, both manna and the Lord’s Supper serve to meet people’s spiritual needs.

Matthew Dodd: Grappling with Grumbling Why do people grumble?

- For some it is the fear of the unknown.
- For others it is the loss of control. Israel had been fending for themselves for 430 years in Egypt and found it difficult to submit to God’s leadership.
- For still others, they just like to play the “victim card.”

The bottom-line is grumbling will damage your heart.

The good news is, God has a solution.

Application – I believe there are **lessons of faith** that we can learn during these are difficult times, unprecedented times.

- It is tempting to grumble.
- But grumbling will blind us to a manifestation of God’s solution.
- God wants us to trust in Jesus Christ, our bread from heaven to meet our needs.
- Manna saved Israel from death due to starvation. Christ saves us from the consequences of our sin, an eternity in hell.
- Manna was available and accessible for all. Christ’s offer of salvation is available to all who will believe.
- Manna satisfied Israel’s hunger for 40 years. Christ satisfies our deepest hunger for all eternity.

TEXT: Exodus 16:16-21

TITLE: INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING OUR DAILY BREAD

BIG IDEA:

THE BREAD OF HEAVEN MUST BE GATHERED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS AND CONSUMED THAT DAY

INTRODUCTION:

The bread of heaven which God freely provided every day as a gracious gift for all the Israelites in the wilderness had to be gathered and consumed in accordance with His specific instructions. This bread represents the Word of God, and even more specifically, the person of Jesus Christ who identified Himself as the bread of heaven. It is provided for our sustenance and must be consumed on a daily basis. It is sufficient to fully satisfy our needs as we fully depend upon God on a daily basis.

I. (:16-18) INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING SUFFICIENCY AND QUANTITY

A. (:16a) Sufficiency

*"This is what the LORD has commanded,
'Gather of it every man as much as he should eat;'"*

Wiersbe: The manna only sustained their physical life in the wilderness, but God's Son gives eternal life to the whole world. Just as the Jews had to stoop and pick up the manna, and then eat it, so sinners must humble themselves and receive Jesus Christ within.

B. (:16b) Quantity

1. On an Individual Basis

"you shall take an omer apiece"

Douglas Stuart: The omer was equal to about two quarts, just enough of relatively light, flaky food for a person per day, especially since sharing would occur in a household, allowing small children permission to eat less and larger adults to eat more as long as the average was an omer per person.

2. On a Household Basis

"according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent."

David Guzik: The bread from heaven was to be gathered on an individual or a family basis. God did not command the creation of a tribal manna gathering and distribution center. Every household had to provide for itself, and a rich family could not hire a poor family to do their work for them.

C. (:17) Quantity

“And the sons of Israel did so, and some gathered much and some little.”

D. (:18) Sufficiency

“When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat.”

II. (:19-20) INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING LEFTOVERS

A. (:19) No Leftovers

“And Moses said to them, ‘Let no man leave any of it until morning.’”

B. (:20) No Exceptions

1. Disbelief

“But they did not listen to Moses,”

2. Disobedience

“and some left part of it until morning,”

3. Decomposition

“and it bred worms and became foul,”

4. Disturbing

“and Moses was angry with them.”

Douglas Stuart: With the incentive to keep manna overnight obviated by the putrid results, the people who had tried it may well have apologized and expressed contrition, enough so to convince Moses that they were repentant.

III. (:21) INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING TIMING AND SPOILAGE

A. Timing

“And they gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat;”

Tim Chester: God doesn’t give grace today for tomorrow. Don’t worry how you would cope if . . . Don’t play scenarios. You are not given grace for ifs and maybes. You will be given grace for today. You will have the grace for the next day when it comes – and it will not come till tomorrow. Look not to your version of the jar of manna when you go to bed each night and tell yourself you have gained what you need – look instead to the providing God and tell him that you trust him to give you what you need.

B. Spoilage

“but when the sun grew hot, it would melt.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God give such specific instructions regarding the gathering and consumption of the manna He was providing?
- 2) Why couldn't you keep some leftovers for the next day?
- 3) What happened if you procrastinated and did not gather the manna on a timely basis?
- 4) What does this teach you about daily devotions?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Deffinbaugh: Lessons from the Manna --

From the New Testament references to the manna of the Israelites, I would suggest that several principles were being taught in the provision of this "*bread from heaven*" which are just as applicable to Christian living today as they were for the Israelites.

(1) Manna teaches us the priority of **submission to the revealed will of God**. The great danger which Israel faced was not starvation in the midst of a wilderness, but the wrath of God. God could make a breadbasket into an empty basket, as He had just done to the Egyptians. God could also turn a desert into a breadbasket, as He did with the manna.

As the closing verses of **Exodus chapter 15** reveal, Israel's reaping of God's blessings and her healing from Egypt's judgments are dependent upon her careful obedience to the commands and decrees of God. It is our response to the revealed will of God that results in either life or death, blessing or judgment.

This points out the importance of our Lord's self-revelation as the "*bread of heaven*." Our Lord came from heaven to save men from the divine wrath of God, which we all deserve. God offers healing to all who will accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, as the one who died in their place, and who bore the penalty for their sins. Just as God's provision of manna, the "*bread from heaven*" was not "steak and ale," it was the only means God had provided for her life. So, too, Jesus Christ is God's only provision as the "*bread from heaven*" whom we must partake of in a personal way, if we are to be delivered from the wrath of God. Obedience to the revealed word of God is a matter of life and death.

(2) Obedience to the will of God is diametrically **opposed to the self-indulgent orientation of our culture**. Obedience to the word of God therefore requires self-denial

and self-discipline. Few cultures have been more oriented toward self-indulgence and self-fulfillment than our own. In this sense, our culture is diametrically opposed to the Word of God. The self-sacrifice of our Lord (cf. **Philippians 2:5-8**) is the pattern for every saint, who must “*take up his cross daily*” to follow Christ (**Luke 9:23**). Obedience to the Word of God is our highest calling, even if this means physical deprivation or even death.

Our obedience to God therefore requires self-denial, and self-denial requires self-discipline. If we would be obedient to our Lord, we must obey His commands. Since He has commanded us to deny ourselves daily and to take up our cross (**Luke 9:23**), we must have self-discipline to replace self-indulgence (encouraged both by our culture and our fallenness) with self-denial. More and more I can understand why God did not immediately lead His people from Egypt into Canaan. They did not have the discipline necessary to survive either the adversity or the affluence of the land of Canaan. The more I read the New Testament, the more I see the importance of self-discipline, which, you will recall, is one of the manifestations of the Spirit of God: “*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*” (**2 Tim. 1:7**).

Reading through Paul’s second epistle to Timothy, along with his letter to Titus has underscored in my mind the vital role which self-discipline plays in the Christian’s life. And, incidentally, it is also noteworthy to observe that one of the common characteristics of the false teacher is self-indulgence: “*These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage*” (**Jude 16**, cf. also **v. 18; 2 Pet. 2:10, 13-22**).

I would like to suggest two very practical outworkings of self-discipline in our daily lives. I must warn you, they are not easy, nor are they pleasant (which is exactly why self-discipline is required). The first suggestion I would make is that we must learn to do without those things which we cannot afford. Such a suggestion is so obvious, you may wonder why I make it. The reason is that contemporary advertising and credit buying consistently encourage us to buy what we neither need nor can afford. We are told that “we owe it to ourselves,” “we are worth it,” and in addition, we are given credit sufficient to enable us to buy those things which we don’t have the money to buy. I am not saying that all credit buying or borrowing is wrong. I am saying that most of us buy things we cannot afford, simply to indulge ourselves.

The second practical suggestion I would make is that we need to develop the ability to deny ourselves of some things which we can afford. I have a negative illustration from personal experience. This week, a friend took me and another friend to lunch. It was a buffet, so that once you paid, you could eat all you wanted. I ate two pieces of angel food cake, with gooey icing. Affording the cake was not the issue. Let’s face it, I indulged, I over-indulged. All of us need to learn to say no to things which we could have, but need to do without for the sheer discipline of it. That is what God required of the Israelites. They could have harvested huge quantities of manna, but He told them to take only what was required for that day.

(3) Self-discipline is not something which man can produce from within himself, but comes from God. When I speak of self-discipline, I want to be clear that I am not speaking of the teeth-gritting, self-effort which is merely a form of “works” which is displeasing to God. There are those who engage in self-denial, in a way that is offensive to God.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Col. 2:20-23).

No, we are not talking about the kind of self-denial which we generate within ourselves, feeling that such asceticism makes us more holy in God’s eyes. We are talking about the self-control which the Spirit of God works within the believer and which characterizes those who are mature in their faith and sets them apart from false teachers (cf. **2 Tim. 1:7; 2:1-7; 3:3; Titus 1:8; 2:2, 6, 12**). We are talking about that discipline which is motivated by our love for God, and our love for men.

The tension which we face here, with regard to self-discipline, is a part of the broader tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The manna God provided Israel in Exodus 16 illustrates the fact that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are inter-related. God provided the manna which Israel needed, but He commanded them to collect, cook, and keep it, in accordance with His instructions. So, too, self-control is something which God produces in the saint through His Spirit, but it is something in which we participate as well.

Let me attempt to draw these matters of self-indulgence and self-control to a conclusion by summarizing several principles which relate to them:

(1) The Christian frequently must choose between immediate pleasure and eternal blessings. Self-indulgence inclines one to pursue the former, while self-discipline is required to gain the latter. **Hebrews chapter 11** is filled with the names of those who chose to deny themselves of immediate pleasure for the certainty of God’s eternal blessings.

(2) The Christian who would rid himself of self-indulgence must learn to be content with the condition and the circumstances in which God has placed him (cf. **Phil. 4:10-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-10**).

(3) The Christian who would overcome the tendency toward self-indulgence must develop a sense of daily dependence upon God to meet his every need (cf. **Matt. 6:11**). For those of us who have enough food for today and tomorrow and the next several weeks, we must recognize that it is God who is our provider. We must seek to avoid a

false sense of confidence based upon our material wealth (1 Tim. 6:17), and we must be free to share out of our surplus (2 Cor. 8; 1 Tim. 6:18). We must recognize that we are dependent upon God daily for our life, for health, and for the grace to deal with all that comes our way. These are things which money cannot buy.

May God give us the grace to learn to live with affluence, and to avoid the perils of self-indulgence by the development of self-discipline and self-denial in our lives.

Pulpit Commentary – Bread from Heaven

Our Lord tells us that the manna was a type of him, and that he was the "*true bread from heaven*" (John 6:32). We may profitably consider, in what respects the type held good.

I. IT WAS THE NOURISHMENT OF THE BODY, AS CHRIST IS OF THE SOUL.

The manna constituted almost the sole nourishment of the Israelites from this time forth until they entered Canaan (Joshua 5:12). So Christ is the food of the soul during its entire pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world, until it reaches the true Canaan, heaven. The Israelites were in danger of perishing for lack of food—they murmured—and God gave them the manna. The world was perishing for lack of spiritual nourishment—it made a continual dumb complaint—and God heard, and gave his own Son from heaven. Christ came into the world, not only to teach it, and redeem it, but to be its "spiritual food and sustenance." He feeds us with the bread of life. He gives us his own self for nourishment. Nothing else can truly sustain and support the soul—not creeds, not sacraments, not even his own Word without him.

II. IT WAS GIVEN FREELY FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, AS CHRIST IS GIVEN TO BE THE SAVIOUR OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

The manna fell all around the camp of Israel, close to them, so that they had but to stretch out the hand and take it. None could lack sufficient sustenance except by his own fault. If he refused to gather, he might starve; but not otherwise. So Christ gave himself for all men, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." His was "*a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.*" Even they who know him not may be saved by him, "if they will do the works of the law written in their hearts," or, in other words, act up to the light that has been vouchsafed them. Thus, his salvation is free, and open to all. In Christian lands it is close to all, made palpable to all, shown them openly, daily pressed upon them. He who starves here in England can scarcely starve save by his own fault—because he will not stretch out his hand to gather of the bread of life, will not take it when it is offered to him, rejects it, despises it, "loathes" it.

III. IT WAS WHITE, AND SWEET TO THE TASTE, AS CHRIST IS PURE AND SPOTLESS, AND SWEET TO THE SOUL.

A master mind of these modern times has made his hero, a well-disposed heathen, see in Christ, even before he could bring himself to believe in him, "the WHITE Christ." "*Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,*" he presents himself to all who will read his life, and contemplate his character, as pure, stainless, innocent. The Lamb is his fitting emblem. Driven snow is

not purer or more speckless. *"Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee"* (So **Exodus 4:7**). And he is sweet also. *"Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue"* (So **Exodus 4:11**). *"How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth!"* (**Psalms 119:103**). His words, his life, his promises, his influence, his presence, are all sweet, especially the last. Let those who know him not, once *"taste and see how gracious the Lord is,"* and they will desire no other nourishment.

IV. IT DESCENDED NOISELESSLY IN THE NIGHT. So Christ comes to us, not "with observation"—not in the wind, or in the fire, or in the earthquake, but in silence and in quietude, when other voices are hushed within us and about us, when we sit and watch, in patience possessing our souls. His doctrine drops as the rain, and his peace distils as the dew. It comes down "like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the earth." In the whirl of passion, in the giddy excitement of pleasure, in the active bustle of business, there is no room for Christ, no fit place for his presence. Christ comes to the soul when it is calm and tranquil, when it waits for him, and believing in his promise that he will come, is at rest.

V. IT REQUIRED TO BE GATHERED EARLY, AND IF NOT GATHERED MELTED AWAY. *"Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth."* Unless we will seek Christ early, we have no warrant to expect that he will condescend to be found of us. If we slight him, if we dally with the world, if we put off seeking him till a *"more convenient season,"* we may find, when we wake up from our foolish negligence, that he has withdrawn himself, has (as it were) melted away. If an Israelite put off his gathering of the manna until the sun was hot, he obtained nothing—the manna no longer lay ready to his hand. So with the Christian who is slothful, self-indulgent, careless—when, after long neglect, he at length seeks spiritual food, he may find it too late, the opportunity may be irrevocably gone.

Clay Curtis: Manna and the Bread from Heaven

Proposition: This morning we will look at a few ways that the manna in the wilderness is a picture of Christ the Bread from heaven.

I. MANNA WAS A STRANGE, MYSTERIOUS THING TO THE ISRAELITES.

A. What can be more mysterious than God coming down, incarnate, in human flesh!

I Timothy 3: 16: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

1. He who made the world was in the world.

John 1: 10: *He was in the world, and the world was made by him*

2. He who made woman was made of a woman.

Galatians 4: 4: *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5: To redeem them that were under the law, that*

we might receive the adoption of sons.

3. The living God became a man and dwelt among us, numbered with transgressors, subject to the same trials and temptations we have, yet without sin.

John 1: 14: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

Hebrews 4: 14: *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15: For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16: Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

4. The bread which came down in the wilderness came down with no help from men--no plowing, not planting, no reaping. That is how the Son of God was conceived and born into this world.

Isaiah 7: 14: *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

Luke 1: 30: *And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. 31: And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. 32: He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. 34: Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35: And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

Just as that manna which came down from heaven was a mystery to those in Israel, so the incarnation of the Son of God, the Bread from Heaven is a great mystery.

B. The manna came down in the dew.

1. Likewise, Christ the Bread feeds the hungry soul through the dew of the gospel we preach.

Deuteronomy 32:2: *My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:*

Romans 1:16: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

Isaiah 55:10: *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of*

my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

II. MANNA WAS A GIFT

Exodus 16: 15: *And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*

A. The Son of God is the gift from God the Father. Moses gospel was my gospel, "*This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*" Those who rejected Christ in favor of the law of Moses--claiming to follow the same gospel which Moses preached and yet laboring for what they thought was bread:

John 6: 30: *They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? 31: Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. 32: Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.*

They did not believe God or Moses: Moses gospel agreed with and glorified Christ, "*This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*" The Lord said, "*My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.*"

Illustration: What did the Lord say to the Samaritan woman?

John 4:10: *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

B. Christ Jesus is the unspeakable gift of God's love.

John 3: 13: *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. 14: And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16: For God so loved the world, (for in this manner God loved the world) that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

- In this manner God so loved the world, he gave his Son to be lifted up in the room and stead of his people
- He gave his Son to be made a curse for us
- He gave his Son to die the just for the unjust

Illustration: Men can speak of God's love all they want, but attempting to come to God in their decision for Christ, by looking to their religious deeds, by speaking so highly of what believer's must do--they reject God's love--God's love is in his Son alone.

I John 4: 9: *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent*

his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10: Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,

Ephesians 1:6: *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

I John 4: 19: *We love him, because he first loved us.*

C. Eternal life is the gift of God in Christ Jesus the Bread From Heaven.

1. Are you working for a righteousness? For justification? For sanctification? To free your self from your sin? To make your self acceptable to God? Do you labor for that bread? Or are you truly hungry? Eternal life is a gift, it can't be bought.

Isaiah 55: 1: *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

2: Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

3: Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Romans 6: 23: *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I John 5: 11: *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12: He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

III. THE MANNA MET THE NEED OF THOSE WHO WERE HUNGRY ENOUGH TO EAT IT.

Exodus 16: 16: *This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.*

A. Everyone in the camp of Israel was starving.

Illustration: There is a profound lesson in hunger--the rich will starve same as the poor without bread; the old and the young will starve without bread. No one exempt--all will starve without the bread!

B. Likewise, all men are sinners starved of God's righteousness therefore all men will

die without Christ the Bread.

John 6:53: *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.*

1. Christ is the only Savior and the only Bread.

Ephesians 5:23: *For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.*

2. But the manna filled every one who ate.

Exodus 16: 17: *And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. 18: And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating.*

- Believers feed on Christ the Bread daily.
- Those strong in faith have "nothing over" and those who have weak faith "have no lack"
- Christ is sufficient so that we never go hungry.

John 6: 35: *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst....53: Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. 54: Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55: For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56: He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57: As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58: This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. 59: These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.*

Illustration: Those who are full do not care to eat, but those who are hungry must eat. A porterhouse steak does not look good to a full man; but a cracker is like fine dining to a man who is starving. Take of Christ the Bread and you shall never hunger or thirst again spiritually.

IV. THE MANNA WAS PLEASANT TO THE TASTE.

Exodus 16: 31: *And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.*

Question: Are there certain foods that are so good to you that you just can't get enough of it?

Psalms 119:103: *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my*

mouth!

Proverbs 24: 13: *My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: 14: So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off.*

1 Peter 2:2: *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

V. FIFTHLY, HERE ARE A FEW WAYS THE MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS DIFFERS IN TYPE FROM CHRIST THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

A. Manna was food for the outward man, the flesh, only; Christ is the bread of eternal life for the inward soul.

John 6: 58: *This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*

B. Manna rotted if kept too long, it ceased when they entered into Canaan; Christ Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. In glory he will be our Bread forever. (**Heb 13.**)

Conclusion In the wilderness, they marveled over this bread at first. But then they got tired of having ONLY manna, because they did not have the variety that they lusted after, they even counted it as having no bread:

Numbers 21: 5: *And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.*

Of those professing disciples who followed after Christ, the same occurred when Christ made it clear that they must cease from all and only believe on Christ and that they could not even do that unless the Father gave it to them, so we read:

John 6: 60: *Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? 61: When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? 62: What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? 63: It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. 64: But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. 65: And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. 66: From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. But not Moses, not Aaron, or Caleb or Joshua, not the apostles, and not those he has fed here today! John 6: 67: Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? 68: Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words*

of eternal life. 69: And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

A GRAND APPLICATION

Psalm 34: 8: *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

And here is his promise to you who have tasted and seen that the LORD is good:

Revelations 2: 17: *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.*

TEXT: Exodus 16:22-36

TITLE: THE SABBATH – GOD’S GIFT OF REST AND WORSHIP

BIG IDEA:

THE PATTERN OF MANNA DISTRIBUTION REFLECTS THE UNIQUENESS OF THE SABBATH AS A HOLY DAY SET ASIDE FOR REST AND WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

The sabbath must be appreciated by the Jews as a gift from God to facilitate rest and worship. Now in the church age we practice the same model of working six days and resting one day by observing the Lord’s Day in a similar manner. God made every provision for the physical needs of His people so that they could obey His command to refrain from gathering manna on the sabbath. It was important that future generations receive the testimony of God’s miraculous provision of manna during the 40 years of the wilderness journey. This would remind them of their redemption from slavery in Egypt and of God’s leading them into the rest of the Promised Land.

John Mackay: Discipleship is not just about acquiring information or receiving benefits from the Lord. It also involves the **self-discipline** required to modify our behaviour so that it pleases God. *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7–8).* Repeatedly the grumbling of the Israelites shows how difficult they found it to throw off the thought patterns of slavery and enter fully into the freedom that the Lord had given them. It was a freedom not to do what they thought up for themselves, but to do what pleased the Lord. Only as they respected the directions of their Creator would they be able to realise the full potential of their salvation and free themselves from the legacy of their Egyptian bondage. The pattern for their living was not to be the responses the Egyptian regime had brain-washed them into accepting but the requirements of God. Sowing to please the Spirit would involve conforming every aspect of their living to the divine pattern of action and of dedicating to the Lord that portion of their time that was rightfully his.

Accepting the Lord as guide and deliverer requires patience in waiting for him to act as he sees fit. He was aware of the needs of the Israelites and would have readily met them if they had asked. There was the need to cultivate a spirit of active dependence on their Redeemer in every situation and turn to him with submission and prayer. *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10).*

I. (:22-26) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SABBATH = SPECIAL DAY SET ASIDE FROM WORK TO WORSHIP THE LORD

A. (:22-24) Preparation Required

1. (:22a) Gather Twice as Much on the Sixth Day

“Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one.”

God provided what they needed in order that they could enjoy His gracious gift of rest on the seventh day.

Douglas Stuart: It could have taken twice as long to gather two omers per person as to gather one, but more likely (though it cannot be proved) God supplied a greater abundance per unit of ground on the sixth day than on the others, making the gathering process of such a relatively light substance probably only marginally more time consuming. This new experience of getting twice the manna for approximately the same effort was sufficiently amazing and/or delightful as a proof of God’s promise that “the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses.” The consistency of this experience—everybody everywhere had the same double results—may have been what they especially wanted him to hear and what he was hoping would be the case, for this was the first test of that part of the command involving the once-a-week sixth day special procedure. Their faith in obeying the testing of each day had now been supplemented by the reward of their faith for obeying the special provisions for the sixth-day’s gathering.

John Oswalt: When the people realized on Friday that they had twice as much manna as they needed for that day, they were perplexed (**16:22**). Evidently, although God had told Moses to expect this (**16:5**), Moses had not told the people. **Sarna** (1991:90) speculates that this was a pedagogic device on Moses’s part; sometimes the most effective instruction is an answer to a question growing out of the student’s experience. At any rate, Moses used the opportunity to convey some instructions about Sabbath observance.

2. (:22b-23) Bake Ahead of Time so You Can Worship on the Sabbath

“When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, ‘This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’”

Alan Cole: *A holy sabbath.* This is the first actual occurrence of the word in Scripture.

Douglas Stuart: “Sabbath” means “stoppage,” and under the old covenant it required discontinuation of all voluntary work. Gathering food was the most basic sort of work anyone did in the ancient world, so the gathering of manna could hardly be allowed to continue as usual on the Sabbath.

3. (:24) Avoiding Work on the Sabbath Won’t Compromise God’s Provision

“So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered,

and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it.”

B. (:25-26) Provision Will be Sufficient

1. (:25) No Manna in the Field, But Food on the Table

“And Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.’”

2. (:26) Principle of Working Six Days and Resting from Work on the Sabbath

“Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

John Mackay: In this way the Lord would impress on them the extent of his control over their lives, and the wonder of his provision for them.

Look at how many different miracles were involved in how God worked out the logistics of this provision of manna.

Application: What is the significance of the Lord’s Day to believers today?

II. (:27-31) SACRILEGE OF THE SABBATH = PROFANING GOD’S GRACIOUS GIFT OF THE SABBATH DEMONSTRATES REBELLION AND INGRATITUDE

A. (:27) Direct Violation of God’s Sabbath Instructions

“And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.”

Douglas Stuart: Again some people couldn’t resist trying to get ahead, to advantage themselves, by disobedience to God’s command. As some of them had tried to keep manna too long (**16:20**), some of them (perhaps some of the same people) now tried to get more on the Sabbath, probably fearing that what they had kept from the night before would never last through the whole day even if they saw that it had in fact lasted until the early morning. They found no manna and in the process showed themselves unwilling once again to trust God in the matter of a single commandment, not a promising sign in light of the fact that soon enough they would be expected to keep his entire covenant law as an indication of their trust in him.

Bob DeYoung: The Sabbath day was a marker for the people of Israel. By keeping this day separate, the people of Israel were a living sign to the world about God and how he was calling people to be His own. Now the Law had not yet been given at this point, so there was no specific command to keep the Sabbath, but we can see already that God was shaping and forming his people, through the kind of lives they would live, to be his own. God miraculously made the manna last over the Sabbath day as provision enabling Israel to rest on the Sabbath. By doing this the people were showing their trust in the Lord.

Christians today do not live under the same strict Sabbath regulations. We voluntarily devote ourselves to our God on Resurrection Day, that is Sunday, to worship him, feed on his Word, and have fellowship with one another. And just like Israel, we wrestle with trusting God as we try, in this world, to not use Resurrection Day as just another day for our own desires and pleasures. For us, too, it is a matter of trust. Will we devote ourselves to God or are we worried we will miss out on something important by tying up the day, or at least part of the day, with Kingdom matters? Are we sometimes like those Israelites who were found gathering manna on the 7th day?

B. (:28-30) Divine Patience in Re-Issuing Sabbath Instructions

1. (:28) Persistent Rebellion

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?’”

John Oswalt: And here, unlike **verse 20**, where we are told Moses became “*angry with them*,” it is God who for the first time in this division becomes angry. His words, “*How long will these people refuse to obey my commands?*” (**16:28**), have an ominous ring because they are the same words that he spoke to Pharaoh in **10:3**. God is incredibly patient, as the whole Bible amply attests, but his patience has limits, and our obstinate human insistence on “doing it my way” pushes those limits to the end. **Houtman** (1993:2.350) is also almost certainly correct when he says that this anger is also because transgression of the Sabbath commandment is a terrible sin (cf. **Num 15:32–36**). It is interesting that throughout the Old Testament, people were condemned for giving merely ritualistic sacrifices and for not keeping the Sabbath. Does this suggest that Sabbath-keeping is less prone to being reduced to mere ritual than is sacrifice, or that Sabbath-keeping is more costly (and thus more valuable) than mere sacrifice?

2. (:29) Persevering Instruction

a. View Sabbath-keeping as a Gift Rather than a Burden

“See, the LORD has given you the sabbath;”

b. Appreciate God’s Provision of Your Needs

“therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day.”

c. Obey the Command to Stay Home and Focus on Worship instead of Work

*“Remain every man in his place;
let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”*

3. (:30) Practical Application = Day of Rest

“So the people rested on the seventh day.”

C. (:31) Description of the Manna

1. Name

“And the house of Israel named it manna,”

2. Appearance

“and it was like coriander seed, white;”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Coriander seed is a small lobular grain that is white or yellowish gray and is used for seasoning.

3. Taste

“and its taste was like wafers with honey.”

Steven Cole: Moses tells us what the manna tasted like (**Exod.16:31**): *“wafers with honey.”* That description satisfies our curiosity, but also it teaches us an important lesson: **Psalm 19:10** says that God’s Word is *“sweeter also than **honey** and the drippings of the **honeycomb**.”* **Psalm 34:8** puts it, *“O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”* Or **Ps. 119:103**, *“How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than **honey** to my mouth!”* Moses later explained (**Deut. 8:3**), *“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”* He went on to promise them that the Lord would bring them into a good land of abundance, where they would eat and be satisfied. God’s word is sufficient and satisfying for life and godliness! **So the manna teaches us that we are to look to the Lord to satisfy our every need and that when we taste of His grace and glory, we are satisfied with His goodness.**

III. (:32-36) SAVING OF THE JAR OF MANNA = TESTIMONY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS OF:

- PAST REDEMPTION FROM EGYPT**
- PRESENT PROVISION DURING THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY AND**
- FUTURE REST IN THE LAND OF PROMISE**

A. (:32) Celebrating God’s Faithfulness

“Then Moses said, ‘This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”

B. (:33-34) Securing a Jar of Manna as a Memorial

1. (:33) Instructions to Aaron

“And Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations.’”

John Mackay: Here again is a miracle. The manna which in other circumstances so quickly decayed would in this instance be preserved in order that future generations would be reminded of the Lord’s provision for his people (**12:17**). The ‘jar’ is later described as being of gold (**Heb. 9:4**).

2. (:34) Implementation by Aaron

*“As the LORD commanded Moses,
so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept.”*

Douglas Stuart: That a sample of manna should be kept with the ark, in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, was a major step of commemoration indeed. The holy of holies contained only one item of furniture: the ark, also called the ark of the testimony (e.g., **Exod 25:21–22; 26:33–34**) or perhaps even simply the Testimony (e.g., **Exod 27:21; 30:6**), a box symbolizing the very presence of God himself. For a jar of manna to be kept there gave the manna prominence above many other objects, including the shewbread or lampstand or incense altar, which were excluded from the holy of holies by the tabernacle’s inner curtain. At this stage in the progress of the Israelites, the tabernacle had not yet been built or even prescribed, so God’s command to them was simply that Aaron was to “*place it before the Lord to be kept*,” a way of saying that it was to remain in God’s presence—that is, in whatever place or object would symbolize God’s presence. Once the ark was actually built, there being no provision for any separate table within the holy of holies to hold the manna, it was placed inside the ark, as **Heb 9:4** confirms.

C. (:35) Sustaining the Nation Until They Reached the Land of Promise

“And the sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.”

Douglas Stuart: The system of footnoting and endnoting was not invented until modern times, but these verses are the Bible’s equivalent of a footnote or endnote—an explanatory note placed at the end of a portion of text. Moses may be the author of both verses, since he likely did not put the finishing touches on the Pentateuch until shortly before his death, roughly forty years later than the events described in most of **chap. 16**. Thus the statement that “*the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled*” brings the reader up to the point of the crossing of the Jordan by the Israelites under Joshua, when the end of the manna is explicitly mentioned (**Josh 5:12**). It is also possible that this footnote is an inspired compiler’s later addition to Moses’ work for the benefit especially of people who would search the Pentateuch itself in vain for any reference to the cessation of manna; there is none, other than here in **v. 35**, because at the time of Moses’ death the manna was still being provided daily.

John Mackay: The manna stopped when Israel left the wilderness and entered territory with land that could be cultivated and provide them with bread. The miraculous provision had played its part in sustaining them till they entered the land of promise, and was no longer needed.

D. (:36) Aside: Defining an Omer

“(Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)”

about 2.2 liters, or about a half-gallon

John Oswalt: The last three items obviously come from a time later than the events described in **16:1–30**:

- (1) The Ark of the Covenant had not been constructed yet,
- (2) the manna had only begun, not ceased, and
- (3) the omer was the normal unit of measure.

However, as **Enns** (2000:328) aptly observes, the very fact that the term “omer” has to be explained to a later generation is a testimony to the antiquity of the story upon which this comment is made. On this basis, it seems quite likely to me that Moses’s direction to Aaron to preserve a sample of the manna as a memorial (16:32–33) was contemporary with the story. Moses understood how important it was to preserve a memory of the miracle for the days when miracles would no longer be the norm and people would be expected to live in the light of the truths that the miracles had taught. “Eventually” (as NLT happily has it), the Ark of the Covenant came to be that sacred place before the Lord.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is your view of the Lord’s Day as a special day set aside from the rest of the work week to focus on worshipping the Lord and gathering with His people?
- 2) Do you view God’s appointed day of rest as a gift or a burden?
- 3) What type of rest do believers enjoy today due to the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross?
- 4) What is the value of memorials in orienting us properly towards our past, present and future? What type of momentos have you saved from some of your hard times?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Philip Ryken: The gift of God’s rest is still available today as one of the many blessings that God has given to his church. Several things have changed, however. One is the day. The Old Testament Sabbath was on the seventh day of the week. However, the New Testament day of worship and rest is the first day of the week (see **1 Cor. 16:2**), the day that Jesus rose from the dead. As a result of this change from Saturday to Sunday, the early church no longer called their day of rest “the Sabbath,” but “the Lord’s Day” (**Rev. 1:10**).

There are also some changes in what the day means. The Old Testament Sabbath

looked back to the exodus and back to creation, but it also looked forward. In the near future it looked forward to Canaan, the promised land of rest. At the same time the Sabbath anticipated the coming of a Savior. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises, including the promise of the Sabbath. When God's people rested on the seventh day, they were waiting in the hope of an everlasting rest. God fulfilled that promise by sending us Jesus, who said, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*" (**Matt. 11:28**). When we come to Jesus in faith, we enter God's rest. We give up trying to work for our salvation. We also abandon the anxiety and the sheer exhaustion that go along with striving to be good enough for God. Instead we rest upon what Jesus did when he kept God's law, died on the cross, and rose from the dead on our behalf.

Today when we celebrate the Lord's Day, we are still looking backward and forward. We look back to creation, but we also look back to the resurrection as we rest in the finished work of Christ. Then we look forward to our everlasting rest. The Scripture says, "*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest*" (**Heb. 4:9–11a**). Our weekly day of rest is both a day to remember and a day to wait in hope for the coming of Christ. According to theologian **Richard Gaffin**, "God wants us to view the final rest—the consummation order in store for God's redeemed children—as one grand, unending sabbath-rest. That suggests that the Sabbath day rest is an eschatological sign. In other words, our weekly Sabbath-rest is a recurrent pointer to that consummation. Weekly Sabbath keeping is a sign that points to the end of history and to the ultimate fulfillment of all God's purposes for his creation."

In Christ the Sabbath has undergone a wonderful transformation to become the Lord's Day. In many ways the day's promise has been fulfilled. Therefore, if we regard the day in a legalistic way, merely treating it as an Old Testament Sabbath, we fail to recognize what God has done for us through the work of Jesus Christ. However, if we dismiss God's weekly gift of rest, we are failing to wait for our full and final rest, which we will not enjoy until Christ comes again. In one of his hymns **John Newton** rightly described Sunday as the "day of all the week the best, emblem of eternal rest."

C. J. Mahaney: The Sabbath and Mercy

Not murmuring is one of the rarest traits in the world. When the Israelites experienced hardship they immediately became angry with God. What explanation is there for the Lord's mercy and patience and kindness towards them? (Deut. 7 provides answer – because the Lord loves you and is keeping His oath to your forefathers; He loves them because He loves them – sovereign, electing affection.)

Another gift from God they don't deserve = the gift of the sabbath rest. God's love for His undeserving people.

I. (:22-31) Provision of Manna for the Sabbath

Simple pattern and practice for gathering the manna each morning. Trust God for their

daily bread; sustained by God's mercy – new every morning – enough mercy for that day alone; No storing up of manna for tomorrow. Strength only for today. Divine design for developing our dependence upon God daily.

Sixth day Israelites were surprised and even shocked to see they could gather twice as much bread. Sought explanation from Moses. Cf. **16:4-5**; Introducing them to the sabbath = the next gift from God to His people; teaching them to trust and obey God. Day devoted to rest and worship of God. A special day uniquely consecrated to the Lord. Part of their identity as the people of God; not celebrated by any other culture; Resting in the goodness of God and remembering their deliverance from Egypt;

Lord is grieved at the disobedience (**vs. 28**) of those who neglected His instructions and tried to gather additional manna on the sabbath. Will my people ever learn to trust me and obey me?

Another display of God's kindness towards His undeserving people – **vs. 29** – the Lord has given you the gracious gift of the sabbath. Contrast to how they had been treated in Egypt.

Vs. 31 – Description of manna – How kind and generous of the Lord – to add honey to His heavenly recipe – manna is tasty stuff! Not bland rice cakes; this is the staple of their diet for the next 40 years; the most delicious food imaginable and nutritious; foretaste of Canaan; informs my theology of candy!

II. (:32-36) Provision to Remember the Manna – Jar of Manna

Perpetual reminder for future generations – one daily ration kept in a jar; a national treasure; remembering the steadfast love of the Lord; did not rot; other memorials: Passover; Feast of Unleavened Bread ...

Vs. 36 – intended for future generations to understand the measure of an omer

How is this practice of gathering twice as much manna on the sixth day relevant for me today? Pattern of 6 days of work and 1 day of rest was established in creation and then renewed in **Ex. 16**; this rest was a foretaste of the rest to come; sabbath pointed to the Lord Jesus who identified Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath; we now have peace with God and experience the rest that only Christ can provide; Christ fulfills the promise of sabbath rest; looking back at our redemption and forward to the coming again of our Saviour; Come to Me and find your rest in Me! We look back to the finished work of Christ on the cross; we cease from our own futile works and rest in His finished work; Passage points to the greater rest that Christ provides;

NT day of worship and rest is the first day of the week; resurrection day; now transformed and called the Lord's Day instead of the sabbath; church gathers on this day as the best day of the week; "emblem of eternal rest" (**Newton**); we get to do this every week; it is a gift of God to us; day of special blessings for the gathered church; Gathering is not optional; no warmth and vigor sitting around at home;

How do you view the Lord's Day? Do you view it as a special day with unique priorities and special blessings for your soul and your family? Our culture no longer views this day as unique;

<https://podbay.fm/p/sermons-13865/e/1552836600>

Rod Harris: I want to show you three reasons why we should joyfully embrace the Sabbath or the Lord's Day.

1. The Sabbath or Lord's Day is a means of clearly identifying ourselves as the people of God. **(16:22-26)**
2. Violation of the Sabbath or Lord's Day defies the command of God and is therefore an affront to God himself. **(16:27-30)**
3. We should embrace the Sabbath/Lord's Day as a day of rest, remembrance and worship. **(16:31-36)**

<https://www.tbctulsa.org/podcast/rethinking-the-sabbath-exodus-31/>

TEXT: Exodus 17:1-7

TITLE: TESTING GOD WHEN GOD IS TESTING US

BIG IDEA:

TESTING GOD BY DOUBTING HIS POWERFUL PRESENCE TO PROVIDE EXPOSES OUR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY BUT ENHANCES GOD'S PATIENCE AND GRACE

INTRODUCTION:

Time after time the Lord leads His children into difficult circumstances in order to test their hearts. Certainly by this time the Israelites should be confirmed in their assurance of God's gracious and powerful presence with them to fully provide and protect them on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. But sadly they fail to respond in faith and submission to the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Instead they test God by their grumbling and complaining.

Kevin McAteer: We put God to the test –

- When we doubt His kindness in any given situation –
- When we question His providence –
- When we grumble and complain under the weight of a trial –
- When we openly accuse Him of leaving and deserting His people –
- When we think we deserve better circumstances than God has given us

Wiersbe: It was the presence of the Lord that gave Moses the strength and confidence he needed as he led the people of Israel during their wilderness wandering. He had a difficult task, leading a thankless army of former slaves whom he was trying to build into a nation, but he persevered because the Lord was with him. The events recorded in these two chapters reveal to us what the presence of the Lord means to God's people and their leaders as they are on their pilgrim journey.

John Davis: The whole history of the wandering in the wilderness is a good example of the longsuffering of God with a people who constantly tempted and provoked Him.

Timothy Greene: We need to remember that it took about three months for the Israelites to travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai (Horeb; **Exod. 19:1-2**), and so there were other stops along the way besides the ones that Moses tells us about here in Exodus.

Here's a part of Israel's itinerary tracing their travels from the Red Sea to Rephidim where we find them this morning: -- **Numbers 33:8-14** --

They... passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and they went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah [bitter water]. And they set out from Marah and came to Elim [where there was water]... And they set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea [where we assume there was water]. And they set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin [where we assume there was water, and where God provided

quail and manna]. And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah [where we assume there was water]. And they set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush [where we assume there was water]. And they set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink.

The point is that as a general rule, God led His people through the desert from one oasis to another – from one underground spring to another. (cf. Currid) And so we shouldn't miss the vivid picture of a shepherd tenderly keeping and leading His flock.

I. (:1-3) TESTING GOD NEVER HELPS YOUR DIFFICULT SITUATION

A. (:1) God Legitimately Testing His People -- Repeating a Prior Failed Test

1. Our Spiritual Journey Includes God Testing Us

“Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim,”

Gispén: The Amalekites probably controlled the stream, the springs, and the palm trees, and they soon came out and attacked Israel (**17:8-16**). The Israelites thus could not reach the springs but had to be satisfied with the barren part of the wadi, and had no water to drink.

Douglas Stuart: The wording of **17:1** makes clear that the Israelites did not camp at Rephidim of their own volition but of God's, and therefore one is forced to conclude that once again God had led them directly to a place where there was no drinkable water (cf. **15:22–26**).

C. W. Powell: If you are in a hard spot:

a) You are either there because of disobedience or obedience. If disobedience, then you must repent and find the way of obedience.

b) If by obedience, then the trial is from God and you are to bear it patiently.

c) Either way, you must not blame God. Their murmuring showed their unbelief either way; murmuring is always sinful and wicked and it means that you either are not taking responsibility for your own disobedience, or you are complaining about the way God has led you—frightful sins either way.

2. Trials Can Involve Difficult Challenges

“and there was no water for the people to drink.”

F B Meyer: Hunger is bad enough to bear, but it affects only one organ of the body, whereas thirst sets the whole being on fire. It mounts to the brain and burns like fever in the blood. The little children were drooping like flowers; the cattle were on the verge of exhaustion, and lay panting on the ground. The scouts searched everywhere for water in

vain, and came back with but one report, that there was no water anywhere to be found.

Steven Cole: Why did God directly lead Israel to another place of no water?" The answer is: For the same reason He brings us into places of **need**: so that **we will call upon Him in our weakness** and **He will be glorified when He delivers us**. The Lord says (**Ps. 50:15**), "*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*" So if you're in a place of trouble, before you do anything else, **call upon the Lord**. If you've been grumbling, confess that to the Lord and ask Him to be glorified through the trial that you're in. This incident of Israel's grumbling at Massah ("test") and Meribah ("quarrel") is mentioned in **Psalm 95:7-11. Hebrews 3:7-11+** cites those verses and adds (**Heb. 3:12+**), "*Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.*" **Grumbling** stems from "an evil, unbelieving heart." Unbelief tests or tries the Lord (**Exod. 17:7; Ps. 95:9**). In spite of His many mercies, when problems arise, unbelief challenges God by asking (**Exod. 17:7**), "*Is the Lord among us, or not?*" In other words, unbelief asks, "If God is really here and cares about me, how can He let this happen?" Unbelief doubts God's sovereignty, His power, His wisdom, and His love. It removes God from His rightful place as judge and puts Him on trial, while I judge Him, questioning His ways of dealing with me! It stems from the pride of thinking that I know better than God what would be best for me. Be on guard against grumbling against the Lord!

B. (:2) God's People Illegitimately Testing God

1. Trying to Control God – Making Demands on Our Terms

"Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water that we may drink.'"

C. W. Powell: Murmuring is implicitly a condemnation of self: you are either refusing to take responsibility for your actions, or you are admitting that you are not walking in faith in the providence of God.

John Mackay: 'Give' is a plural verb. Although Aaron is not mentioned, he is evidently at Moses' side. The people do not explicitly confront the Lord, but rather challenge the adequacy of the provision made by the leaders he appointed. The word 'quarrel' is significant in the passage, being the root from which the word Meribah ('quarrelling' or 'contention') is formed (**17:7**). It denotes formal legal proceedings, and also, as here, an informal presentation of a grievance, which if not resolved may well give rise to more formal action at a later stage. So Moses has to face more than the previous grumbling. It has now become a general, formal expression of dissatisfaction.

Philip Ryken: This is something else we have seen before: All our dissatisfaction shows that we are disappointed with God. To put it another way, all our complaints go straight to the top, where God rules the universe by his sovereign power. Whatever the reason for our discontent, what it really shows is that we are not satisfied with what God has given us. This is a great sin. It is not wrong to take our troubles to God, talking them over with him in prayer. In fact, the Bible encourages us to be honest about our doubts

and difficulties. But God does not accept open revolt against his holy will or the refusal to trust in his perfect word.

2. Trying to Judge God – Making God Accountable to Our Demands

*“And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me?
Why do you test the LORD?’”*

Douglas Stuart: “Testing God” is demanding or expecting him to do something special for you, something you haven’t earned and don’t per se deserve. . . Testing God always involves some degree of doubt about whether or not one’s present circumstances are all that one deserves and whether or not God could or should have done a better job of providing one’s needs.

Philip Ryken: People often put God to the test this way. We want him to prove himself to us. So instead of starting with God and evaluating our experience from his point of view, we start with our own circumstances and judge him on that basis. When things go wrong, when life does not meet our expectations, we are quick to fix the blame squarely on his shoulders and to demand some kind of explanation. **C. S. Lewis** observed: “The ancient man approached God as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God’s acquittal. But the important thing is that Man is on the Bench and God in the Dock.”

Timothy Greene: As one commentator says, testing God is “seeking a way God can be coerced to act or show himself. It is to set God up, to try to force God’s hand...” (**Fretheim**; quoted in **Hamilton**) Someone else writes: “In essence, testing God is demanding that he jump through our hoops and make himself answerable and accountable to us.” (**Hamilton**) Now we might say that the provision of water isn’t much of a hoop to jump through, and yet any and all “hoops” that we might ever set up are all equally sinful and arrogant. Remember the questions we asked ourselves a couple of weeks ago: How often do we fall into the trap of thinking that, at least in what we would consider to be the most “basic” and “essential” areas, God is obligated to us – though we’d never say that out loud. How have we ever tried to manipulate God? What are the “hoops” that we have at least assumed God should be jumping through if He really loves us and is truly with us? What we need to be learning from Israel’s experiences in the wilderness is that our own “flesh”—which is the same as what was in each one of them—is naturally and automatically prone to “testing” God. Our own flesh (including each and every single one of us here) is naturally and automatically prone to insisting that God prove Himself to us based on our standards, and our expectations – no matter how “minimal” and “elementary” they might be.

C. (:3) Grumbling Against God’s Appointed Leadership

1. Legitimate Needs – Denying God’s Provision

“But the people thirsted there for water;”

Rod Mattoon: The heads of the Hebrews were inflamed with irrationality. Their hearts were flaming with fury against Moses. Their hands were clutching stones, ready to be hurled like fast balls at any moment. Their circumstances were in control of them and emotionally they were out of control. They were suffering a panic attack and a temper tantrum at the same time and they chided Moses....When you are waterless in wilderness, do you blame others for your problems or do you cry out to God? Men have a spiritual thirst for pardon, holiness, and salvation. Learning won't satisfy this thirst. Riches or pleasure won't satisfy it either. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can quench the longing in your heart.

2. Irrational Arguments – Denying God’s Protection

“and they grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Instead of submitting to the tests God was conducting for them (15:25; 16:4), Israel began to test the Lord (Pss 78:56; 106:7, 14, 25, 29)! God’s people tempt or test their Lord when they distrust his kindness and providential care of them and grumble against him and/or his leaders.

Philip Ryken: The Israelites made three statements to Moses, each of which represents a different kind of complaint. . .

First they said, “*Give us water to drink*” (Exod. 17:2a). The sin here is **demanding God’s provision**—not asking for it or waiting for it, but insisting on it. They were telling God that he had to give them what they wanted or else there was no telling what they might do. In our rebellion we often do the same thing. We insist on having our own way. When God does not do for us what we think he ought to do, in the way we think he ought to do it, we complain about it. At home, at work, and in the church, we demand God’s provision on our own terms.

The second thing the Israelites said was, “*Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?*” (v. 3). Here they were **denying God’s protection**. The people assumed the worst, as they usually did, and thus they concluded that God had abandoned them, even to the point of death. Although their words were directed against God’s prophet, they were really impugning God’s motives. They were accusing him of trying to harm them. Again, we often commit the same sin. We complain that what God is doing in our lives—especially the suffering we must endure—is not good for us but actually harmful. This is to deny God’s protection.

The third thing the Israelites did was to test God, saying, “*Is the Lord among us or not?*” (v. 7). In this case, their sin was **doubting God’s presence**. The lack of water made them wonder if God was really with them after all. Our own trials often raise the same question: “Are you really there, God? If you are, you sure don’t seem to be blessing me very much right now!” When we adopt this attitude, we are guilty of denying God’s presence.

II. (:4-7) TESTING GOD NEVER NULLIFIES THE GRACIOUS PROVISION FROM GOD'S POWERFUL PRESENCE

Remember: While we were still enemies of God, Jesus Christ died for us to make gracious provision for forgiveness of sins and life eternal with God.

A. (:4) Priority of Prayer and Dependence on the Lord in Desperate Times

“So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying,

‘What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: One of Moses' most characteristic and praiseworthy traits was that he took his difficulties to the Lord (v. 4; 15:25; 32:30; 33:8; Num 11:2, 11; 12:13; 14:13-19 et al.).

John Davis: The people had become so dissonant and angry that they apparently were ready to stone their leaders (v. 4). The leadership and competence of Moses should have been vindicated by now, but to a people easily influenced by the mixed multitude and the difficulty of the circumstances these historical facts were easily forgotten.

David Thompson: Sometimes leaders are forced into situations in which the only thing they can do is cry out to God. Moses has nowhere else to turn. His only recourse is to cry out to God. Now Moses was not the kind of man to embellish the truth. So when he says to the Lord there is a danger here of me being “stoned,” you can be certain that was, in fact, a real possible threat. Moses did not know what to do. He never wanted this job in the first place and now that he had it, he is leading a group of people who are criticizing, complaining and threatening him. Stoning was the normal way people who were a threat were killed. Even recognized leaders were not above being stoned (Num. 14:10; 1 Sa 30:6; Jn 8:59; Acts 5:26; 7:58; 14:19). Stoning was a legitimate form of legal punishment. **Moses truly believed that he was on the verge of being stoned.** The people charged him with trying to starve them to death and now they were charging him with trying to kill them by thirst. Moses was in a real bind and people were in a panic and Moses needed God's help and so he did exactly what he should do—**he cried out to God.** Now in some respects, Moses' emotions are getting the best of him, just as Israel's emotions are getting the best of them. **Both have temporarily forgotten the protection of God and both have temporarily forgotten the provisions of God.** To not trust in God is a form of rebellion and this lack of trust is a rebellion that is remembered in all of Scripture pertaining to Israel (Nu 20:13, 24; 27:14; Dt. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 81:7; 95:8; 106:32), but also pertaining to Moses and Aaron (Nu 27:14; 20:24; Deut. 32:51; Ps. 106:32). We may remember that God told Moses that he would lead the people of Israel back to a specific spot to worship Him (Ex. 3:12+). Moses was not back to that spot yet and he should have realized these people can threaten me all they want, but the fact is they cannot kill me because God is leading me. But even though this is a lapse of faith in Moses, he is doing the right thing by crying out to God.

B. (:5-6) Gracious Provision from God from a Surprising Source

1. (:5) Preparing the Miracle of Gracious Provision

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.’”

John Hannah: This “*staff of God*” (4:20; 17:9) was a symbol of power; holding it was a sign of dependence and trust in God.

Philip Ryken: God said to Moses, “*Take with you some of the elders of Israel*” (v. 5). In ancient times the assembly of elders passed judgment on disputed matters. Therefore, when Moses gathered them together, he was convening a court by forming a jury.

Peter Wallace: What shall you do? Notice the four things that God tells Moses to do:

- “*Pass on before the people*” – in other words, this will be a public event –
- “*taking with you some of the elders*” – those who are responsible for the grumbling –
- “*and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile*” – the symbol of God’s presence with Moses –
- “*and go.*”

But the **staff of Moses** is the instrument of **judgment** –

- first in the judgment upon Egypt –
- but here, most poignantly, in the judgment upon Christ – the Rock – as God shows how he will take the judgment of the people upon himself.

2. (:6) Performing the Miracle of Gracious Provision

a. Instructions – Focusing on the Rock as a Type of Jesus Christ

“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.”

Youngblood: Paul may have had this incident in mind when he spoke of Christ as “*the spiritual rock*” that accompanied Israel on their journey across the desert (1 Cor. 10:4; see also Heb. 11:24-26).

Wiersbe: The rock is a type of Jesus Christ smitten for us on the cross (1 Cor. 10:4), and the water is a type of the Holy Spirit whose coming was made possible by Christ’s death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven (John 7:37-39).

Douglas Stuart: God’s presence and power represent the essentials for any miracle, and God explicitly promised Moses his presence in saying “*I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb.*” Horeb is the other name by which Mount Sinai is known. The provision of water is a divine gift in many biblical contexts. Here, in association with the encampment at Rephidim near Sinai, God did not merely allow the Israelites to find water but showed them his provision for them by supplying that water in a place it was

not otherwise available: from a rock at the base of the Mountain of God.

b. Implementation

“And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

C. (:7) Powerful Presence of God Despite the Failure of God’s People

1. Failure of God’s People

“And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel,”

John Oswalt: Moses understood that places are unique because of what takes place there in history and that if the lessons of that history are learned, the future need not be a repetition of the past but can actually be different. By giving this place this descriptive name, he was trying to root it and its lessons in his people’s minds in an unforgettable way and thus to change their behavior.

2. Fundamental Issue: Can We Count on the Powerful Presence of God?

*“and because they tested the LORD, saying,
‘Is the LORD among us, or not?’”*

Are they that stupid? A flame in the night and a cloud in the day; bread in the morning and water from a bitter river...How can they doubt the presence of God?

Douglas Stuart: The Israelites’ inexcusable attitude becomes clear with Moses’ concluding statement to the entire story: *“They tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ ”* Had the people said something like, “Does the Lord intend for us to become weaker and weaker while we wait for him to supply us with water?” it would still have been an untrusting statement and evidence of lack of faith. But for the people actually to doubt God’s presence among them was outrageously unfaithful. His presence was obviously manifest at all times, as it was at that very time through the pillar of cloud/fire, so the people’s question must be seen as nothing other than a contempt of the Lord’s leadership over them. . . It is an insult. It looks at the obvious and implies by snidely denying it that it is no good. Israel thus incurred God’s wrath and challenged God in a way he could not ignore.

Timothy Greene: The point of this whole account is that the Lord is, indeed, among the people. But they’re warned that He is not among them as one who serves their own carnal and fleshly thirsts and desires, but rather as the one who is, Himself, their abundant, never-ending source of life-giving water. (cf. **Ps. 95:7-11; 81:7, 11-16; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8**) To truly understand this would put an immediate and complete end to all of our “testing” of the Lord! But in the end, the people of Israel didn’t heed the warning or learn the lesson.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of tests has the Lord repeated for you? Why do you think He has repeated them? What are the lessons you still need to learn?
- 2) What does grumbling and complaining against God look like in your life?
- 3) Are we quick to turn to the Lord in prayer and dependence when we find ourselves in a difficult challenge?
- 4) When do you have doubts that you can count on the powerful presence of God to work in your situation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore;
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing waters flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside; "
Bear me thro' the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to Thee,
I will ever give to Thee.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: this incident is not to be confused with a similar episode that comes near the conclusion of Israel's forty years of journeying in **Numbers 20:1-13**. In this later account, the glory of the Lord is not present; and Moses is explicitly instructed that he is **not** to strike the rock but only to **speak** to it. This shows that the only connection between Israel's need and God's supply was the divine Word. True, they also named that place "*the waters of Meribah*" (**Num 20:13**), but the symmetry and naming may

indeed be deliberate to emphasize the purpose in allowing the incidents and in directing that they be recorded as Scripture. God's people are prone to grumbling at the first hint of adversity no matter how abundant and spectacular may be the evidence of his power and presence.

John Mackay: The references to this incident at Massah and Meribah elsewhere in Scripture (**Deut. 33:8; Ps. 95:8**) show that it was recognised as providing a key insight into Israel's lack of spiritual development. They had not really come to recognise who they were. Their stance was unbelievable. They had been given their freedom by the Exodus; they had been subsequently guided by the pillar of cloud, which was still with them; their needs had been miraculously and abundantly met—did they not gather the manna six days out of seven?—and yet they could ask, "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" This was an Egyptian-like (or should it be Pharaonic?) stance of refusing to admit the obvious in spite of overwhelming and repeated testimony. This was Israel, as **Psalm 95:8–9** implies, hardening their hearts, "*though they had seen what I did*". They had still to accept all that was involved in their new status as the people redeemed by the Lord, and what that meant for their attitude towards him and towards themselves. They had still to come to terms with what they have now become. They had to recognise his overwhelming power and his willingness to provide for them.

Dr. Woodrow Kroll: Water From the Rock -

The importance of water can never be underestimated. Sixty percent of a lean, adult body is composed of water. A person can fast from food for 40 days or longer, but the human body can go only for about 7 days without water even under ideal circumstances.

It's no wonder, then, that the Israelites were getting desperate. The wilderness was far from ideal. It was a hot, desert-like stretch of land dotted with huge rocks but little vegetation. Without water they would quickly perish. So God instructed Moses to strike a rock, and out of this flinty hardness flowed sufficient water to meet the needs of all the people and their livestock.

The Bible writers later saw this rock as a symbol of Christ (**1 Cor. 10:4**). In the midst of a sin-parched life, Christ offers a well of living water that never runs dry, no matter how often we drink from it.

Have you received Christ as your Savior? If not, trust Jesus today and you will never thirst again. If you want eternal water, come to Jesus who said, "*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*" (**John 4:14**). The world offers a cistern; Christ offers a well.

Wiersbe: An Old Test Repeated –

Israel had a long way to go before they would qualify as a godly nation. So far, every new trial they experienced only brought out the worst in them. When they arrived in Rephidim, in the Wilderness of Sinai, they again found themselves without water. They

had failed this test once before, so God had to test them again. He had proved that He was able to provide water and food for them, so why were they quarreling with Moses? Because their hearts were still in Egypt! They were guilty of ingratitude and unbelief, wanting to go back to the old life; and as a result, they again failed to pass the test.

Every difficulty God permits us to encounter will become either a test that can make us better or a temptation that can make us worse, and it's our own attitude that determines which it will be. If in unbelief we start complaining and blaming God, then temptation will trap us and rob us of an opportunity to grow spiritually. But if we trust God and let Him have His way, the trial will work for us and not against us (**Rom. 8:28; James 1:12-15**) and help us grow in grace. . .

“Massah” means “to test,” and “Meribah” means “contention, quarreling.” The Jews had not yet learned that God tests His people in the everyday experiences of life. He uses the difficult experiences of life to strengthen our faith and mature our character. But Israel's faith in God was very weak, for they thought their God had led them to a place where He couldn't care for them! The trouble with the Israelites was that they had hard hearts that wouldn't submit to the Lord, so they rebelled against His will. In fact, the older generation had unbelieving hearts throughout their entire journey from Egypt to Canaan (**Ps. 96:6-11; Heb. 3**). They complained about water at the beginning of their pilgrimage and also forty years later at the end (**Num. 20:1-13**).

William McEwen: The water flowed when the rock was smitten not in scanty measure, but in large abundance. The miraculous stream was not exhausted, though many hundred thousand men, with their herds, drank it. Nor were the dry places of that sandy desert able to imbibe the copious moisture. So inexhausted is the fullness of Jesus Christ, from whom all sorts of men, the Jews, the Gentiles, the barbarians, the Scythians, the bond, and the free, may receive all sorts of blessings. You are not straitened [restricted] in him, O children of men; this river of God, which is full of water, can never run dry, nor be exhausted, how abundantly soever we drink of its refreshing streams.

Philip Ryken: What did the water prove? It proved everything about God that the Israelites were calling into question. Remember, they were **demanding his provision, denying his protection, and doubting his presence**. But the water flowing from the rock proved all these things. Obviously it proved that God had the power to provide: “*He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers*” (**Ps. 78:15, 16**). Not only was God their provider, but he was also their protector. Instead of judging his people for their sins—especially for their unbelief—he submitted himself to judgment so they could live. Finally, the rock was the proof of God's presence. The Israelites wanted to know if God was with them or not. Well, there he was—their Savior—standing on the rock. . .

The Bible often refers to God as a Rock. He is “*the Rock of Israel*” (**Gen. 49:24; cf. Isa. 30:29**), “*the Rock ... [whose] works are perfect*” (**Deut. 32:4**), the Rock who is a

“fortress” and a “refuge” (Ps. 18:2). He is “*the Rock of our salvation*” (Ps. 95:1; cf. Deut. 32:15). In keeping with this imagery, the rock that Moses struck with his rod was a symbol of God and his salvation. In particular, it showed how God would submit to the blow of his own justice so that out of him would flow life for his people.

God did this in the person of his own Son. The rock was Christ because like the rock, Christ was struck with divine judgment. This is what happened to him on the cross. Christ was bearing the curse for our sin; so God struck him with the rod of his justice. The Scripture says, “*He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed*” (Isa. 53:5). The judgment that Christ received on the cross is the proof of our protection. It shows that we will not suffer eternal death for our sins. God has taken the judgment of our guilt upon himself, and now we are safe for all eternity.

The rock was also Christ because it flowed with the water of life. Here we recall something significant from the crucifixion, something that John noticed as he stood near the cross. In his Gospel John records how, in order to confirm that Jesus was dead, “*one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water*” (John 19:34). The blood was the blood that he shed for our sins. But John also mentioned the water, not simply to prove that Jesus died on the cross, but also to show that by his death he gives life.

Jesus is the water of life. He said, “*Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst*” (John 4:14a). He is our provider as well as our protector. More than that, everyone who comes to Jesus by faith is filled with the Holy Spirit, and now his life flows within us. Jesus went on to say, “*Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*” (v. 14b).

In Christ God is for us what he was for Israel—our provider, protector, and ever-present Lord. This is what Paul meant when he said “*that rock was Christ*” (1 Cor. 10:4). In the same way that God was with Israel at Horeb, he is with the church in Christ. Our Lord is our Rock, and we trust in his provision, his protection, and his presence.

John Barnett: KEY INSIGHTS ON THE ROCK OF EXODUS 17

1. The “*Rock*” is one of the titles of Jehovah, found frequently on the pages of the O.T. In his “*song*,” Moses laments that Israel forsook God and “*lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation*” (Deut. 32:15). In his song, we also hear the sweet singer of Israel saying, “*The Lord is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer*” (2 Sam. 22:2). The Psalmist bids us make a “*joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation*” (95:1). While the prophet Isaiah tells us “*And a Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a Great Rock in a weary land*” (32:2). In the N.T. we get that memorable and precious word, “*Upon this Rock*” (pointing to Himself, not referring to Peter’s confession) *I will build My church*” (Matthew 16:18).

2. The first thing that impresses one when we see a rock is its strength and stability, a

characteristic noted in Scripture in the question of Bildad to Job, "*Shall the rock be removed out of his place?*" (**Job. 18:4**). This is a most comforting thought to the believer. The Rock upon which he is built cannot be shaken: the floods may come, and the winds may beat upon it, but it will "*stand*" (**Matthew 7:25**).

3. Another prominent characteristic of rocks is their durability. They outlast the storms of time. Waters will not wash them away, nor winds remove them, from their foundations. Many a vessel has been dashed to pieces on a rock, but the rock stands unchanged; and it is a deeply solemn thought that those who are not built upon The Rock, will be shattered by it—"And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken," said Christ, pointing to Himself, "*but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder*" (**Matthew 21:24**).

4. A third feature that may be mentioned about a rock is its elevation. It towers high above man and is a landmark throughout that part of the country where it is situated. Some rocks are so high and so steep that they cannot be scaled. Each of these characteristics find their application to and realization in the Lord Jesus. He is the strong and powerful One—"The mighty God" (**Isa. 9:6**). He is the durable One—"the Same yesterday and today and forever." He is the elevated One, exalted to the Throne of Heaven, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

5. The first thing to be noted here in our type is that the rock was to be smitten. This, of course, speaks of the death of the Lord Jesus. It is striking to note the order of the typical teaching of **Exodus 16** and **17**. In the former we have that which speaks of the incarnation of Christ; in the latter, that which foreshadowed the crucifixion of Christ. **Exodus 17** is supplementary to **chapter 16**. Christ must descend from Heaven to earth (as the manna did) if He was to become the Bread of life to His people; but He must be smitten by Divine judgment if He was to be the Water of life to them! Here is another reason for the opening "*And*."

6. There are three details here which enable us to fix the interpretation of the smiting of the rock as a type of the death of the Lord Jesus. First, it was to be smitten by the rod of Moses. The "*rod*" in the hand of Moses had been the symbol of judgment. The first reference to it definitely determines that. When he cast it on to the ground it became a "*serpent*" (**4:3**)—reminder of the curse. With his rod the waters of the Nile were smitten and turned into blood (**7:17**), and so on. Second, only the "*elders of Israel*" witnessed the smiting of the rock. This emphasizes the governmental character of what was here foreshadowed. Third, Jehovah Himself stood upon the rock while it was smitten. "*Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb*" (**v. 6**)—marvelous line in the picture was this. Putting these things together what spiritual eye can fail to see here a portrayal of our Substitute being smitten by the rod of Divine justice, held in the hand of the Governor of the Universe. Doubtless that word in **Isaiah 53:4, 5** looks back to this very type—"Smitten of God . . . by His stripes we are healed." How solemn to behold that it was the people's sin which led to the smiting of the rock!

7. Out from the smitten rock flowed the water. Beautiful type was this of the Holy Spirit

— gift of the crucified, now glorified, Savior. May not this be one reason why the Holy Spirit is said to be "*poured out*" (**Acts 2:18**)?—speaking in the language of this very type. The gift of the Holy Spirit was consequent upon the crucifixion and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. This is clear from His own words from **John 7:37, 38**: "*Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*" Now mark the interpretation which is given us in the very next verse: "*But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*"

8. The Holy Spirit has given us a supplementary word through the Psalmist which enhances the beauty of the picture found in **Exodus 17**. There we are told, "*He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. For He remembered His holy promise (to) Abraham His servant*" (**105:41, 42**). It was because of His covenant to Abraham that God gave the water to Israel. So, too, we read of God promising to give eternal life to His elect "*before the world began*" (**Titus 1:1, 2**), and this, on the basis of "*the everlasting covenant*" (**Heb. 13: 20**).

9. **1 Corinthians 10**, also supplements **Exodus 17**. In the historical narrative we read of Moses striking the rock in the presence of "*the elders*" of Israel, but nothing is there said about the people drinking of the streams of water that flowed from it. But in **1 Corinthians 10:4**, we are told, "*And did all drink the same spiritual drink.*" This is an important word. It affirms, in type, that all of God's people have received the Holy Spirit. There are some who deny this. There are those who teach that receiving the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace. This is a serious error. Just as all the children of Israel (God's covenant people) drank of the water from the smitten rock, so in the anti-type, all of God's children are made partakers of the Holy Spirit, gift of the ascended Christ—"And because ye are sons, God had sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, *Abba, Father*" (**Gal. 4:6**). There is no such thing as a believer in Christ who has not received the Holy Spirit: "*If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of Him*" (**Rom. 8:9**).

10. Much of the blessedness of our type will pass unappreciated unless we note carefully the occasion when the stream of living water gushed from the smitten rock. It was not when Israel were bowed in worship before the Lord. it was not when they were praising Him for all His abundant mercies toward them. No such happy scene do the opening verses of **Exodus 17** present to our view. The very reverse is what is there described. Israel were murmuring (**v. 3**); they were almost ready to stone God's servant (**v. 4**); they were filled with unbelief, saying, "*Is the Lord among us, or not?*" (**v. 7**). The giving of the water, then, was God acting according to His marvelous grace. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. But, be it well noted, it was grace acting on a righteous basis. Not till the rock was smitten did the waters flow forth. And not till the Savior had been bruised by God was the Gospel of His grace sent forth to "*every creature.*" What, my reader, is the response of your heart to this amazing and rich mercy of God? Surely you say, out of deepest gratitude, "*thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift*" (**2 Cor. 9:15**).

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/102908175362.pdf>

TEXT: Exodus 17:8-16

TITLE: *FIGHTING THE AMALEKITES (SPIRITUAL WARFARE)*

BIG IDEA:

VICTORY IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE REQUIRES GOD'S PEOPLE ACTIVELY FIGHTING WHILE DEPENDING ON THE POWER OF THE LORD WHO DESERVES ALL THE CREDIT

INTRODUCTION:

Spiritual warfare is a reality for every believer. The forces of evil wage war against God's kingdom agenda. There is no victory apart from engaging in battle. You cannot sit on the sidelines and just expect God to bail you out. Yet you also cannot fight in your own strength. You must see the Lord as the Commander-in-Chief who leads His people to victory as they seek His help and depend on Him. Spiritual leaders play a critical role in both engaging the enemy and soliciting God's aid. Ultimately we make our boast in the Lord who gives us the victory and subdues the enemy. God is sovereign but we must exercise our responsibility to fight by faith.

In **Ephesians 6**, Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God (**Eph 6:11**). Then he explains: "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (**6:12**).

Spiritual warfare must be a reality for every believer.

Wiersbe: Israel's great victory over Amalek involved three elements:

- The power of God in heaven,
- The skill of Joshua and the army on the battlefield,
- And the intercession of Moses.

Steven Cole: I think that Amalek represents our broader threefold enemy: the world, the flesh, and the devil. We're engaged in perpetual spiritual warfare against these enemies of our souls. If you compromise with such aggressive enemies, they will eventually dominate your life and destroy you. First, Israel had to drink from the rock, which is Christ. But then, they had to take up their swords and actively fight this enemy. The point is, the Christian life is not an easy stroll in the park; it's a daily battle against powerful forces of evil that threaten to destroy us. How do we fight the battle?

I. (:8-13) ACHIEVING THE VICTORY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LORD

A. (:8) Conflict Against Israel Initiated by the Amalekites

"Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim."

John Hannah: The Amalekites were nomads in the desert south of Canaan (cf. **1 Sam.**

15:7; 27:8). They were descendants of Esau through Eliphaz (**Gen. 36:12**). They apparently were attempting to dislodge the Israelites from this pleasant oasis and to secure their territory from intrusion.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The Amalekites lived in the desert, south of Canaan around Kadesh (**Gen 14:7**), otherwise known as the northern part of the Negev. Amalek was the son of Eliphaz (Esau's eldest boy) by a concubine named Timna (**Gen 36:12**) and became a "clan" or "chief" in the tribe of Esau (**Gen 36:15**). Thus the Amalekites were distant cousins to the Israelites. . .

Amalek's assault on Israel drew the anger of God on two counts:

- 1) they failed to recognize the hand and plan of God in Israel's life and destiny and
- 2) the first targets of their warfare were the sick, aged, and tired of Israel who lagged behind the line of march (**Deut. 25:17-19**).

Thus Amalek became the "first among the nations" (**Num 24:20**) – in this case, to attack Israel. They are placed in juxtaposition with another group of Gentiles in the next chapter (Jethro's Midianites) who believed in Israel's God. These two chapters illustrate two kingdoms and two responses to the grace of God from the Gentile world.

B. (:9) Champions for Israel Strategically Deployed

1. Leadership Role of Joshua – Responsibility to Fight

"So Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek.'"

John Davis: This is the first mention of the man Joshua. He was about forty-five years of age at this time. His name was actually Hoshea but was later changed to Jehoshua (**Num. 13:16**). The former name means "savior," the latter means "Jehovah is Savior." Throughout the forty years he acted as Moses' personal minister (**Exod. 24:13; 32:17; 33:11; Josh. 1:1**). One is immediately impressed with the faith and obedience of this young man (**v. 10**). Without question or objection he organized the relatively untrained and unseasoned soldiers of Israel and fought the Amalekites. It was not the military genius or the fighting skill of the Israelites that brought victory, however. It was the consistent and prevailing prayer of Moses (**vv. 11-13**).

Ligon Duncan: Now, in this passage if you look at **verse 9** you'll note that unlike at the Red Sea, God instructs the people to play an active role in their own defense. At the Red Sea, the people of God were to **stand still and see the salvation of the Lord** (**Ex 14:13+**) Here at Rephidim the people are to have an appointed army to respond to the Amalekites and they themselves must be faithful in defending Israel against the attackers. Isn't it interesting how even in the Pentateuch, even in the Torah, even in the first five books of the Bible, **there is a nice balance between the active and the passive elements of the believing life**. There is the **passive element** of depending upon the Lord, trusting in the Lord, resting in the Lord, watching the Lord work, depending on His power, and there is the **active element** of doing the responsible things that God

calls us to do. Both of those elements are part of healthy Christian growth. If you have a totally passive approach to the Christians life, you'll be in "**the let go and let God**" camp. You will sort of sit in the pew and see what He's going to do. If you're in the totally active camp, then you will have a hard time trusting on Him to do it and you will be trying to figure out the way you are going to do it for Him. There is a balance in the Christian life between depending on God and on acting in accordance with those things He has called us to do, and you see that balance even here as the children of Israel are called to play an active role in their own defense.

2. Leadership Role of Moses – Dependence on the Power of God is the Key

*"Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill
with the staff of God in my hand."*

Wiersbe: since Moses held the staff of God in his hands, he was confessing total dependence on the authority and power of Jehovah.

Douglas Stuart: Of interest is that the Israelites had a day to prepare for battle. The Amalekites may have arrived gradually at Rephidim, signaling their presence early in the process, or else advance parties may have encountered the Israelites then gone north to get the main body of warriors with which to engage them, thus alerting the Israelites and allowing them time to prepare. Alternatively, the Amalekites may have announced to the Israelites that if they did not surrender their valuables, they would be attacked the next day.

John MacArthur: It became the symbol of God's personal and powerful involvement, with Moses' outstretched arms perhaps signifying an appeal to God. The ebb and flow of battle in correlation with Moses' uplifted or drooping arms imparted more than psychological encouragement as the soldiers looked up to their leader on the hilltop, and more than Moses' interceding for them. It demonstrated and acknowledged their having to depend upon God for victory in battle and not upon their own strength and zeal. It also confirmed the position of Moses both in relation to God and the nation's well-being and safety. They had angrily chided him for their problems, but God confirmed his appointment as leader.

C. (:10-13) Champions for Israel Play Out Their Strategic Roles

1. (:10a) Joshua Displays Obedience, Faith and Bravery

"And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek;"

2. (:10b-12) Moses and His Supporters Seek God's Power for Victory

a. (:10b) The Players and the Site

"and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill."

b. (:11) The Performance of Intercession and Its Impact on the Battle

"So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed."

Douglas Stuart: It was important that the Israelites understand unmistakably that the only reason they could win against the Amalekites was that God was fighting for them, giving them the victory. The staff functioned in the case of this battle just as it had in the case of the plagues. As long as the staff of God was raised high, just as in the miraculous plagues and the miracle of the water from the rock immediately preceding, God's decisive role was properly acknowledged symbolically and the army prevailed. When the staff was lowered (because Moses grew tired, as v. 12 makes explicit), "*the Amalekites were winning*." Thus the staff portrayed God's sovereignty in the consequences of battle. The staff had to be above Moses' head—symbolizing God's superiority to all his people as the leader in holy war.

Ligon Duncan: If He wants me to look at the rod and think about that, then what's the message that He wants me to get? Again it's very, very clear. **The rod, he's already taught you, is both a symbol of the presence and power of God.** It is the physical sign of the might that God wields on behalf of Israel. So the point is that it is God who is fighting for Israel. His power is going to be more important than theirs, and thus He is the one that they should depend on for victory, and the one to whom they should give the glory.

Thomas Constable: Moses' actions suggest that he was engaging in intercessory prayer, though reference to prayer is absent in the text. The emphasis is on the rod that Moses held in his hand, the instrument of God's power.

Steven Cole: Some object to the interpretation of Moses' uplifted hand holding his staff as prayer, since the text does not say that he was praying. True, but his staff represented God's authority and strength. By holding it up, Moses was clearly appealing to God for His help in the battle. When he held it up, Israel prevailed. When he let it down, Amalek prevailed. So it seems to be a picture of prevailing prayer that lays hold of God's strength.

c. (:12) The Prevailing Prayer Supported by Props and Bit Players
1) Situation

"But Moses' hands were heavy."

Philip Ryken: The weakness of Moses served to magnify the glory of God. It showed that Israel was victorious not because Joshua was a military genius or because Moses was a man of prayer, but because God was their captain in the fight. **John Calvin** noted that even though Moses prayed, he could not "boastfully commend his own zeal in praying, but is rather the public witness and proclaimer of his weakness, that the glory might be entirely attributed to the gratuitous favor of God." Moses was only a man, and when the Israelites recounted the day's events, they did not praise his power in prayer. Instead they said something like this: "Did you see old Moses up there today? Frankly, I wasn't sure he was going to make it. I don't know how much longer he would have been able to hold on. It's a good thing he had some help!"

Kevin McAteer:

Most of us have discovered what Moses realized –

- If you hold your arms above your head for a long period of time, the blood drains down
- The result is that your arms seem heavy

See Moses in a position of **dependence** –

- He puts himself in a position where he is totally reliant upon the LORD
- All Moses can do is simply lift the staff of God above his head

2) Solution

“Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other.”

3) Steadiness

“Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.”

3. (:13) Joshua Leads Conquest of the Amalekites

“So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”

II. (:14-16) ASCRIBING ALL THE CREDIT TO THE LORD

A. (:14) Prophecy of the Eradication of the Amalekites Recorded and Recited

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’”

Alan Cole: *Write this.* One of the few passages in Exodus itself (others occur in Numbers and Deuteronomy) where there is clear reference to contemporary written records of material (cf. **Exod. 24:4; 34:27**). It is interesting that the ‘writing’ is paired with oral recitation here: no doubt this corresponds to the two great streams of sacred tradition, written and oral. It is also interesting that the oral is here seen to be in dependence upon the written document.

David Thompson: What was God's antidote for forgetfulness? He instructed Moses to write a memorial describing what had taken place in the battle against the Amalekites. This memorial was to be read to Joshua, the future leader of Israel, so he would be sure to remember as well. Moses did write it down in The Book and thus God's victory over the Amalekites became a source of encouragement for Christians throughout the millennia. Dearly beloved, are you keeping a written account of the good things God has done for you? Perhaps you need to begin a spiritual diary. Perhaps you might place some memorial in your yard, such as a tree which would be a constant reminder to you and your children. You might place a rock in your back yard and write the date of the event on it. Here's the point -- our memories are short, but God's goodness is everlasting and we need to do something to aid our remembrance of God's blessings. Then next

time you feel downcast or discouraged, or you even wonder whether the Almighty God really cares for you personally, look at the tree you planted, the rock you placed or the journal you wrote in and refresh your memory. As someone has well said the weakest ink is stronger than the greatest memory!

B. (:15) Proclamation Giving Credit for the Victory to the Lord via an Altar

“And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner;”

- Served as a memorial
- Served as a reminder

John Hannah: The word for “*banner*” (*nēs*) reflects the root “to be high,” “raised,” or “conspicuous.” The allusion would be to lifting up the staff as a standard and a testimony to his power. The victory, then, was the Lord’s, just as the war had been his. There was no such thing as a “holy war” in the OT, but there were “wars of Yahweh.”

Douglas Stuart: Most often it is used in military contexts, where the *nēs* is a signal pole around which an army or army unit can rally, regroup, or return for instructions. Accordingly, Moses’ name for the altar makes use of those connections. Because Yahweh had supplied the sign of his favor/presence/power by the staff—in effect a small military signal pole given to Moses—and had done so in the context of a military encounter, Moses stated by the name of the altar that the staff he had held high during the battle was the signal pole of Yahweh, a visible rallying point for the army of Israel in holy war.

Philip Ryken: A banner is a military standard, a piece of cloth bearing an army insignia and raised on a pole. Soldiers always look to their banner. It establishes their identity; it helps them know who they are. On the battlefield it also helps them keep their bearings and gives them courage and hope. As long as their banner is still flying, they know that the battle is not lost.

C. (:16) Promise of Ongoing War vs. Amalek

“and he said, ‘The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.’”

John Hannah: The Amalekites remained a persistent, harassing enemy of Israel (cf. **Num. 14:45; Jud. 6:33; 1 Sam. 14:48; 15:7; 27:8**) until they were finally destroyed by King David (**1 Sam. 30**).

J Ligon Duncan: addresses the Lord's charge to **blot out the Amalekites** - Now I want to say two things about this.

- First of all, this is not a petty, vindictive act of God, it's a reflection of God's just judgment. The Amalekites had done something that was odious in God's sight. They had attacked weak, straggly noncombatants in an act of war and God was enraged by it.
- Secondly, this judgment that God has brought against the Amalekites, gives a

picture of God's final judgment intruded into the experience of Israel going into the land of Canaan for the first time, but not for the last. From this time all the way through the book of Joshua, over and over, it will be indicated that God's judgment against the occupants of the land who resist Israel is a final picture of God's judgment. It's a pre- picturing of God's final judgment against the wicked, those who are not His people. So He's giving us a picture of the dispensation of final justice.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does this passage teach about the stance that God takes towards those nations that oppose the nation of Israel?
- 2) What role does prayer and the support of other believers play in your struggles against sin?
- 3) How do you see the partnership between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility playing out in this area of spiritual warfare?
- 4) What concrete steps have you taken to memorialize your spiritual victories and ensure that God gets all the credit?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Philip Ryken: Spiritual Warfare

It is obvious that the Amalekites were taking their orders from somewhere higher up, or rather from somewhere lower down. Since they were enemies of God, these soldiers were really in Satan's army, and Satan was determined to prevent the Israelites from ever reaching the Promised Land. For centuries he had kept them in bondage to Pharaoh. Now that tyranny was over, but Satan thought perhaps there was something else he could do to ambush the plan of salvation. So he enticed the Amalekites to attack the Israelites at Rephidim.

To see how this relates to our own spiritual experience, remember that the Israelites were already saved. They had been delivered from their bondage back at the Red Sea. On that occasion they had not taken up arms against their oppressors. This was because they had someone to fight for them. So Moses had given them these orders: "*Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. ... The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still*" (**Exod. 14:13, 14**). The God of Israel won their salvation all by himself, as he always does.

Israel's survival was at stake once again at Rephidim, only this time the Israelites did have to stand and fight. Not only were they fighting in self-defense, but they were also waging a holy war in which they were fighting for the glory of God. This was the first of many battles that God's people would fight before completing their conquest of Canaan. They had been saved out of Egypt by the strong arm of God. Now they were bound for the Promised Land, and they worked out their salvation by defeating the enemies they met along the way.

Israel's encounter with the Amalekites is a picture of the church in its spiritual warfare. This battle is another Old Testament type—a Biblical event that shows the pattern of our life in Christ. The attack was a historical event that pointed to a higher spiritual reality. We have been delivered from the Egypt of our sin, and now we are heading for the land of glory. Our ultimate victory is certain because Jesus won the crucial battle when he died on the cross. Speaking of his great enemy the devil and all the demons of Hell, Scripture says that Jesus, *“having disarmed the powers and authorities ... made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross”* (Col. 2:15).

Now everyone who comes to faith in Christ is free from the powers of death and Hell. However, the enemies of Christ have not yet surrendered; so on our pilgrimage we continue to be ambushed by Satan. We are engaged in a constant spiritual struggle to resist temptation and carry on with the work of Christ and his gospel. The attacks we face are often sudden, but unlike the wars of the Old Testament, they are spiritual, not physical. The Scripture says that *“our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph. 6:12).

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

The children of Israel were not under the power of Amalek—they were free men; and so we are not under the power of sin any longer. The yoke of sin has been broken by God's grace from off our necks, and now we have to fight not as slaves against a master, but as freemen against a foe. Moses never said to the children of Israel while they were in Egypt, “Go, fight with Pharaoh.” Not at all; it is God's work to bring us out of Egypt and make us his people, but when we are delivered from bondage, although it is God's work to help us, we must be active in our cause. Now that we are alive from the dead we must wrestle with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness if we are to overcome.

There is a good deal of confusion in the church today about spiritual warfare. Part of the problem is that Christians think of spiritual warfare too much in physical terms. Often we assume that disease and depression, accidents and technical difficulties, natural disasters, warfare and terrorism are all direct attacks of Satan. It is true that God allows Satan to bring great evil into the world, and in truth, all our suffering can be traced back to the sin that he first tempted us to commit. But the real battle is not visible—it is invisible. The troubles we see in the world are only skirmishes in the cosmic spiritual strife between God and Satan.

John Mackay: What happened on that occasion is a paradigm for the church's action on earth. In the valley the Israelites were active in resisting the adversary, but their success in the battle depended on divine empowerment mediated through the intercessory prayer of Moses. That is the model which is still of relevance. "*I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me*" (**Col. 1:29**). After describing the armour God provides for his servants in contending for the truth, Paul concludes, "*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints*" (**Eph. 6:18**). Success in standing against the devil's schemes and the onslaughts of the adversary depends not just in putting on the full armour of God, but in wearing it with on-going prayer.

John Oswalt: I mentioned this factor of **human agency** in the comments on **17:5–6**, but here it comes to the fore even more. There were God's agents in the valley, the Israelite warriors. If they had been unwilling to hurl themselves into the battle, and then to persevere in it, the battle would not have been won. Then there was God's agent on the hill. The fact that it was "*the staff of God*" that was held aloft made it perfectly clear that it was not some intrinsic power Moses possessed that was winning the battle, as was also shown by his fatigue. Nonetheless, it was Moses's responsibility to hold the staff aloft. If he failed in that responsibility the battle would be lost. But the significance of human agency here is not yet exhausted. When Moses, possessed of no superhuman strength, proved unable to hold the staff up all day, Aaron and Hur (**17:12**) came alongside of him and held up his hands. Thus, the human agency extended beyond Moses. God desires to meet our needs in a dynamic partnership with us. We are neither the effective agents, nor are we spectators; we are called into the fellowship of partnership, and it seems that he was underlining that point by the ways in which he manifested himself at the battle with Amalek.

Kevin McAteer: This passage teaches us several truths about the war between Israel and Amalek –

- The strategy of the war (**17:8-11**)
- The victory in the war (**17:12-13**)
- The memory after the war (**17:14-16**)

Arnold Brewick: **Four Keys to Victory over Sin and Satan**

In **1 Corinthians 10** the Apostle Paul wrote about both the advantages and the downfall of the Israelites in the wilderness and told his readers, their experiences were meant for our learning. In **verse :11** he writes – *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* (**1 Corinthians 10:11** NKJ)

In this chapter we have an example of the Israelites doing right in a physical battle, which applies to our spiritual battles. We are told in **Exodus 17:8** – *Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.* (**Exodus 17:8** NKJ) This is the same place where they had just received water from the ROCK! We are told in Deuteronomy they attacked in the most cowardly way – "*Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, 18 "how he met you on the way and attacked your rear*

ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. (Deuteronomy 25:17-18 NKJ)

This is like Satan, he will attack us at our weakest points! Now, last week I compared the receiving of the water from the ROCK, Christ – and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. **(1 Corinthians 10:4 NKJ)**

To Christ's giving us the Holy Spirit – On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39 NKJ)*

This starts an internal, spiritual battle – I say then: *Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. (Galatians 5:16-17 NKJ)*

“In the Christian, then, in every Christian, there are two natures: one sinful, the other sinless; one born of the flesh, the other born of God. These two natures differ from each other in origin, in character, in disposition and in the activities, they produce. They have nothing in common. They are opposed to each other. This is what is in view, typically in the second half of **Exodus 17.**” **A.W. Pink** According to A.W. Pink, Amalek represents our flesh, our old man, Adam; while Israel in this chapter represents our New Birth, though the power of God's Spirit!

I. Realize how constantly you are depended upon God's empowering –

And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. (Exodus 17:11 NKJ) The rod of God, represented the power of God. For this reason Moses carried it to the top of the mountain.

His holding up this rod represented Israel's NEED of God's help – *And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." (Exodus 17:9 NKJ)*

Moses holding up this rod was the equivalent of PRAYING, and as long as Moses continued his prayer, Israel was victorious, when he left off his prayer, they would lose! This is why Paul tells us – *pray without ceasing, (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NKJ)* This is why our Lord Jesus tells us – *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 NKJ)*

II. Realize you need a little help from your friends –

But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat

on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. (Exodus 17:12 NKJ)

1. There is no such thing, apart from Christ, as a spiritual Superman, or Superwoman! We are all weak! We are all needy!

2. We not only NEED God, but we also NEED each other – *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. 26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (Hebrews 10:25-26 NKJ)*

Moses' hands grew heavy because our flesh is weak, especially about spiritual things! **Matthew 26:41** "We do not find that Joshua's hands were heavy in fighting, but Moses's hands were heavy in praying." **Matthew Henry**

3. We need each other also because we have different callings – "See how God qualifies his people for, and calls them to, various services for the good of his church: Joshua fights, Moses prays, and both minister to Israel." **Matthew Henry**

III. Realize the spiritual battle does not exempt us from material world battles –
So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. (Exodus 17:13 NKJ) "First Joshua carefully selected Israel's bravest warriors, and then he went down into the valley to fight. And he fought with real weapons, for the Scripture says, "*Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword*" (v. 13)." **Philip Ryken**

I do not totally like the above quote because it uses the word "real" to describe material swords, weapons! I do not deny that the weapons were REAL! However, the Word of God is also a REAL weapon – *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NKJ)* However, what Dr. Ryken says is something I agree with. Just because Moses was praying did not mean Joshua did not have to fight.

IV. Realize how whole-heartedly God is with you in your struggle –
Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." 15 And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; 16 for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:14-16 NKJ)

1. Notice in these something worthy of a memorial - :14

2. A commitment to blot out an enemy - :14

3. Moses altar – The LORD IS MY BANNER - :15

A celebration of God and His help!

4. The LORD's promise – WAR - :16

This is symbolic of God's war with SIN, a war in which His only Son had a part in and died – *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (**2 Corinthians 5:21** NKJ) The WAR against sin was one in which God was willing to get down and dirty for us, He was made sin for us! This is also something for us to take note of, to remember – (**1 Corinthians 11:23-25** NKJ)

The ungodly, hate passages like these which speak of God utterly blotting out and making war with a people from generation to generation, however God's zeal against Amalek was only because of His great love for Israel! For us, God's ZEAL is against SIN! Jesus Christ was zealous to cleanse the Temple, **John 2:17**, how much more though has He been zealous to cleanse us from sin – *and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,* (**Revelation 1:5** NKJ)

If God is so whole-hearted in His battle vs our sin, how should we be in the very same battle? *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* (**Joshua 1:9** NKJ)

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Lee Cadenhead: War with Amalek

I. A Struggle with Amalek – The Warfare

No sooner does the waters of Rephidim flow forth than the enemy of Amalek attacks. This is in keeping with the typology that we've observed all along, for Amalek is an outstanding picture of the flesh throughout scripture. When a man looks upon the smitten rock for salvation and becomes the recipient of the Holy Spirit there is a great struggle between the flesh and the Spirit begins to take place (**Gal 5:17, Rom 7:21-23**).

A. The Character of the Enemy

1. The ancestry of Amalek (**Gen 36:12**) – He was Esau's grandson; Esau is a prominent Old Testament type of the flesh in that he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, sacrificing the eternal on the altar of the immediate.
2. The origin and destiny of Amalek (**Num 24:20**) – He is said to be the first nation (**John 3:6**), and is destined to perish forever.
3. The obstinacy of Amalek (**Deut 25:17-18**) – He has no fear of God.
4. The worthlessness of Amalek (**1 Sam 15:3**) – There is absolutely nothing salvageable in Amalek, the only prescription is utter destruction (**Rom 7:18**).
5. The determination of Amalek (**2 Sam 1:8, Esther 3:1, 10**) – Whatever part of Amalek that survives will always seek to make fools out of the people of God

and he's be satisfied with nothing short of annihilating God's seed.

B. The Order of the Engagement

1. Amalek comes against Israel unprovoked. They are the aggressors, they need know other motivation to attack than the presence of water (the Holy Spirit).
2. Amalek attacks first. The order is pronounced in **Galatians 5:17** the flesh (first) lusteth against the Spirit. The lost man knows nothing of this battle, for he is ruled by the lusts of his flesh. As soon as a man is saved however, the battle ensues.
3. Amalek strikes where the people of God are weakest (**Deut 25:18**). It's where we're weak, faint, and feeble, that he concentrates his attack.

C. The Responsibility of the Enlisted

1. There are men chosen to fight (v. 9). Up to this point the Lord has fought for the children of Israel (**Ex 14:14**), but there comes a time when the Israelites themselves must take on some responsibility and fight for themselves. The Lord did for us what we could not do for ourselves when he suffered and died for our sins at the cross. But there is an element of personal responsibility in our warfare with the flesh – we must fight!

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.
1 Timothy 6:12

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: **2 Timothy 4:7**

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. **1 Corinthians 9:26-27**

II. The Support of our Advocate – The Warrior

While we have a personal responsibility in this fight with the flesh, we've not been left altogether to our own devices. We should take note that there are two battlefronts in the struggle with Amalek – one is on the top of a hill, the other is down on the ground.

I. The Command from on High

1. In modern military engagements the orders are not issued by the foot soldiers on the front lines of battle; their vantage point is limited. The orders are issued from higher ground where the field can be better seen. It is from the hill that the proper position is announced, the retreat is sounded (**1 Cor 10:13**), and the supplies are administered.

The Psalmist understood something of this: *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.* **Psalms 121:1-2**

2. Present on the hill is an intercessor seen in three offices:

- a Prophet (represented by Moses),
- a Priest (represented by Aaron), and
- a King (represented by Hur of Judah, Exod 31:2).

3. The outcome of the battle is determined by the uplifted hands of that intercessor. Our victory over Amalek is settled on the grounds of Christ's upheld hands at Calvary (**Rom 6:1-11, Gal 2:20**). If those uplifted hands are lowered for even a moment it results in certain failure, but as long as they're raised the basis of victory is sure.

4. The hand of flesh will fail us (**Phil 3:3**), but the upraised arms of Christ will remain steady to the going down of the sun (v. 12). Not only is Christ pictured on the hill, he's pictured in the field of battle. Lest any object, let us be reminded that while he was here, he was there (**John 3:13**), and while he departed to heaven bodily, he continues his great work in the person of the Holy Ghost (**John 14:18**). The Advocacy of Jesus Christ is not only executed from on high (**Heb 7:25**), but from within (**Rom 8:26**).

II. The Captain in the Midst

1. Joshua is an outstanding Christ throughout scripture (**Acts 7:45, Heb 4:8**). Our sufficiency is not of ourselves but of the Lord (**2 Cor 4:7, Phil 2:13, 4:13, 1 Thess 5:24, Heb 13:21, 1 Sam 17:47, Ps 144:1**).

2. At the end of the day, our fighting is only as effective as our following (**1 Tim 6:11-12**). The victory determined by the common from on high is only administered through faith in the captain in the midst (**Col 1:27**). Joshua is the one credited with the discomfiture of the Amalekites (v. 13).

III. The Supply of our Armament – The Weaponry

In the great spiritual warfare text of **Ephesians 6** there are only two offensive weapons at the disposal of the soldier of the cross, and both are present in type in this great picture of the believers' warfare.

I. The Sword of the Spirit

1. Joshua secures the victory by the edge of the sword, representing the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (**Eph 6:17, Heb 4:12**).

2. Jesus Christ answered the temptations of the enemy with "*As it is written...*" *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.* **Psalms 119:11**

3. We can discharge our duty in this battle with the flesh by memorizing, meditating upon, and ministering the word of God.

II. The Supplication in the Spirit

1. The one piece of armor that is missing from the list in **Ephesians 6** are the “greaves”. But the Christian soldier has no need of these, for his warfare is taken up from his knees which is alluded to in **Ephesians 6:18**.

2. Christ can be seen in Moses uplifted hands, but the lifting up of holy hands also speaks of personal prayerfulness. *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* **1 Timothy 2:8**

3. Personal prayerfulness is essential in victory over the flesh, because it is the expression of a conscious dependence upon God. *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;* **Romans 12:12**

Pray without ceasing. **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

4. Whenever we fail in prayer and the holy hands hang down our defeat is eminent though the victory was certain. The power of God over sin is appropriated in prayer.

IV. A Standard for the Ages – The Winner

Throughout history when one nation has conquered another or has claimed some new land as its own, the victory and possession is signified by the raising of a flag, the planting of some national standard that will bear witness to the authority and jurisdiction of the Victor. Upon this great victory over Amalek an altar is erected and the Lord reveals himself to us in one of His many compound names, this one signifying: The LORD our Banner. Not only is our God an unshakeable foundation, He is the never-failing banner for all who place their trust in him. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. Psalms 60:4

I. A Banner of Redemption

1. Oftentimes Christ is spoken of in scripture as a standard.

Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. **Isaiah 49:22**

So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. **Isaiah 59:19**

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. **Isaiah 62:10**

2. It was at Calvary that he was lifted up for a testimony to all men.
And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:32

3. Christ is the assurance of our victory over the flesh – he is the one that condemned sin in the flesh (**Rom 8:3**), he is the one to whom power has been given over all flesh (**John 17:2**), he is the one that has promised to return and redeem this body of flesh (**Rom 8:23**). Therefore Christ himself is the testimony that the victory has been one.

II. A Book of Remembrance

A. The erection of this altar was in connection with the recording of a book. It looks as though this book would not only account the record of Israel's victory (v. 8-12), but the promise of Amalek's destruction (v. 14-16).

B. There are some times when our sight of the banner becomes eclipsed, there are occasions when the altar of Jehovah-nissi seems to be concealed from our vision as the ages roll on and the clutter of life gathers about it. But praise God there is a book that tells us all about it. You can flip over and read about the pleadings of Moses, the help and ministry of Aaron and Hur, the conquest of Moses, and the defeat of Amalek. You can look up the account of the banner being lifted up at the cross. You can read and rejoice at the promise of the Lord's coming when he "*shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*" (**Phil 3:21**). Any time you grow discouraged you can look over at the end of the book and be reminded that the Savior wins, the Devil loses, the flesh is destroyed, and God reigns for Eternity!

III. A Blessing of Rehearsal

A. Not only was Moses to record a memorial He was to rehearse it in the ears of Joshua. It sounds like a sermon. That's what Christ's body needs to be perfected and equipped and edified; we need that old, old story rehearsed in our ear. Don't give up, the battle is the Lord's, the victory is certain, the promise land is worth it, stay in the fight!
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Gary Reimers: The Key to Victory

I. Depend on the Lord before a battle (8–10)

- A. Guard your heart from attack (8)
- B. Make your plan to respond (9)
- C. Take your place in his plan (10)

II. Depend on the Lord during a battle (11–13)

- A. Discern the power of prayer (11)
- B. Share the burden of prayer (12)
- C. Gain the triumph through prayer (13)

III. Depend on the Lord after a battle (14–16)

- A. Expect the victory from God (14)

B. Declare your gratitude to God (15)

C. Renew your commitment to God (16)

TEXT: Exodus 18:1-12

TITLE: *GOD MAKING HIMSELF KNOWN TO THE WORLD*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S WORK OF REDEMPTION ENHANCES HIS REPUTATION AND EARNS PRAISE AND COMMITMENT

INTRODUCTION:

The material in the first half of **chapter 18** is the necessary background information for the more important discussion in the second half of the chapter regarding easing the burden of judging the Israelites by delegating responsibilities to key elders. We have already seen that God's intent was to make His name known to the surrounding nations (**9:14, 16**) and to magnify His glory by the way in which He delivered His people and provided for them in the wilderness. Here we see a priest of Midian coming to appreciate the greatness of the God of Israel.

Wiersbe: After reading about the trials, complaints, and battles of the Israelites, it's a relief to move into a chapter that describes the camp of Israel as a quiet place of family fellowship and daily business. Life isn't always hunger and thirst and warfare, although those are often the things we usually remember.

Timothy Greene: What a stark and vivid contrast we have between the **Amalekites** in **chapter seventeen**, and **Jethro, the priest of Midian** in **chapter eighteen**! And what a contrast we also have between the history of the **Amalekites** throughout the Old Testament, and the history of the **Kenites**! And yet both of these chapters, and both of these histories, ultimately tell the same story of God's zeal to bring His salvation to all the peoples of the earth. In chapter seventeen, we saw the "negative" side of that zeal in the decree that the Amalekites should be utterly annihilated and destroyed. But here in chapter eighteen, we see the very first beginnings of God's salvation blessings reaching out to include even the Gentiles. In the story of Jethro we see anticipated the stories of other Gentiles, such as King Hiram, the queen of Sheba (cf. **Mat. 12:42**), Rahab (cf. **Mat. 1:5; Heb. 11:31; Js. 2:25**), Namaan (cf. **Lk. 4:27**), and the widow from Zarephath (cf. **Lk. 8 4:25-26**). In the story of Jethro, we see anticipated the permanent line of a family in Israel that will always shine as an example to all the rest of true faith and obedience.

Nathan Carter: Exodus is the story of the one, true God distinguishing himself by supernaturally intervening to redeem a people for himself. . . it gives us the paradigm of how God acts in history to save his people, a prefiguring of the ultimate redemption that was accomplished in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. . .

Here is a Midianite (and it was the Midianites who sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt (**Gen. 37:36**), who deceived Israel later at Peor (**Nu 25:17**), who Gideon was called to

fight against in **Jdg. 6-7**)... here is a Midianite who is engrafted into the covenant people of God. Yes, the promise first given to Abraham that through him and his offspring all peoples of the earth would be blessed is coming true. This God is for all people. And the great salvation that he has accomplished in Christ is meant to be proclaimed to all nations.

I. (:1-6) GOD'S WORK OF REDEMPTION ENHANCES HIS REPUTATION (TESTIFIES TO THE WATCHING WORLD)

A. (:1a) Testimony Impacts Jethro

"Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law,"

David Guzik: Jethro was the *priest of Midian*—likely a descendant of one of Abraham's other children through Keturah named Midian (**Genesis 25:1–2**). Because of this connection with Abraham, we have good reason to believe he was a true priest, and worshipped the true God.

Timothy Greene: The last we heard of Jethro was in chapter four when Moses went to his father-in-law after the burning bush and asked for his blessing on a return visit to his brothers and relatives in Egypt. (cf. Exod. 4:18-20) Now, of course, a whole lot has happened since then! And even Jethro, the priest of Midian, has heard from far off of all that God has done in bringing Israel out of Egypt.

B. (:1b) Testimony Focuses on God's Work of Redemption

"heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt."

C. (:2-6) Testimony Prompts a Family Reunion for Moses and His Wife and Sons

1. (:2-4) Reunion Participants

a. (:2) Jethro and Zipporah

"And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away,"

John MacArthur: The intelligence-gathering ability of ancient peoples should not be underestimated. Quickly and thoroughly the news of significant events in other lands passed from one place to another, very often via the merchant caravans which traversed the Fertile Crescent, or through ambassadors and other official contacts between nations. In Jethro's case, whatever knowledge he had gleaned of Israel's progress had been supplemented with information from Zipporah and her sons after Moses sent them ahead to her home.

b. (:3-4) Two Sons

"and her two sons,"

1) (:3) Gershom – Disappointment – Alien in a foreign land

"of whom one was named Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.'"

John Davis: The name Gershom means “banishment” coming from the root *garas* (“to drive” or “to thrust away”). This name probably reflects something of the **disappointment** that Moses experienced in his separation from his people in the land of Egypt.

2) (:4) Eliezer – Gratitude – Helped by God

“And the other was named Eliezer, for he said, ‘The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.’”

John Davis: This name indicates something of the **gratitude** which Moses had for divine protection enjoyed during his flight from Egypt.

Timothy Greene: We also learn, now, about the naming of Moses’ second son. He named him Eliezer (*“for he said, ‘The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh’”*). Just as Moses’ first deliverance from Pharaoh was followed by a first meeting with Jethro, the Midianite, so now a second and greater deliverance from Egypt is about to be followed by another meeting—a reunion—with Jethro, the Midianite.

2. (:5) Reunion Logistics

“Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God.”

Wiersbe: 2 possible scenarios:

1) It’s possible that Moses sent his family back to Midian before the Lord declared war on Egypt. Then, after the Exodus, Moses sent a messenger to Jethro asking him to bring Zipporah and the two boys and meet him at Sinai.

2) If the family was with him in Egypt, then sometime after the Exodus, Moses may have sent Zipporah and their two sons back to Midian to give the good news to her family . . . Having heard the good news, Jethro then sent a message to Moses saying that he was coming to the camp with Zipporah and her sons.

3. (:6) Reunion Introduction

“And he sent word to Moses, ‘I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.’”

II. (:7-12) GOD’S WORK OF REDEMPTION EARNS PRAISE AND COMMITMENT FROM JETHRO AND MOSES

A. (:7) Renewing Family Relationships and Reviewing Personal Testimonies

1. Respect and Affection

“Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him;”

John Davis: He respected this man for his wisdom as well as his age.

Bruce Hurt: **Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him** - Notice that Moses does not wait for Jethro to come to him, but he goes out to meet Jethro and in so doing, demonstrated his respect for his father-in-law, respect which underscored by his willingness to bow and kiss him. It is also notable that Jethro is mentioned before Zipporah and the sons. **Moses** now a man of considerable esteem ("a prophet of the Lord, a great prophet, and king in Jeshurun" - **Matthew Henry**) was still a humble man and expressed his respect and reverence for a man presumably older than himself. Moses' greeting would support the thought that Jethro, a priest in Midian, was a godly man and not a pagan priest. We see Abraham bowing down to the three men (one very likely a Christophany) who came to meet him in **Genesis 18:2**. In **Ge 19:1** Lot bowed down to the angels.

2. Concern for Each Other's Welfare

*"and they asked each other of their welfare,
and went into the tent."*

B. (:8) Reviewing Personal Testimonies of God's Faithfulness

*"And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done
to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake,
all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey,
and how the LORD had delivered them."*

Timothy Greene: It's pretty obvious what Moses is doing, isn't it? It's possible we could say that this is the first case of "evangelizing" anywhere in the Bible – right here in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus. From the overflow of his own heart, Moses relates to his father-in-law not the things that he has done, but "*all that Yahweh had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how Yahweh had delivered them.*"

Moses is giving testimony to the goodness, and the glory, and the power and supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Israel. And to whom is Moses witnessing and proclaiming all these things? – To a Midianite and a foreigner, and even more specifically to a Midianite priest! The picture is really quite startling and amazing, and yet now it's about to get even more so. How will a foreign Midianite priest respond to the news about the God of Israel?

C. (:9-11) Rejoicing in the Supremacy of the Lord

1. (:9) Rejoicing in the Goodness of the Lord

*"And Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to
Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians."*

Steven Cole: on **goodness of Jehovah** - It is essential that you derive your understanding of God from the Bible. And at the root of who God is, you must affirm

that He is **good**. This means that He “deals well and bountifully with His creatures” (Stephen Charnock). A W Tozer put it, “The **goodness** of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men.” The Bible attests to God’s **goodness** in His creation (**Ge 1:31**); in His salvation and deliverance of His people (**Ex 18:9**; **Nu 10:29, 32**); in His provision for His people (**Neh 9:25**); and, in His Word, which instructs us in how to live so as to be blessed (**Ps 25:8**; **Dt. 30:15-16**), even in affliction (**Ge 50:20**).

Nathan Carter: Back to the larger main point: **evangelism is not about the person and his or her experience in life, but about God and what he has accomplished in history**. Isn’t it interesting that Jethro gets converted (and that’s what happens as we’ll see in a moment) not by hearing of Moses’ burning bush experience but Jethro was converted when he heard about “*all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians*” (**v. 9**). . .

It was **Francis Schaeffer**, I think, who used to say we must present the gospel not first as something that is helpful, but as something that is **true**. As such it doesn’t depend on my feelings or virtue, but on objective facts. I love the Apostle Paul’s tack when clearly trying to persuade King Agrippa to be a Christian – “*What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner*” (**Acts 26:25-26**). When Christians are witnessing they are not testifying to something that was done in a corner of their heart when they asked Jesus to come in; they’re bearing witness to public facts about a crucified and risen Lord seen back from the dead by over 500 people at one time. That’s something that has to be dealt with. In testifying to that I’m not drawing attention to myself, I’m not claiming that I have something that you don’t; I’m simply reporting the news that **God has acted in history** to accomplish salvation.

2. (:10) Rejoicing in the Deliverance Accomplished by the Lord

“So Jethro said, ‘Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.’”

3. (:11) Rejoicing in the Greatness of the Lord

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: This confession formula – “*Now I know*” – is used by two other Gentile believers: the widow at Zarephath (**1 Kings 17:24**), and Naaman, commander of the Syrian army (**2 Kings 5:15**). It is a clear statement to Yahweh’s incomparable greatness above all the gods of Egypt (not necessarily Jethro’s past or present penchant for polytheism).

D. (:12) Remembering God’s Work in Sacrifices and Fellowship Meal

1. Participating in Sacrifices

“Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God,”

Youngblood: Jethro then “*brought*” sacrifices to God, a verb that always means to “provide” an animal for sacrifice (**25:2; Lev. 12:8**, for example), never to “officiate at” a sacrifice.

2. Participating in Fellowship Meal

“and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God.”

Thomas Constable: The meal that Moses, Aaron, and the Israelite elders ate with Jethro was the sacrificial meal just mentioned. Eating together in the ancient Near East was a solemn occasion because it constituted the establishment of an alliance between the parties involved. That is undoubtedly what it involved here. The fact that Aaron and all the elders of Israel were also present demonstrated its importance.

Alec Motyer: In **verses 1-12** Jethro hears the truth about the Lord, the God of Israel, delights in what he hears, praises the Lord personally for his saving acts, affirms the truth of the one and only God, revealed in and confirmed by what he has done, and brings his own offerings. We would say that Jethro came to faith, that he was converted – and the response of the Israelite leadership shows that Jethro was officially affirmed in the faith he had professed.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the evidence that Jethro was already a believer in the true God vs. the evidence that this records his conversion experience?
- 2) Why had Moses sent his wife and sons away previously?
- 3) How do you testify to the supremacy and greatness of God?
- 4) What was the significance of the sacrifices and the fellowship meal?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Woodrow Kroll: Have you ever been separated from your family? If you have ever been apart from your family for any length of time, you know how difficult it is. I was apart from my wife and children during my last semester of seminary while I was

studying in France. I was thousands of miles away, living in a foreign country, knowing I would not see them for months. It wasn't easy.

Moses also had been separated from his family. Zipporah, his wife of 40 years, and his two sons had been sent back to the land of Midian while he returned to Egypt to lead Israel to freedom. With that challenge behind him, Moses was ready to be reunited with his loved ones and Jethro was gracious enough to bring this about. While Scripture gives no details, you can imagine what a joyful reunion it was.

As Christians we also have the joy of anticipating a very special reunion. Scripture says, *"And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:16-17+). Now that's a family reunion! Someday we'll experience a reunion that never ends. Hallelujah!

Scott Grant: A **burnt offering** was representative of full devotion to God. In making these sacrifices, then, Jethro is offering up his life to the Lord. Based on what he has seen the Lord do in the lives of the Israelites, he devotes himself to the Lord. This is the kind of thing that can happen when others get a good look at what the Lord is doing in our lives....This story also offers strong encouragement for us to be a Jethro in others' lives - to legitimately ask of another's welfare, to watch for the Lord's activity in the life of another, to rejoice over another, to praise the Lord in another's presence, to acknowledge the greatness of the Lord, to enter into intimate fellowship with another in the presence of God. So the Lord will send us Jethros, but we can also be Jethros. And what was it that Jethro did? He took notice of the greatness of God, as seen in the lives of Moses and the Israelites, and he extolled his greatness. He extolled the greatness of the Lord. He lifted up the Lord, and everyone was able to see his greatness more clearly.

David Thompson:

BECAUSE OF HEARING ABOUT THE TRUTH OF GOD, THE FATHER-IN-LAW OF MOSES, AND A PRIEST IN A FALSE RELIGION, CAME TO BELIEVE IN THE TRUE GOD OF THE BIBLE.

It is so interesting that at the end of **chapter 17**, we see God giving a great sovereign victory in destroying the Amalekites and now in **chapter 18**, we see God saving a Midianite. The power of God can destroy and the power of God can save. It is a person's response to the truth of God that plays a determinate role in what God will do. The Amalekites wanted to fight the Israelites, knowing what God had done to the Egyptians, and God destroyed them. A Midianite priest wanted to unite with the Israelites, knowing what God had done to the Egyptians, and God saved him.

There are four historical facts brought out in this text:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – What Jethro heard 18:1

News travels. Dramatic news spreads. What had happened to the Egyptians spread like

a wildfire all over the known world. People of the city were talking about it. Those in caravans were talking about it. Various messengers and business people and eye witnesses were talking about it. There had never been anything like this and we may be certain that what had happened in Egypt was the talk and gossip of the whole world.

Now this news was all connected to Moses, and since Moses had a wife and two sons and a father-in-law, they naturally would be interested to hear anything connected to him. If we use a little imaginative speculation, we may assume that when some traveler came by Jethro's house, he must have asked if he had heard anything about Moses and the Israelites. The things they would have heard does boggle the mind.

Verse 1 says that they “*heard of all that God had done for Moses and His people.*” They listened to the stories of the plagues and then the dramatic story of the parting of the Red Sea and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Just imagine listening to this.

The first point to observe here is that one of the things that starts causing people caught up in false religion to think is the truth about God. The Apostle Paul said, “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” (**Rom. 10:17**). Whenever the truth of God is communicated, it does have the power to deliver and save. . .

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – What Jethro did 18:2-6

Now Jethro had heard that Moses and Israel were in the wilderness at Mt. Sinai and he was very much aware of that area. When Moses was shepherding Jethro's sheep, Moses had actually taken the sheep into this area so obviously Jethro knew about it (**Ex. 3:1**). There were two main actions that Jethro took:

Action #1 - Jethro took Moses' wife and sons to Moses in the wilderness. **18:2-5**

Now we may recall that when Moses received his call from God to go deliver Israel, Moses sent Zipporah and the boys back to her father and did not take her with him. Actually there is a major theological debate over whether or not Moses divorced her.

We may recall that initially Moses took Zipporah and the boys with him (**Ex. 4:20**), but because of his wife's temper outburst (**Ex. 4:25-26**), he apparently sent her back to her father. Some have concluded based on the verb “*sent her away*” (**Ex. 18:2**) that Moses divorced her and sent her on her way. We do know from **Numbers 12:1** that Moses married a Cushite woman and we may also observe from **Exodus 18:3** that the two sons are identified as “*her sons*,” not “*his sons*.”

On the other hand, others argue that this was not a divorce but a temporary separation. Those who argue this way say that the word “*sent away*” (*shilluh*) is not the typical word used for divorce (*keri tut*). They also say that having more than one wife was not uncommon in this time and was not illegal. Also, it is pointed out that the boys are called “*his sons*” in **verse 5** and Zipporah is called “*his wife*” in **verse 5**.

This debate on this issue, I am sure, will continue to go on and on and probably it is best just to leave the details of this matter to God. But the thing we see here is that

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah and her two sons. The first was "*Gershom*" (**verse 3**), which means "live in a foreign land as an alien," which Moses literally did. The second son, "*Eliezer*" (**verse 4**), means "God of help."

When Jethro learned that Moses and the Egyptians were camped at Sinai, "*the mount of God*," he knew the area well and decided to take his daughter and her two sons to meet Moses. He wanted to be connected to Moses and Moses' God and he also wanted his daughter and her sons to be connected as well.

Action #2 - Jethro sent word to Moses that he was coming. **18:6**

It is clear that Jethro is not presumptuous here. He recognized that Moses had become a very powerful man of God and he did not just walk in unannounced. He sent word to Moses that he and his daughter were arriving with the two boys. In doing this, he gave Moses an opportunity to think through what he would do. When you have been hearing about what God has done with Moses—plagues, killing first-born, parting sea, providing water and food—you don't want to go into this man's presence lightly. Even though Jethro was older, he sent word to Moses to let him know he was on his way.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – What Moses did 18:7-8

When Moses learned about this he responded in two ways:

Response #1 - Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. **18:7**

It is interesting that there is no further mention of Zipporah or the two sons except for genealogical references. There is no mention here of what happened between Moses and Zipporah. What we learn here is what happened between Moses and Jethro. Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and he bowed down and kissed him and they asked about each other's welfare and went into the tent.

Response #2 - Moses told his father-in-law all God had done for him and Israel. **18:8**

The first thing Moses talks about is all God had done for Israel. He told him what God had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians and he told him about how God provided for them in difficult times on the journey. Now this is not some delusional fairytale that Moses is telling Jethro. Sometimes you get with some people who want you to think they have seen God do all kinds of things, which isn't true. They talk and talk and talk and invent things that are not even real. So what Jethro would learn is that when you are in a relationship with this God, His hand of protection and provision is on you.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – How Jethro responded 18:9-12

Now keep in mind that Jethro is a Midianite priest who has never had a relationship with the true God of the Bible. It is clear from his response that he does not try to defend his false religion in any way, shape or form. Moses had told the truth and God used it.

Response #1 - Jethro rejoiced over what God had done. **18:9**

Jethro was not jealous about what God had done, he delighted in it. God had been good to Israel and had completely delivered her from the hand of the Egyptians. Now notice

carefully that he rejoiced over “*all the goodness which the LORD had done.*” So his rejoicing is based on understanding the truth and facts about God. It seems from **verse 11** that Jethro had been questioning things about God. There were all kinds of “*gods*” in existence, but the historical facts pointed to one true, powerful God and Jethro rejoiced when he heard about this God.

Response #2 - Jethro praised God for delivering Moses and the Israelites. **18:10**

Now the praise that Jethro offers to God is one that acknowledges that Moses and Israel have been blessed by God. Jethro is not praising God because God has blessed him; he is praising God because God has blessed Moses and Israel. He delivered them from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God had literally delivered Moses and Israel from a world superpower. God had not done that for Jethro, who was a Midianite, or for any other people and Jethro is praising God for this great deliverance. When you talk with most people caught up in false religion, they are proud and if you tell the truth, they will, at times, try to outdo you. Jethro wants a relationship with the true God and he is not trying to outdo Moses in any way.

Response #3 - Jethro knew God proved to be greater than all gods. **18:11**

Jethro is coming to terms with the theological truth about God. There is only one God and He is Israel’s God. The Egyptians had their deities and the Midianites had their deities of which Jethro was a priest. But he came to understand that there is only one God who is exalted above all and that is the God of Israel.

Response #4 - Jethro made a sacrifice for God. **18:12**

This is an amazing moment in Jethro’s life. He comes to the point where he turns his back on his false religion and gets into a relationship with God.

(Step #1) - A proper relationship with God starts with a shed blood offering and sacrifice. **18:12a**

Jethro started by offering a sacrifice and burnt offering to God. The burnt offering was understood as an offering that atoned for sins and appealed to God for forgiveness. God’s people knew something about the significance of the burnt offering because this had been done clear back in the days of Abraham (**Gen. 22**). Certainly this offering was Jethro’s way of acknowledging that there needed to be some substitutionary sin offering in order to have a relationship with this true God.

(Step #2) - A proper relationship with God includes fellowship with the leaders of God. **18:12b**

This was an important moment for Jethro, because this act showed him that the Jewish religious leaders welcomed him into fellowship with them. Notice at the end of **verse 12**, it says this was done “*before God.*” Now the Midianites were typically a group of people who were anti-the true God and anti-Israel. But what this text shows is that even those religious leaders who have been involved in false religion may respond to truth and experience God’s grace.

Dale Crawford: I think from this passage we can glean some hints as to the type man

Moses was as a family man.

I. First, Moses was a man concerned for the welfare of his family

A. We are not told when or why Zipporah was sent back to her father.

1. Some surmise that Moses might have sent Zipporah away after the circumcision issue in **Chapter 4** because of her stubbornness lest she prove a hindrance to his work but we have no reason to assume this.

2. Some even go so far to presume that Moses had actually divorced her since the word for “*sent her back*” in **Verse 2** can be used to refer to divorce. **Verse 5** clearly says she was his wife.

3. I think we would be best to understand that Moses sent his family away for their protection when he began to deal with Pharaoh and the plagues began.

B. Now after the danger is passed Moses is reunited with his family that he might properly care for them.

1. This is the duty of fathers

a. To care for the physical needs of our family

1 Timothy 5:8 – “*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*”

b. To care for their spiritual needs – to train and instruct them

Ephesians 6:4 – “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*”

2. Children have often brought shame to their parents

a. Some of Jacob’s children brought him great grief

b. Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu would be killed of God for offering strange incense before God.

c. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons Eli, brought him shame and were judged of God.

C. It has always been of great importance for God’s leaders to properly oversee their children.

1. **Matthew Henry** – “Moses must have his family with him, that while he ruled the church of God he might set a good example of prudence in family-government”

2. This is still true today

1 Timothy 3:4-5 – “*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*”

3. Churches must give regard to the matter of a man’s home before calling him to be

one of their elders.

II. Second, Moses was a man who was respectful of his elders

A. Moses treated his father-in-law with honor and respect

1. We might presume that the parents of Moses are dead by now – Moses is 80 years old. Perhaps they were dead before he fled Egypt at the age of 40

2. Moses sees Jethro as a father. He treats him with honor

Exodus 18:7 – *“And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent.”*

3. This law would be written in stone upon Mt. Sinai

Exodus 20:12 – *“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”*

4. We can see this with Ruth towards her mother-in-law, Naomi

Ruth 1:16-17 – *“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”*

B. The Godly man will show honor to whom honor is due

1. All of us should be willing to humble ourselves. Moses was a prophet of God and a great prophet. He was the leader of over a million people, the people who had overcome mighty Egypt. His word carried great power. Yet when this pagan priest arrived he bowed before him in honor

2. We don't have much concept for respect and honor today It is a sign of sinful wickedness

Jude 1:8-10 – *“Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. 10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.”*

3. **Thomas Watson** – “The Godly man honors his parents both by humility of speech and by gesture. Duty is the interest which children pay their parents on the capital they have had from them. He in whose heart godliness lives makes as much conscience of the fifth commandment as of the first.”

III. Third, Moses was concerned about sharing the Gospel with his relatives

A. The word “Gospel” is a New Testament term

1. It means “Good News” It refers to the good news of God's deliverance of His people from sin.

2. In this sense Moses was concerned about the same thing. He wanted to spread the news about God's great deliverance of His people.

3. Surely Moses had shared with Jethro in the past about the God of Israel
a. He dwelt with him for 40 years. Surely he told Jethro about God's covenant with Abraham, about God's covenant people. In **Chapter 4** when Moses is talking to Jethro he refers to Israel as "*my brethren*."

Exodus 4:18 – "*Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which are in Egypt. . .*"

b. He probably told him about the burning bush

4. But Jethro had not believed – he was still the priest of Midian, pagans serving false gods.

5. Moses takes the opportunity to share with his father-in-law again

Exodus 18:8 – "*And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them.*"

a. The word for "told" means to declare – Moses was proclaiming "all" that God had done.

b. We are not told the depth of what Moses told his father-in-law but don't forget that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible.

6. Now Jethro was convinced – See **Verses 9-11**

a. We don't know if Jethro believed to the saving of the soul and this is the last time the Bible makes mention of him.

b. The point is Moses made a point of sharing with his kinsman the greatness of his God.

B. This must be our great burden – to share Christ with our relatives

1. This is our duty. Their soul hangs in the balance. What they do with Christ is the difference between life and death. Jesus says, **John 14:6** – "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*"

2. The Godly person should have a burden for the souls of his family members. This means we must love them and serve them. **Philip Ryken** – "Care for your husband or wife. Honor your parents. Serve your brothers and sisters. Show hospitality. Strengthen your family ties. Respect your family members, because your love for them is essential to effective evangelism."

3. And the Godly person doesn't give up. He continues to hold the glory of God before his family, before his children and continues to look for their conversion. . .

4. I'm not saying we weary our children but we never relax, never cease telling them about our great God.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/11081924546.pdf>

Timothy Greene: The phrase, “*Blessed be YAHWEH*,” appears twenty-nine times in the Bible. Ten times we find it on the lips of the Psalmist. Outside of the Psalms, we find this phrase four times on the lips of David as an expression of thanksgiving, and worship, and praise, and twice on the lips of Solomon. Others who use this phrase are Noah, Abraham’s trusted servant, the women in Israel, Ahimaaz (a loyal servant of David), Ezra (the priest and scribe), and Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist).

All of these examples help us see that when people say, “*Blessed be YAHWEH*,” it seems to be always a joyful expression of faith in the covenant God of Israel. But, of course, the startling thing here is that this is Jethro, a Midianite priest! This time, it’s not the Israelites, but a foreigner who says, as the expression of his joy and delight, “*Blessed be YAHWEH*.”

Of the twenty-nine times that this phrase appears in the Bible, there are two other times that we also hear a Gentile speaking these words – once from a king, and once from a queen. — **1 Kings 5:7 & 2 Chronicles 2:12** — *As soon as Hiram [the Gentile king of Tyre] heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly and said, “Blessed be YAHWEH this day, who has given to David a wise son... who has discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for YAHWEH and a royal palace for himself.”* —

1 Kings 10:4–6, 8–9 (cf. 2 Chron. 9:8) — *When the [Gentile] queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon... there was no more breath in her. And she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom... Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be YAHWEH your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because YAHWEH loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness.”*

Jethro, Hiram, and the queen of Sheba are all responding in joy and awe to what they have seen of the glory of Yahweh: Jethro to what he has seen of Yahweh’s great power to rescue and deliver His people from Egypt; Hiram and the queen of Sheba to what they have seen of Yahweh’s faithfulness and goodness in the royal city of Jerusalem and the royal son of David. Jethro, Hiram, and the queen of Sheba are all examples of Gentiles whose eyes have been opened to see the glory of Yahweh, the God of Israel and then to actually rejoice greatly in Him. But now we remember that Jethro isn’t quite finished.

Nathan Carter: Family Dynamics

Just to remind you a little of Moses’ family history – as a baby he narrowly escaped the infanticide program enacted by Pharaoh in an effort to curb the growth of the Hebrew people and in a strange twist Moses ended up being adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and

raised in the royal court. At some point, however, in his adulthood Moses chose to be identified with his own oppressed people. A noble move, but he had to be broken of his messiah complex through a stinging experience of failure which ended up with him as a fugitive in a faraway land. The message of Moses is not, “You can change the world.” Moses, with all his gifting and intellect and training and ambition, wasn’t going to save the Israelites; God was.

Well, during those long years in exile, all alone, away from his anything-but-normal-homelife and anything that had become familiar, rejected by his own ethnic people, alienated from the power and wealth that he had enjoyed at one time... during this time where nothing seemed to be happening a lot happened.

First, Moses met a woman named Zipporah. Moses and Zipporah married and had a couple kids. Zipporah’s father was a local Midianite priest (we read about all this in **Exodus ch. 2**). He goes by two names – Ruel or Jethro. Moses had a good relationship with his father-in-law. He worked for him, tending his sheep.

The second thing that happened to Moses during this time is that he met the Lord. While tending his father-in-law Jethro’s sheep he wandered close to Mt. Sinai and there had an encounter with God appearing to him in a burning bush. God essentially said, “Okay, now is the time for you to go back to Egypt and I will use you to redeem my people.” Moses eventually agreed, got his father-in-law’s blessing, and packed up the family of four to head back to Egypt.

Now here’s where there’s some confusion on the chronology. Along the way back to Egypt there was that weird encounter in **ch. 4** where God was about to kill Moses and Zipporah circumcised their son and exclaimed, “*You are a bridegroom of blood to me*” (**Ex. 4:25**). Some people think that at this point Zipporah was really fed up with Moses and took the kids and headed back for her dad’s house. Others think Moses sent them back somewhere around this time because he realized that the mission ahead was going to be too dangerous. There’s no mention of Moses’ wife and kids at all during the plagues and exodus and desert wanderings so far.

And then we get here to **chapter 18** and there’s a reference in **v. 2** to Moses having “*sent away his wife, Zipporah*” (which, by the way, some have taken as indicating Moses and his wife were divorced, although in reading the arguments for that they are very unpersuasive). But it’s clear they were parted for a time. When did that happen? Because here in **v. 5** “*Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife*” (**v. 5**) come to meet Moses as he’s with the Israelites back near the region of Mt. Sinai.

Here’s what I make of it. It’s possible that Moses sent his family away at some point before the exodus with the understanding that Jethro would take care of them until they could rendezvous again back by Sinai. But I tend to agree with **John Calvin** who says,

“To me this does not seem probable. For Moses would never have allowed his sons to be deprived of the redemption of which he was the minister.... Besides,

if he had deposited his wife and children in safety, and had advanced alone to the contest, he would have been deservedly suspected of deceit, or of excessive cowardice. Wherefore I have no doubt but that he underwent, together with his family, that miserable yoke of bondage by which they were long oppressed, and by this proof evidenced his faithfulness.”

I think Moses’ family was with him the whole time – plagues, Passover, parting the Red Sea, plodding through the desert – and then Moses sent his wife and the kids off to see grandpa once they got back into his neighborhood. Zipporah fills her father in a little bit on what’s been happening and leads Jethro back to the Israelite camp to see Moses. That makes sense to me of this reunion we see here.

A quick word on the names of Moses’ children and why they’re highlighted here: Gershom we’ve heard of before back during Moses’ dark days of confusion tending sheep in Midian – “*I have become an alien in a foreign land.*” Poor Moses. Eliezer is mentioned by name for the first time here – “*My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh;*” evidently Moses, by the birth of his second son, had gained some perspective and was beginning to see God’s hand on his life. “Together the names Gershom and Eliezer told the story of Moses’ life.... [But] these two names also described what was happening to the nation of Israel. Like Moses, the Israelites were strangers in Egypt. But God was their helper; he saved them from Pharaoh’s sword.”

And that’s what this passage on the whole is trying to highlight. At an earlier point Moses was absorbed in his own story, as his kids’ names reflect. But now Moses has come to be concerned not with relating his own personal experience, but with the larger story of God’s dealing with his people, the history of salvation.

https://www.immanuel-baptist.net/sermon/exodus/pdf/100509_Exodus_18_1_12.pdf

TEXT: Exodus 18:13-27

TITLE: ADMINISTRATIVE DELEGATION OF JUDGING DUTIES

BIG IDEA:

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION INTRODUCES THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

The traditional model of church leadership reflects some type of hierarchy with the burden of the pastoral work being carried out by the dominant senior pastor. Yes, there is a recognition that the NT teaches the importance of a plurality of elders involved in ministry. But the senior pastor tends to view himself in the role of Moses -- maintaining the ultimate responsibility -- even when delegating some functions to other qualified men. This is the danger of studying a passage like the one before us. Moses is NOT the model for some type of senior pastor designation [which I view as illegitimate]. [Of course the context here is more in the area of civil and judicial government -- but closely tied to the interpretation of the laws of God.] But this story is valuable in the lessons it provides regarding the necessity of sharing the burden of spiritual leadership. We also learn lessons about burnout and learning how to let go and accept help from others. Certainly we can see that leadership focused solely around one key leader is defined by Jethro as “*Not good!*”

So this passage does not represent the fully developed model of plurality of elder NT church government. But in the wisdom of progressive revelation, God starts to introduce the importance of shared leadership. Certainly some of the pitfalls of concentrating all of the burden on a one-man form of leadership are exposed here.

Dale Crawford: We have seen several examples of Moses as a type of Christ.

1. He was God’s deliverer.
2. He was chosen as a mediator to stand before God’s people
3. He was intercessor for God’s people
4. He was prophet, priest, and king -- **A.W. Pink** – “All of God’s early dealings with Israel were transacted through Moses. He was a prophet, priest, and king on one person, and so united all the great and important functions which later were distributed among a plurality of persons.”
5. In the passage before us tonight we find him as lawgiver and judge.

Wiersbe: Whenever ministry and structure collide, and ministry is being hindered, God’s people must adjust the structure so ministry can grow. . . . The emphasis in the Bible isn’t on organization as such but on the kind of organization that involves qualified people who get the job done.

Douglas Stuart: Immediately after his conversion Jethro was able to play a helpful role in Israel by recommending the basic structure of the judicial system, a properly hierarchical arrangement that placed Moses at the top of the judicial pyramid as Israel's "supreme court" and established inferior courts/judges under him.

John Mackay: This chapter continues to give vital advice regarding the organization of God's work and the importance of delegating responsibility to others who are suitably qualified. If all focuses on one individual, not only is he liable to be overwhelmed by the strains, but others will wilt and become weary because of the delays inherent in one man trying to control every aspect of a complex situation. In all probability the difficulty is not in finding those to whom the duties may be assigned, but in a leader being prepared to take the risk of entrusting important tasks to others. Moses shows the right spirit in that he is willing to listen to advice regarding how he should go about his own duties and implements the recommendations made.

I. (:13-16) PROBLEM RECOGNITION = ONE-MAN CENTERED LEADERSHIP

A. (:13) Observing of the Process of Judging – Takes Moses All Day

"And it came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening."

Cf. my experience in business with Six Sigma types of process evaluation and continuous improvement projects (e.g. Elite Support Continuous Improvement Coordinator for Freightliner dealership)

John Mackay: *The next day (18:13)* probably serves to show that the pressure that had built up on Moses was so severe that even the arrival of his father-in-law did not permit any significant break in his daily routine. Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood round him from morning till evening. We have here a typical scene for the administration of justice: the judge is sitting while the others are standing around. But this was not just for several hours in the morning. There was such a log-jam that it was taking all day to get through the business that had arisen. The procedure would be exhausting for Moses himself, as well as trying the patience of the Israelites.

John Oswalt: Lit., "to judge the people," which has a broader sense, something like "to bring order to the people." More seems to have been involved than merely the hearing of disputes (so **18:16**).

B. (:14) Identifying the Bottleneck of the Process of Judging – Depends Completely on Moses

"Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?'"

Bruce Hurt: Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people - Jethro sees the scene with eyes of wisdom. It is interesting that Jethro in the first section of **Exodus 18** Jethro saw all that the LORD had done for Israel (**Ex 18:1, 8, 9**), and now he sees all that Moses is doing for the people. This is parallel to his observations about what the Lord had done for the people.

Scott Grant: Moses, then, is acting just like God, but not in a good way. He is putting himself in the position of God, trying to be God. Whereas Jethro was thrilled with what the Lord had done, he is not thrilled with what Moses is doing. He asks, in so many words, "What are you doing?" and "Why are you doing it?"

C. (:15-16) Justifying the Process of Judging Based on the Essential Role of Moses

1. (:15) Essential in Inquiring of God

*"And Moses said to his father-in-law,
'Because the people come to me to inquire of God.'"*

John Mackay: As the covenant mediator, the people accepted that he was the one to whom they should go if they needed to know more about how they should live their lives. 'To seek God's will' or 'to make inquiry of God' need not imply that there was a dispute, merely that there had arisen a situation in which they were uncertain of the right course of action. In later times, it was a duty of the priests to inform the people of what the Lord required of them. "You must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses" (**Lev. 10:11**). "*For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction*" (**Mal. 2:7**). But Moses was trying to do all this single-handed.

2. (:16a) Essential in Rendering a Decision

*"When they have a dispute, it comes to me,
and I judge between a man and his neighbor,"*

3. (:16b) Essential in Communicating God's Laws

"and make known the statutes of God and His laws."

Timothy Greene: A **statute** is something "prescribed" (*CHALOT*); something which is "established" and "definite" (*GHCLOT*). So the statutes of God are things not to be disregarded. They are unchangeable and uncompromising. They are not to be read in light of the circumstances; rather, the circumstances are always to be read and responded to in light of God's statutes.

God's "**laws**," on the other hand, are not simply a bare list of rules. "Law," or *torah*, has the idea of instruction and direction, or even teaching. So God's laws are his absolutely authoritative rules that instruct us and guide us in all our daily living.

Douglas Stuart: Through him the people asked God for answers to their disputes, and thus Moses asserted that he did not really judge on his own but "*decides between the parties and informs them of God's decrees and laws.*" In other words, the legal process

involved the revelatory process in this case. That was almost certainly the reason Moses had felt obligated to do all the judging himself: the answers involved God's own decisions, and Moses understood himself to be the sole conduit for those to the people.

II. (:17-23) CORRECTIVE COUNSEL = SHARED LEADERSHIP

A. (:17-18) Counsel Regarding the Negative Impact of the Current Process

1. (:17) Judged as "Not Good"

*"And Moses' father-in-law said to him,
'The thing that you are doing is not good.'"*

Philip Ryken: There was no question about the sincerity of Moses' motives. The prophet was simply trying to be faithful to his calling. The people had spiritual needs, and he was graciously trying to meet them. Yet for all his willingness to serve, it was clear that Moses had taken on a burden that was too great for him to bear alone. Jethro had the wisdom to see that there was no way Moses could sustain this kind of pace. The workload was so overwhelming that soon Moses would be exhausted. He was headed for burnout. So Jethro was emphatic: What Moses was doing was *"not good."* In Hebrew these words express strong disapproval. Moses was taking on more work than he could handle, and it was a big mistake.

2. (:18) Judged as Burdensome -- Leading to Burn-out

a. Not Sustainable

*"You will surely wear out,
both yourself and these people who are with you,"*

Gispen: *"wear out"* – same word is also used for the wilting of leaves and flowers, e.g. **Ps. 37:2**

Bruce Hurt: As Christians, we too are subject to **burnout** because helping others is part of our calling. We may feel overwhelmed by the complexity, intensity, and sheer volume of human need. We discover that we can't keep burying ourselves in all the pain without paying the price. We too have to quit, stop caring, or readjust. If we stop trying to help others, we break our fellowship with Christ. If we become unfeeling, we fall far short of His example. But we can **readjust** by making changes that will ease our burden. Like Moses who heeded the good counsel of his father-in-law Jethro and began delegating responsibility, we must recognize our human limitations and learn to act wisely.

Timothy Greene: Not only is Moses wearing himself out, but Jethro sees that the people, too, will wear out as they wait in such long lines to *"inquire of God."* Jethro is concerned for Moses' sanity, and for the sanity of the people, but I think more importantly, Jethro's concern is that this work that Moses is doing must not be compromised in any way. It's essential that every single person have access to an understanding of the statutes and laws of God and their application to every single area

of his or her life. That's what's at stake here. And so for Jethro, it's precisely because this work is so desperately important that something absolutely must change.

Douglas Stuart: That the judicial workload must have been too much for one man is shown by the incontrovertible fact that both Moses and the people who waited for justice could not conclude business in a reasonable time span. In effect, Jethro's argument is an early version of the now popular legal saying "Justice delayed is justice denied."

How had such a heavy workload come about? The answer, it would seem, involves three facts.

- First, newly freed from having few legal rights under Egyptian oppression, the Israelites had a pent-up list of issues and complaints to settle properly as well as an eagerness to take advantage of their sudden freedom to function as free people function, including access by right to legal services.
- Second, the sheer size of the large group, including non-Israelites, under one visible leader surely meant that matters previously adjudicated by clan heads, village leaders, and the like were now considered by the people themselves to require adjudication by the nation's only divinely approved leader, Moses.
- Third, Moses' own eagerness both to help and please his people as well as to learn God's standards for the nation must have motivated him to spend much time and careful thought on every decision, including the time involved in waiting for an answer from God to his questions raised on behalf of the people. He presumably treated no case lightly but threw himself into the work wholeheartedly and became entrapped by the caseload brought before him. Thus in spite of everyone's best intentions, the judging of disputes had bogged down, as was immediately obvious to someone new to the faith and the situation of Israel, such as Jethro was.

b. Requires Additional Resources

*"for the task is too heavy for you;
you cannot do it alone."*

Kevin McAteer: Now "*heavy*" is a word that has been a key word in Exodus. It is used of Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh's heart was hard or heavy. In other words, Pharaoh put too much weight on his own position and importance. He thought himself to be too high.

Wiersbe: Jethro knew that Moses' leadership was crucial for the future success of Israel and that any activity that drained his energy or wasted his time was bound to hurt the nation. . . No one man could minister personally to 2 million people and last very long. Even after the new arrangement had been established, Moses had to confess that the work was too much for him (**Num. 11:14**), so what must the burden have been like under the old system?

Thomas Constable: Evidently the people were becoming unruly because Moses was not dispensing justice quickly (**Exodus 18:23**). Jethro's counsel was wise and practical, and he presented it subject to the will of God (**Exodus 18:23**). Moses may not have realized the seriousness of the problem he faced. He seems to have been a gifted administrator who would not have consciously let Israel's social welfare deteriorate. However, his efficiency expert father-in-law pointed out how he could manage his time better.

B. (:19-23) Counsel Regarding the Corrective Action to Fix the Process

1. (:19a) Listen to Counsel and Trust the Lord

*"Now listen to me: I shall give you counsel,
and God be with you."*

2. (:19b-20) Concentrate Your Efforts on Essential Functions

a. Representing the People before God

*"You be the people's representative before God,
and you bring the disputes to God,"*

b. Teaching Them God's Laws on a Systematic Basis

"then teach them the statutes and the laws,"

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Jethro's solution to this lengthy process, which was wearing out both people and leader (v. 18), was to give Moses that portion of the work that involved a twofold office:

(1) an advocate on behalf of the people

(2) an interpreter on behalf of God to teach the people

c. Training Them How to Live on a Systematic Basis

*"and make known to them the way in which they are to walk,
and the work they are to do."*

John Mackay: 'Teach' is an unusual word, which is rendered 'warn' in **2 Chronicles 19:10**. It would seem to indicate that Moses has to remind them of the need to respect the existence of the divine rules for their living. As the covenant people they could no longer expect to live just as they chose, but they would have to realise that the decrees and laws of their King were to structure their lives. Moses would also have to show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 'Show' is literally 'make them to know', and refers to the detailed instruction that was to take place in the law of God. Their 'way' or 'path' pointed to the conduct of their life in all its aspects. This reflects the Hebrew idiom whereby life was viewed as a journey whose eventual destination depended upon the route one took and the conduct one displayed. The blessings of the covenant depended on keeping to the route laid down by the covenant overlord and living in conformity with the duties (literally, 'work', 'task') that he imposed on each of them (**Ps. 32:8; 143:8; Isa. 48:17; Jer. 42:3**). Presumably Moses implemented this advice by beginning to draw up the material we now have in the Pentateuch.

3. (:21-22) Delegate Judging Responsibility to Qualified Leaders

a. (:21) Selection and Installation of Qualified Judges

“Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.”

John Oswalt: *honest*. Lit., “*men of truth*.” The sense here is that these are men who will be true to their word, to their people, to their calling, and above all, to God. These are people who are reliable and trustworthy.

b. (:22) Differentiate Between Major and Minor Disputes

“And let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.”

Scott Grant: Letting go of something that we think is important is difficult, but Jethro offers Moses, and us, three incentives:

1) Simply, it will be “**easier**” for Moses. We make life so much more difficult than it needs to be by obsessing over every detail. Letting go of things, allowing them not to be perfect and allowing other people to help us, is a much easier way to live.

2) The other judges will “**bear the burden with you**.” This is shared leadership, which is so much more exciting than individual leadership. It's so much more fun to do an important task with people than by yourself. People who share something important get to know each other in a deeper way.

3) The people will be able to go home “**in peace**” instead of waiting around all day for a chance to see Moses. Moses is clinging to responsibility because he doesn't want to disappoint the people, but if he lets go of responsibility it will actually be a blessing to people. His thinking has been all wrong, just as ours often is.

Wiersbe: The Hebrew word translated “easier” in **Exodus 18:22** means “to take cargo from a ship.”

Douglas Stuart: While the judges would deal with the cases where there was no doubt as to how the law applied, Moses would continue to decide matters where there were no precedents or affairs were very complex. There would be a division of labor, which would be beneficial to Moses in that it would free his time for other matters.

Philip Ryken: Jethro's proposal was based on three vital principles for spiritual leadership.

- First, spiritual leaders must be **mature**.

- The second main principle is that spiritual leadership must be **representative**.
- The third principle for spiritual leadership is that it must be **shared**.

4. (:23) Expect Positive Results

*“If you do this thing and God so commands you,
then you will be able to endure,
and all these people also will go to their place in peace.”*

Douglas Stuart: Jethro’s goal in this advice, which he assumed God would endorse, was that both Moses and the people would have relief: Moses from his huge workload (“*you will be able to stand the strain*”) and the people’s morale (“*and all these people will go home satisfied*”).

III. (:24-27) SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

A. (:24) Embracing the Counsel

“So Moses listened to his father-in-law, and did all that he had said.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: It is not a little remarkable that the very first rudiments of the Jewish polity were thus suggested by a stranger and a Midianite.

John Oswalt: It is to Moses’s credit that he did not hesitate to take the recommended action. To be sure, he may have seen it as a welcome relief. At the same time, normal human nature does not give up its prerogatives easily, and the fact that he did so at once says that he experienced a remarkable freedom from ego-centeredness, as is confirmed throughout the succeeding books.

B. (:25-26) Implementing the Changes

1. (:25) Selecting and Installing Qualified Judges

*“And Moses chose able men out of all Israel,
and made them heads over the people,
leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.”*

2. (:26) Differentiating Between Difficult and Minor Disputes

*“And they judged the people at all times;
the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses,
but every minor dispute they themselves would judge.”*

John Oswalt: Jethro did not suggest that Moses should simply quit doing all that he had been doing previously. Rather, he proposed a division of labor. Moses should continue to deal with the revelation and the promulgation of the divine principles (**18:20**). He should “*teach them*” (in the sense of warning and admonishing them; the laws and instructions of God. But except for major cases (**18:22**), he should leave the day-to-day administration of these to the chosen officials, who were again prevented from arrogating too much to themselves by the division into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. This division of Moses’s roles prevented either principles or practice from

becoming absolute. Too often the exigencies of practice can subtly change the principles, and we fall into the bottomless pit of “what works.” Conversely, principles can become so sacrosanct that they become more important than people. This is what had happened in Jesus’ day, and he had to remind people that the reason the Sabbath laws had been stated so prescriptively was for people’s sake and not the other way around (**Mark 2:27**). When preservation of the principle (interpreted in certain ways) becomes the most important thing, we have missed the point of the principle. Moses was prevented from becoming immersed in practice, but still a way was preserved so that principles and practices were connected.

C. (:27) Parting with Jethro

*“Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell,
and he went his way into his own land.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do you see leaders holding on to too much responsibility and not empowering others to lead and assist?
- 2) How did Moses transition from a defensive reaction to the counsel of Jethro to accepting and implementing his counsel?
- 3) How do these leadership criteria compare to the qualifications for elders in the NT?
- 4) What lessons do you glean from this passage for NT church governmental structure and functioning?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Davis: Moses was fully convinced of the wisdom of Jethro’s suggestion and in a short time selected men and put this system to work. The impression one gets from **verses 24** and following is that Moses immediately implement this plan; however, **Deuteronomy 1:9-15** indicates that Moses did not actually arrange for the selection of these judges until after the Law had been given at Sinai. Perhaps Moses wanted to wait for divine approval of this plan before proceeding. On this basis, therefore, we must read **verses 24-27** as a later insertion. This type of historiography is not unusual in the Old Testament. On many occasions a writer deals with a subject topically rather than chronologically and thus material is inserted from later historic periods.

David Thompson: MOSES’ FATHER-IN-LAW IS USED BY GOD TO HELP MOSES ORGANIZE AND DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY SO THAT HE COULD KEEP

HIS TOTAL FOCUS ON GOD AND THE COMMUNICATION OF GOD’S WORD.

Now there are five qualifications given for leadership and any nation or any organization would be wise to apply these very principles in their selection of leaders today:

Qualification #1 - They are to be able men. 18:21a

The word means these were to be capable and competent men. This refers to men who do have the ability to lead others in the true and pure ways of God. In fact, **Victor Hamilton** said that if you track this word through the O.T. it refers to brave men who are strong defenders and warriors (Exodus, p. 284). Some men do not have the ability, personality or capability to handle the pressures of leadership. Some men are in leadership positions because they are popular with people or they are related to someone; not necessarily because they are skilled, able men. Moses was to spot “able” men.

Qualification #2 - They are to be men who fear God. 18:21b

This to me is interesting, because you would think that all men in Israel would fear and reverence God and His Word. But obviously this is not an automatic given. The truth is there are many who go to worship services regularly who do not fear and reverence God and His Word.

Qualification #3 - They are to be men of truth. 18:21c

It is imperative that leaders be men of truth. It is imperative that leaders not be liars. A lying leader is useless in the sight of God.

Qualification #4 - They are to be men who hate dishonest gain. 18:21d

Godly leaders not only are against dishonest gain, they hate it. To be a leader, you must love things and you must hate things. Now dishonest gain is gain that is through a bribe or distortion.

Qualification #5 - They are to be in charge of various numbers of people.

The mathematical breakdown of a society into categories of divisions of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens indicate that the whole group has accountability. The point is that there were to be enough qualified leaders to take care of the entire population. Unfortunately, what has happened in our society is that those who are elected to leadership offices don’t have a clue as to what God’s Word actually is or says. For the most part what we have is the blind leading the blind.

Dale Crawford: Tonight I want to set before you some principles seen here that should be applied to the church today.

I. First, we see once again the principle of plurality in leadership

A. It was not God’s will that Moses serve as the sole leader of Israel

1. Jethro expresses strong disapproval – This was “*not good*.” Moses was taking

on too much. It was not good for him; it was not good for the people.

2. A plurality of leaders was established

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:”*

B. As I’ve pointed out on numerous occasions, a careful study of the NT reveals the absence of churches with a single pastor – In other words there is no such thing as “The Pastor”

1. This is not to say that this is essential for a church to be a true church but it is certainly the model, one to be followed if at all possible.

2. Let me briefly share again the benefits of a plurality of elders

a. Combined leadership

It is seldom that one man has all of the gifts of the eldership God raises up men with different gifts for the strength of the elder body in the local church.

b. There is strength in combined counsel

There are many times that pastors have to address individuals with various issues. With a single pastor they may find it easier to reject the counsel or take offense. **Proverbs 11:14** – *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”*

c. Continuity of leadership

It is tragic to see churches fall apart after a long time pastor resigns – this is a strong indication that something is awry with the single pastor paradigm. With a plurality of elders there is a pool of men from which choose the new pastor. Hopefully there would be another man who had also been sharing in the preaching responsibilities.

d. Accountability in the pastoral ministry

There is value in moral and theological accountability in the ministry

II. A man who would lead God’s church must meet high spiritual qualifications

A. The word for “provide” refers to an act of discernment

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;”*

1. NAS – *“select out”*

2. A man’s character must be carefully considered

B. He must be “able” – this carries with it various characteristics

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;”*

1. He must be able to teach God’s people

a. The elders of Israel had to be able to instruct God’s people in every situation “all seasons.” They had to be wise in a knowledge of God’s will.

b. A pastor today must be able to take God’s Word, teach it, and apply it to the lives of God’s people.

1 Timothy 3:2 – *“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;”*

c. He too must be able to teach in every season, every situation, when it’s popular and when it’s not.

2 Timothy 4:2 – *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”*

2. He must be able to lead God’s people

a. It must begin at home

1 Timothy 3:4-5 – *“One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)”*

b. He must be characterized as “ruling well”

1 Timothy 5:17 – *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”*

C. He must be one that fears God

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;”*

1. History is full of leaders who had no fear of God

a. Nadab and Abihu – They had an unholy familiarity

Leviticus 10:1-2 - *And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."*

b. Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas were killed because of their wickedness and lack of reverence for the priestly office –

c. Uzza - Killed for his unholy familiarity

d. In the NT, Simon the sorcerer – guilty of using the office for personal gain.

Acts 8:18-20 – “*And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*”

e. Diotrephes

3 John 1:9-10 – “*I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*”

f. Our generation has its own examples of pastors who have no fear of God. Worship is more a form of entertainment than of holy reverence.

2. We must fear God in all of His majesty

a. God is holy Isaiah saw it.

Isaiah 6:1-3 – “*In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.*”

John saw it. **Revelation 4:8** – “*And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*”

b. God’s leaders today must have a high view of God. They must hold Him in high reverence. They must have a zeal for His great name and to promote His glory.

C. They must be men of truth

Exodus 18:21 – “*Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;*”

1. The word for truth here means “firmness” “reliability” “stability”

2. These must be men who are unwavering on their convictions. They stand firm

upon the truth.

3. God's leaders must not fear what other men think. He must not preach what he thinks they want to hear.

D. They must be characterized by a love for money

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;”*

1. The word here for covetousness refers to unjust or dishonest gain

2. For the Israelite judges it warned against ordaining elders whose decisions could be influenced by bribery.

3. The NT describes it in **1 Timothy 3**

1 Timothy 3:3 – *“not greedy of filthy lucre”* NAS

1 Timothy 3:3 – *“free from the love of money.”*

4. This speaks of one who is not influenced by a love for money but could also include those who can be influenced by any form of gain.

III. When at all possible elders should be chosen from among the people

Exodus 18:21 – *“Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men”*

A. The people had a hand in the selection of their elders

Deuteronomy 1:13 – *“Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.”*

1. Once they were selected and approved Moses appointed them to serve. The final authority rested with Moses but the people gave their approval.

2. Israel was governed under a representative form of government Once these elders were installed the people looked to them for leadership

3. Israel was not a democracy. They weren't governed by the will of the people.

a. What would have happened when they reached the Red Sea or when they ran out of water or when they were attacked by the Amalekites?

b. God's people have never governed themselves. They were given leaders. When they murmured against their leaders they were murmuring against God.

B. We can see this pattern in the church

1. Many churches today immediately look outside of their membership as the source of elders ignoring men within their own number that God may be calling to the office. Local churches are often blessed with elders from among their own number.

2. Their qualifications are then discerned by the other elders but the congregation helps in recognizing their gifts. Once a man is determined to be qualified he is ordained by the elders.

3. Once ordained they are given the oversight over the church.

C. Every church member then has the duty of promoting good church government by following their spiritual leaders.

1. The leaders should lead. The membership should follow

Hebrews 13:17 – *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”*

2. To submit yourselves means to yield. Our natural inclination is to resist especially when we disagree. But God calls us to give up our own way.

3. This is the nature of the Christian life

Ephesians 5:21 – *“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”*
(wives, husbands, children, servants)

Conclusion: This is God’s pattern for the church.

A. We are to select qualified men to lead us.

B. When possible we should seek a plurality of men.

C. We should submit ourselves to the leadership of these men.

May God continue to bless our church as we continue to seek His model for our church which is His church.

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/11082025192.pdf>

Philip Ryken: Every Christian has a responsibility to promote good church government. Spiritual leaders do this by leading. Yet sadly, pastors and elders tend to commit one of two errors. Either they are too timid to exercise their true spiritual authority or they try to claim more authority for themselves than they have been given by Christ. **Roger Beardmore** writes:

“In evangelical circles today we are witnessing the abuse of ecclesiastical authority in two directions. There is, on the one hand, an abdication of church authority by some. Confronted with the individualistic, anti-law spirit of our time, cowardly church officers refuse to exercise the biblical oversight entrusted to them by Christ. In many circles authoritative preaching and corrective church discipline are conspicuously absent. Equally dangerous, however, is the tendency by others to overreact against such laxity. Church leaders lose sight of the fine line between the virtue of biblical counsel and guidance and the vice of usurping control over the conscience.... Counsel becomes control, control becomes coercion, and coercion becomes tyranny over the conscience.”

TEXT: Exodus 19:1-25

TITLE: PREPARATION FOR THE GIVING OF THE COVENANT

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S PEOPLE PREPARE FOR INTIMATE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BY A PROCESS OF CONSECRATION AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES THAT RESPECT GOD'S AWESOME TRANSCENDENCE

INTRODUCTION:

God has finally fulfilled His promise to bring His people out of Egypt and all of the way to the base of Mt. Sinai in order to meet with them and communicate His covenant. He wants them to appreciate the privileges of their covenant relationship as the people of His own possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation that will carry His name and reputation to the watching world. He wants them to commit to obey the stipulations of the covenant. He wants them to prepare for the initiation of this covenant relationship by a process of consecration and observing boundaries which He has established. He wants them to respect the balance between approaching God by faith and yet responding in awe and holy fear to His majestic transcendence.

John Mackay: Here we come to the heart of the Old Testament revelation of the Lord. He has intervened in history to overthrow the oppressors of his people; he has exhibited his power in leading Israel through the Red Sea and the wilderness; and now he formalizes the relationship he has with them by setting before them the nature of the bond that exists between himself and them, and by enunciating the response that is required from them.

John Oswalt: Chapters 19 and 24 provide “bookends” for the giving of the covenant. Chapter 19 provides preparation for the giving, while chapter 24 tells the story of the consummation. This enclosure of the covenant stipulations in these narrative portions is very significant. Above all, this structure roots obedience in life and in the context of a relationship with God. Too often, we view the Old Testament “law” as simply arbitrary demands dropped from heaven by an immutable divine tyrant, with a kind of “do or die” mentality. That is not the case, as the immediate structure, as well as the larger book structure, shows. God gave his people his covenant in the midst of their saving experience with him. Thus, the “Torah” (“Instruction”) is not merely the 613 commandments that can be extracted from Exodus 19 through Deuteronomy 33. Rather, it is the entire story, from Genesis 1 to Deuteronomy 34. God’s “instruction” for life is to be found in the context of life, and we are intended to live out God’s will for us in the context of life.

I. (:1-9) PREPARING GOD'S PEOPLE FOR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

A. (:1-2) Fulfillment of the Promise to Bring Israel to Sinai

“In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on

that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.”

John Davis: The area to which they were taken can only be characterized as majestic and inspiring. The granite mountains provide an awesome background for the events which would take place. For more than eleven months Israel remained at this place receiving the Law, ratifying the covenant and preparing the sanctuary.

Youngblood: All the events recorded in **Exodus 19:1** through **Numbers 10:10** took place there, where the Israelites spent almost a year before setting out on the next stage of their journey to Canaan (**Num. 10:11-12**).

J. Ligon Duncan: They will wander in the wilderness for 38 years or so. Isn't it interesting, friends, that of those 38 years, we are only told about a very small amount in the books of Moses, but of these eleven months, you know what we get? Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers through chapter 10. These eleven months are less than one fortieth of the time that Israel would be in the wilderness, but these eleven months occupy the focus of....from **Exodus 19** on through **Leviticus**, and **Numbers 10**....Why are long stretches of the history of Israel in the wilderness skipped over and there is all this focus on this meeting? **Because the giving of the law is the great distinctive of God's covenant with Moses.**

B. (:3-8) Features of the Treaty Preparing God's People for Covenant Relationship

1. (:3) Summons by God

“And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The six verses (**vv. 3-8**) of this eagles' wings speech and its response are cast in the familiar Near Eastern **suzerainty treaty** form (**Mendenhall**). . . a literary pattern to write their treaties imposed by strong kings on their vassals

Youngblood: God's covenants with His people are always **suzerainty covenants**, unilaterally established by Him alone. He is the divine King, and we are His human subjects.

John Hannah: Moses made three trips to the mountaintop and back (**19:3, 7; vv. 8-9; vv. 20, 25**).

Walter Kaiser Jr.: A twofold title is used for the people of God (**v. 3**): “*house of Jacob*” (a reminder of their humble beginnings; cf. **Gen 28:13; 35:11; 49:7**) and “*the people of Israel*” (a statement as to what they had become: a nation).

2. (:4) Historical Prologue – Reminding Them of Their Redemption

*“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles’ wings,
and brought you to Myself.”*

John Hannah: When young eagles are learning to fly, the mother eagle flies under them with her wings spread out to catch them.

Wiersbe: The eaglets illustrate three aspects of freedom: freedom **from** (they are out of the nest, which to us is redemption); freedom **in** (they are at home in the air, which to us is maturity), and freedom **to** (they can fulfill their purpose in life, which to us is ministry). True freedom means that we’re delivered from doing the bad, we’re able to do the good, and we’re accomplishing God’s will on the earth.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: This metaphor is developed most extensively in **Deuteronomy 32:11**, where the loving compassion, protection, strength, and watchfulness of God is compared to the majestic bird’s attributes. As the young eagles were carried on the adult wings and brought out of their nests and taught to fly, so Yahweh had lovingly carried and safely delivered Israel.

Douglas Stuart: The words “*and brought you to myself*” express not merely the arrival at Sinai but the entering into covenant relationship (which is ultimately a family relationship) with the only true God.

John Mackay: He reminds them of how he *brought you to myself*. They might have thought that they were travelling to Sinai, but the Lord was more concerned with the spiritual aspect of their journey than the geographical. The spiritual pollution of Egypt had militated against entering into a close relationship with the Lord. As they had travelled, they had repeatedly been made to realise their utter dependence on him. Now at Sinai, they are removed from the corrupting environment of Egypt; they are living from day to day on the bounty of his provision; and they can focus on developing an intimate and obedient relationship with their benefactor.

John Oswalt: Specifically, Yahweh called upon the people to remember what had happened in Egypt (**19:4**). He pointed out two diametrically opposite results. The Egyptians had sought to thwart God’s will and Israel had “*seen*” (**19:4**) what had happened. By contrast, the Israelites had believed God and, however fearfully, had done what he told them to do. The result? God had carried them “*on eagles’ wings and brought*” them to himself (**19:4**). As opposed to the frightful cataclysms of nature that may well have destroyed nearly a whole Egyptian generation, Yahweh had made nature care for his people as he brought them through the wilderness. What kind of conclusion should one draw from these facts? Only fools refuse to trust, believe, and obey Yahweh! So the people were called on to reflect on the lessons of history.

3. (:5a) Stipulations – Requiring Obedience and Faithfulness

“Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant,”

John Davis: Since God was responsible for Israel's freedom and liberty, they were therefore obligated to respond in obedience to the covenant which God was about to establish.

Philip Ryken: Even before getting specific, God revealed to Moses the essence of what he required, which was full obedience. This is the main thing. Anyone who wants to enjoy fellowship with God must make a basic commitment to do everything God says. Once this commitment has been made, the rest is "just details." The decision to do what God demands has already been made; now it is simply a matter of learning what God demands. So God began with the basic commitment to do what he says: "*If you obey me fully and keep my covenant ...*" (**Exod. 19:5a**).

Realize that this statement was made to people who were already saved. The Israelites had been delivered from bondage and redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb. This is crucial for understanding how God's law works in the Christian life. The order of the exodus is important: First God delivered his people from bondage; then he gave them his law. Imagine what would have happened if it had been the other way around. Suppose God had said to Moses, "Tell my people: 'If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, I will carry you away from Egypt on eagle's wings.' " In that case, there never would have been an exodus at all. God's people would still be in bondage due to their failure to keep covenant with God. But God is a God of grace. So he saved his people first; then he called them to obey his law. The history of the exodus thus helps us understand the function of the law in the Christian life. First God rescues us from our sin; then he teaches us how to live for his glory. If personal obedience had to come first, we would never be saved. But as it is, God saves us in Christ before he calls us to live for Christ.

4. (:5b-6) Blessings – Revealing 3 Distinct Privileges of the Believing Community

a. (:5b) God's Treasured Possession

*"then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples,
for all the earth is Mine;"*

cf. **1 Pet. 2:9**

Bruce Hurt: But what is Yahweh explaining? He owns everything. But His special **possession** was to be Israel! Jehovah has chosen Israel to be His own special, peculiar, treasured possession not because of Israel's merits, because they had none (**Dt. 26:5–11**), but because of God's love and sovereign grace (**Dt 7:6–8**), the same reason He has chosen you dear believer in Christ! Like Israel we have nothing to boast about, *but let him who boasts, boast in the LORD (1 Cor 1:31)*. Israel's assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.

- b. (:6a) Kingdom of priests
“and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests”

Wiersbe: It was God’s intent that **all** Israel live as priests, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the world. Israel was to be God’s “showcase” to the Gentiles, proving to them that there is but one true and living God and that serving Him is the way to fullness of blessing (**Isa. 42:6; 49:6**). Unfortunately, instead of Israel influencing the nations to worship Jehovah, the nations influenced Israel to worship idols!

Douglas Stuart: Israel’s assignment from God involved intermediation. They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him. . .

Priests stand between God and humans to help bring the humans closer to God and to help dispense God’s truth, justice, favor, discipline, and holiness to humans. Israel was called to such a function. How? The answer is not spelled out in the present context, but it surely was to take place in four ways:

- (1) Israel would be an **example** to the people of other nations, who would see its holy beliefs and actions and be impressed enough to want to know personally the same God the Israelites knew.
- (2) Israel would **proclaim the truth** of God and invite people from other nations to accept him in faith as shown by confession of belief in him and acceptance of his covenant, as Jethro had already done.
- (3) Israel would **intercede** for the rest of the world by offering acceptable offerings to God (both sacrifices and right behavior) and thus ameliorate the general distance between God and humankind.
- (4) Israel would **keep the promises of God**, preserving his word already spoken and recording his word as it was revealed to them so that once the fullness of time had come, anyone in the whole world could promptly benefit from that great body of divinely revealed truth, that is, the Scriptures.

- c. (:6b) Holy Nation
“and a holy nation.”
These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

5. (:7-8) Acceptance in a Solemn Assembly

- a. (:7) Presentation of God’s Words
“So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him.”

Bruce Hurt: With 2 million people Moses could not announce Jehovah's words to all of them and perhaps learning from the advice of Jethro in **Exodus 18**, he calls in the elders who can then be his emissaries throughout the populace of Israel.

b. (:8) Commitment to Obey

“And all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do!’ And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.”

Douglas Stuart: The formality of the process kept the people reminded that they were not dealing only with their elders or Moses or both but with the universe's only God, who was not approachable by just anyone, who was greater and more dangerous than any force they had ever otherwise known, and who was requiring of them in a patient, cadenced process their assent to the most important commitment they could make. Yahweh would hear their words of agreement only from his officially appointed spokesperson, Moses, so Moses brought those words to Yahweh.

C. (:9) Fear-Inspiring Mode of Communication that Will Validate the Leadership of Moses

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever.’ Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.”

Gispen: The Lord would come to Moses in “*a dense cloud*.” Clouds frequently accompanied His appearance (cf. **13:21**; **Pss. 87:2**; **104:3**; **Ezek. 1:4**; **Dan. 7:13**; **Matt. 17:5**; **26:64**; **Mark 14:62**; **Rev. 1:7**). They covered His glory (cf. **16:10**), so that the people could come close enough to be able to hear His voice when He spoke with Moses on the mountain. The purpose of the Lord's speaking within earshot of the people was that the people would always trust in Moses (cf. **14:31**; and **4:1**). The Lord thus did not need to speak audibly, either here or in the giving of the Ten Commandments; He did it to support Moses' authority, especially after the repeated grumbings and the assaults on his authority, and also to lend divine authority to the laws that were given through Moses.

II. (:10-15) PRESCRIBING CONSECRATION AND BOUDARIES

A. (:10-11) Consecration

“The LORD also said to Moses, ‘Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.’”

John Davis: Before the children of Israel could approach God and receive the laws which He had for them, there had to be a period of preparation both inward and outward.

Wiersbe: The emphasis in this chapter is on the sanctity of the nation as the holy people of God, and three images stand out: the changing of their clothes, the distance set between the people and God, and the storm on Mount Sinai.

John Hannah: In anticipation of the covenant God ordered the people to separate themselves from impurity and to consecrate themselves to God. The three-day purification ritual included washing their garments and abstaining from sexual intercourse. Also during the three days no person or animal was to contact the mountain or he or it would be put to death. Such careful preparation underscored the significance of the event that was about to transpire. The God of the heavens was about to make a covenant with His people.

B. (:12-13) Boundaries

“And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 ‘No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.”

Douglas Stuart: He has chosen to restrict his presence, manifesting it to a degree but not fully. One way to teach this to the Israelites so they would not foolishly think he was a human-conceived god like an idol—who could be handled or kissed or otherwise manipulated physically or approached casually—was to restrict access even to the mountain that God would touch in his theophany and to the “contagion” of touching anyone who had in fact touched the mountain. If a king required approaching with the greatest of care, should not the King of Kings be honored even more carefully and respectfully? The boundary markers (“limits”) placed around the base of the mountain served to prevent people in their daily course of grazing flocks and gathering manna and the like from straying thoughtlessly onto the actual edge (“foot”) of the mountain.

C. (:14) Consecration

“So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.”

D. (:15) Boundaries

“And he said to the people, ‘Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.’”

Philip Ryken: The people also refrained from sexual intercourse (**Exod. 19:15b**)—not because there is something wrong with sex, but as a form of fasting. Here **Calvin** makes the helpful comment that “although there is nothing polluting or contaminating in the marriage bed, yet the Israelites were to be reminded that all earthly cares were, as much as possible, to be renounced, and all carnal affections to be put away, that they might give their entire attention to the hearing of the Law.” According to the New Testament,

the only reason to abstain from marital relations is for a spiritual purpose, and then only temporarily (see **1 Cor. 7:5**). What the Israelites did was in keeping with this principle: They abstained from intercourse for three days in order to give their undivided attention to their King and to his law.

III. (:16-25) PRODUCING HOLY FEAR AND REVERENCE FOR GOD'S TRANSCENDENCE

A. (:16-17) Demonstration of Divine Majesty

1. (:16) Creating Fear

“So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.”

Wiersbe: In Scripture, a storm is often a symbol of the awesome presence and power of God (**Pss. 18:1-15; 29; Hab. 3:1-16**). The cloud and darkness, the thunder and lightning, and the earthquake and fire, all manifested the greatness of God (**Deut. 5:22-23, 27**) and produced a holy fear in the hearts of the people. Even Moses trembled with fear and admitted it!

Philip Ryken: Each of the natural phenomena revealed a different aspect of God's character. The thunder and the earthquake were signs of his power. The dark cloud was a sign of his mystery, showing that there are aspects of his being that we cannot penetrate. The fire was a sign of God's holiness, his bright and burning purity. Fire both attracts and repels. We are drawn to its warmth and beauty, but at the same time we are kept away by the danger of its burning. So, too, we are attracted to the beauty of God's holiness but at the same time repelled by its power to destroy us. The trumpet signified his sovereignty, for a trumpet signals the coming of a king. When God descended on Mount Sinai, he was given a royal fanfare to signify his kingly majesty. Together these spectacular signs displayed the glory of God, the sum total of his divine attributes. It must have been an amazing sight. The people who saw it could never forget that they had been in the presence of the living God in all his holiness and majesty.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: A deep moral impression was made on the people, for they were in the presence of the glorious majesty of the Holy God who was about to reveal his person and character in his law. This magnificent event will be unexcelled until the Lord Jesus returns again in blazing fire (**2 Thess 1:7-12**).

John Davis: The purpose of this dramatic visual presentation was to impress upon the people that majestic power of this sovereign God. It helped to highlight the tremendous importance of this occasion and call to their attention that the commitment which they had made (v. 8) was not to be taken lightly.

Philip Ryken: The truth is that God is both transcendent and immanent. He is exalted above all that he has made. At the same time he is intimately involved with everything

that happens in his universe. Both of these things are true about God. The trouble is that the church usually tends to emphasize one at the expense of the other.

2. (:17) Creating Expectation

“And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.”

B. (:18-25) Warning to Maintain Distance – Don’t Get Too Close

1. (:18) Visual Display

“Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.”

2. (:19-20) Vocal Demonstration

a. (:19) Divine Dialogue with Moses

“When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.”

b. (:20) Mountaintop Meeting with Moses

“And the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.”

3. (:21-22) Violent Danger

a. (:21) Death if the People Get Too Close

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ‘Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.’”

b. (:22) Death if the Priests Fail to Consecrate Themselves

“And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.”

John Oswalt: But the final verses of the chapter (**19:21–25**) tell us that with all the cognitive, volitional, and affective preparation that had taken place, Yahweh was still not satisfied that everyone had gotten the picture. This is entirely understandable. These people had demonstrated an incredible obtuseness in a variety of ways. It was worth one more effort (despite Moses’s rejoinder, **19:23**) to drive the point home again: Yahweh is not this world; he is terrifyingly and awe-fully other. And if he gives himself in a binding commitment to humans, no one must ever think even once that this means that he has become a rabbit’s foot or a four-leafed clover that humans can control or manipulate for their own selfish purposes. If Moses would drive that point home once more, then perhaps the people would be truly prepared to receive God’s offer of such momentous dimensions.

4. (:23-25) Vouching Dialogue

a. (:23) We Get It

“And Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for Thou didst warn us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’”

b. (:24) Make Sure You Get It

“Then the LORD said to him, ‘Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break forth upon them.’”

c. (:25) Repeating the Warning to the People

“So Moses went down to the people and told them.”

Douglas Stuart: The wording of v. 25, “So Moses went down to the people and told them,” is a simple, direct way to end the prelaw narrative portion of the book of Exodus on two themes: the awesomeness of God (since what he told them related to that awesomeness, to wit, the danger of trying to breach God’s holiness) and the readiness of Moses and the people together at the bottom of Mount Sinai to hear God’s Ten Words of covenant thundered at them from the top of the mountain—God’s very words audible comprehensibly to all from the great height of the Mountain of God.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the role of Moses as **mediator** compare to the role of Jesus Christ as mediator?
- 2) What is the significance to you of the **privileges** of the believing community recorded in **1 Pet. 2:9** (cf. **Ex. 19:6**)?
- 3) Why so much **preparation** needed before the giving of the law to Moses and the people of Israel?
- 4) How do you reach the **proper balance** in your relationship with God between emphasizing God’s **transcendence** and His **immanence**?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tim Chester: Living under God’s law does not only satisfy his people; it also displays God to those who are not his people. God has made his name known through the exodus. At Sinai, Israel is constituted as God’s covenant people with a calling to

continue to make God's name known to the nations. God intends not only to make himself known to Israel but also through Israel. The law is given to shape Israel's life so that they display the character of God. It is missional in intent. . .

Here [19:4-6], God says three things about Israel.

First, Israel was God's treasured possession (v. 5). This phrase is used elsewhere of a king's private treasury (1 Chronicles 29:3; Ecclesiastes 2:8). Israel was God's special possession. Israel was chosen from the world. But they were also chosen for the world.

Second, Israel was a kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:5). Israel were to be a kingdom which, as a whole, had a priestly function similar to the priests in tabernacle. The priests represented the Lord. Aaron's garments were made of the same material as the curtain of the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:31; 28:5-6) – the word “*glory*” is only used in Exodus of the Lord, with the significant exception of Aaron's garments (Exodus 28:2, 40). In this sense, Aaron bore God's glory to the people. They could not go into the Most Holy Place to witness God's glory there, but they could see Aaron and witness his glory there.

The priests also represented Israel. Aaron's ephod carried stones representing the tribes of Israel (28:6-28). When he stood before God, Israel stood before God; when he presented the blood of the sacrifice which secured forgiveness, Israel presented it and benefited from it.

The presence and activity of priests therefore creates the possibility of a relationship between God and his people. In the same way, Israel as a priestly kingdom created the possibility of a relationship. As a priestly kingdom, Israel was to represent God to the world through mission, and represent the world to God through prayer. The world could not see God, but the world could see Israel and should have seen his glory in them. . .

Third, Israel was a holy nation (19:6). They were to be holy as God is holy. . . In other words, God's people, today as then, are to reflect God's distinctive character in their distinctive life so that the character of God is displayed to the nations. They are to be a light to the nations.

These words are God's preface to the Ten Commandments, which he gives to Israel in *chapter 20*. What we are meant to understand is that the Ten Commandments are missional. They were given to shape the life of Israel so that as a nation they displayed the goodness of God. God was creating one area in the world where the goodness of his rule could be seen. His people were his prototype, his working model, his proof of concept.

Noah Braymen: Our God is a Consuming Fire

Big Idea: God is a consuming fire who graciously covenants with His people.

Application: Repent and believe in Jesus Christ as the only backfire we can have to avoiding the coming judgment of God's fiery wrath.

(1) God's People are Betrothed to God (Exodus 19:1-9a)

Movement 1: God fulfills his promise to bring Israel to Sinai/Horeb (vv. 1-3; cf. 3:12)

Movement 2: God proposes to His people (vv. 4-6)

1. Conditioned on their obedience (v. 5)
2. God owns all things (v. 5)
3. 3 marks of God's people (vv. 5-6) :
 - (i) treasured,
 - (ii) kingdom of priests,
 - (iii) holy nation

Movement 3: God descends in fire so the people believe and remember Moses' teaching

(2) God's People Prepare for God's Arrival (Exodus 19:9b-15)

1. Need for consecration, cleansing and to be washed
2. The seriousness of God's Word

(3) God Powerfully Arrives (Exodus 19:16-25)

John Mackay: Through the Sinai theophany God was teaching his people about himself, and these truths regarding the covenant King continue to form the core of the New Testament portrait of God as "*the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God*" (**1 Tim. 1:17**). The barrier round Sinai reflects the reality of "*God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might for ever*" (**1 Tim. 6:15–16**). It is therefore necessary that those who worship him should do so with reverence and awe, recognizing that God in his holiness is a consuming fire (**Heb. 12:28–29**).

However, in the New Covenant age the people of God have been granted a vivid perception of a complementary aspect of the character of God who has now exhibited the full extent of his love and compassion in Jesus Christ. As a result the gathering of God's people is now an altogether different affair. "*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the*

sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:22–24).

Steven Cole: God’s Purpose for His People

Our response to God’s gracious salvation should be obedience and reverence so that as His channel for blessing the nations we proclaim His glory.

1. God has graciously saved us so that we will be His own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.
 - A. God’s salvation is totally by His grace, not by our merits.
 - B. God’s salvation brings us into an exclusive covenant relationship with Him.
 - 1) MOSES WAS THE MEDIATOR OF THE OLD COVENANT.
 - 2) JESUS CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT.
 - C. God’s salvation means that we are His own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.
 - 1) GOD’S SALVATION MEANS THAT WE ARE HIS OWN POSSESSION.
 - 2) GOD’S SALVATION MEANS THAT WE ARE A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS.
 - 3) GOD’S SALVATION MEANS THAT WE ARE A HOLY NATION.
2. Our response to God’s gracious salvation should be obedience and reverence.
 - A. Our response to God’s gracious salvation should be obedience.
 - B. Our response to God’s gracious salvation should be reverence and awe.
3. God’s purpose for graciously saving us is that as His channel for blessing the nations we proclaim His glory.

Philip Ryken: That is what Israel experienced, but it is not what we experience in the church. We have come to a different mountain, which Hebrews proceeds to describe:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (vv. 22–24)

The contrast is absolute. It is the contrast between the law and the gospel, between

Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. One mountain was dark and stormy; the other is a city of bright and shining joy. One mountain was a place of fear and danger; the other is a place of peace and safety. On one mountain the angels blazed with fire and blasted with noise; on the other they form a welcoming party for a celebration. One mountain was designed to keep people away; the other was designed to draw them close.

What makes the difference? The difference does not lie in God himself. He is present on both mountains, and even on Mount Zion he sits in judgment: “*You have come to God*,” Hebrews says, “*the judge of all men*” (12:23). The difference is that when we come to Mount Zion we are on the right side of God’s justice. This is all because of Jesus Christ and the blood that he shed on the cross. In this passage the person and work of Jesus Christ stand in the climactic position. Hebrews lists all the things we come to at Mount Zion: the heavenly Jerusalem, the myriads of angels, the church of God. But the last thing is the most important: We come “*to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood*” (v. 24).

In order to approach a holy and awesome God properly (and safely!), we need a mediator. Jesus is that mediator. He is the mediator who offered himself as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:10). By his crucifixion and resurrection he has delivered us from all the terrors of God’s law and has granted us entrance to the glories of Heaven.

Philip Hughes writes,

“Such were the terrors of Sinai, the mount of God’s law, where because of their sinfulness the people were unable to draw near to God’s presence. How different are the circumstances of Zion, the mount of God’s grace, where, thanks to the perfect law-keeping and the all-sufficient sacrifice of himself offered by the incarnate Son in our stead, we are invited to draw near with boldness into the heavenly holy of holies.”

We must decide where we would rather meet with God—Mount Sinai or Mount Zion. If we meet God on Mount Zion, then on the basis of what Jesus has done, we dare to approach him with as much confidence as reverence (see Heb. 10:19–22).

Peter Enns writes:

“This is not to say that we enter into his intimate presence casually, without reverence. But it does mean that, since the death and resurrection of Christ, we enter into that presence with a degree of joy, thanksgiving, and confidence, which were wholly lacking in Exodus 19, for we know that we are without sin before God and have been reconciled to God through Christ. As Moses consecrated the people in Exodus 19 to prepare their approach to God, we are consecrated by virtue of our relationship to the risen Christ.”

Now we are free to worship, free to love, and free to ask for whatever we need. In the words of John Newton’s triumphant hymn:

Let us love and sing and wonder,
Let us praise the Savior's name!
He has hushed the law's loud thunder,
He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame:
He has washed us in his blood.
He has brought us nigh to God.

Let us wonder; grace and justice
Join and point to mercy's store;
When through grace in Christ our trust is,
Justice smiles and asks no more:
He who washed us with His blood
Has secured our way to God.

The only way to gain this kind of access to God is through faith in Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator, the one who brings us close to God. There is no other way to have a relationship with God except through Jesus. **Hebrews 12** thus closes with a warning not to reject the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ: "*See to it, that you do not refuse him who speaks.*"

Why not? Because God is coming again, in all his terrible, awesome majesty, to judge us for our sins: "*If they [the Israelites] did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth [that is, at Mount Sinai], how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens' "* (vv. 25, 26).

These verses speak of the final judgment, warning us that if we reject Jesus now, we will not escape then but will be lost forever. God is there. He is not silent. And he is saying, "You must come to me through Jesus to be saved."

TEXT: Exodus 20:1-21

TITLE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

BIG IDEA:

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS DISPLAY THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND REVEAL HIS MORAL WILL FOR HIS COVENANT PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

These are not moral suggestions. These are divine commandments. Christ was able to sum up these requirements under 2 main headings: Love for God and love for our fellow man. There is both a vertical and a horizontal component to the Mosaic Law. These are not given as the pathway to salvation but as the righteous expression of a heart that has been transformed by the grace of God.

There is much introductory material that could be studied regarding the purpose of the law and its place (or application) in the NT economy as opposed to being addressed to Israel within the context of the Old Covenant. In addition, weeks could be spent preaching on each of the individual commands. So the treatment here will be a very cursory overview.

Wiersbe: While all the Ten Commandments deal with our responsibilities toward God, the first four are particularly Godward while the last six are manward. How we relate to others depends on how we relate to God; for if we love God and obey Him, we'll also love our neighbors and serve them (**Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13**).

John Hannah: The Ten Commandments are an excellent summary of 10 divine rules for human conduct. They might be called rules of

- (1) religion,
- (2) worship,
- (3) reverence,
- (4) time,
- (5) authority,
- (6) life,
- (7) purity,
- (8) property,
- (9) tongue, and
- (10) contentment.

John Davis: A careful study of both Old and New Testament will reveal the fact that the Law had a five-fold purpose in the plan of God.

- (1) It was designed to reveal man's sinfulness (**Rom. 3:19-20**).
- (2) It uncovered or illustrated the hideous nature of sin (**Rom. 7:8-13**).
- (3) It revealed the holiness of God.
- (4) It restrained the sinner so as to help him to come to Christ (**Gal. 3:24**).

(5) It restrained wrong behavior so as to protect the integrity of the moral and social and religious institutions of Israel.

John Oswalt: Here then is the core of what God asks of people who are in covenant with himself. Here, in these 10 “words” is a revelation of his nature and, indeed, of reality as he made it to be. He asks his people to commit themselves and their needs to him and in so doing become free to value others for themselves just as he does. The person who will treat God and others in these ways will truly be part of *a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (19:6)*.

(:1-2) PREAMBLE AND PROLOGUE – GOD’S UNIQUE ROLE AS REDEEMER

A. Preamble – Who God Is

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God,’”

Philip Ryken: If the law comes from God, then it must reflect his divine character. This is true of rules and regulations in general: They reveal something about the rule-maker.

To summarize, the Ten Commandments display the character of God. They reveal his sovereignty, jealousy, justice, holiness, honor, faithfulness, providence, truthfulness, and love.

When we see how God has poured himself into his law, it becomes obvious that he could not have given us any other commandments than the ones he gave. The Ten Commandments express God’s will for our lives because they are based on his character. This helps answer an ancient dilemma, one that **Plato** posed in one of his famous dialogues: Does God command the law because the law is good, or is the law good because God commands it? The answer is, both! The law, with all its goodness, springs from the goodness of God’s character. The law is good because God is good, and his goodness penetrates every aspect of his law.

B. Prologue – What God Has Done for His Covenant People

“who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Youngblood: On the basis of who I am, and on the basis of what I have done for you, here now is what you are to do for Me.

I. (:3) FIRST COMMANDMENT – NO OTHER GODS

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Wiersbe: The Jews lived in a world of blind and superstitious nations that worshiped many gods, something Israel beheld for centuries in Egypt. Israel was to bear witness of the true and living God (**Ps. 115**) and invite their neighbors to trust Him.

Gispén: Not having any other gods besides the Lord involves total surrender and consecration to the one and only God.

Douglas Stuart: This first commandment presents a translation challenge. Does the Hebrew *‘al-pānîm* mean “*before me*” or “*other than me?*” The difference is not insignificant because the former translation might suggest that the commandment calls only for Yahweh to be Israel’s supreme God, and thus it is not a prohibition of polytheism but rather a hierarchicalizing of it, whereas the latter demands a monotheistic religion. Hebrew *‘al-pānîm* (the form of the expression without the first-person singular pronoun) means lit., “*at/to/before the face*” and usually has the connotation of “*against*” or some derived sense therefrom. But does it have any special idiomatic meaning that can be discerned?

. . . a translation something like “*You must have no other gods over against me*” or “*You must have no other gods in distinction to me*” would capture the idiomatic sense in the context.

David Guzik: In the days of ancient Israel, there was great temptation to worship the gods of materialism (such as Baal, the god of weather and financial success) and sex (such as Ashtoreth, the goddess of sex, romance, and reproduction), or any number of other local deities. We are tempted to worship the same gods, but without the old-fashioned names and images. It has been said (perhaps first by **John Calvin**) that human nature is like an idol factory that operates constantly. We constantly deal with the temptation to set all kinds of things before or competing with God and His preeminent place in our life.

John MacKay: The great kings of the ancient empires demanded the exclusive loyalty of their subject peoples. It was high treason to enter into a relationship with another emperor. This was the focus of their treaty relationships with their vassals, and in a far higher sense it is such exclusive allegiance that is the emphasis of Yahweh’s kingship over his people. In his presence there can be no rival for their affection and service.

II. (:4-6) SECOND COMMANDMENT – DON’T WORSHIP IDOLS

A. (:4-5a) Prohibition

1. (:4) Against Making Idols

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.”

Tim Chester: This is to reduce God to something of our own making – not to replace him, but to make him manageable, to understand him according to our notions rather than according to his revelation in his word.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Thus all idolatry, which Scripture labels elsewhere as spiritual adultery, that raise up competitors or brooks any kind of rivalry to the honor, glory, and esteem due to the Lord will excite his zealously for the consistency of his own

character and being. Every form of substitution, neglect, or contempt, both public and private, for the worship of God is rejected in this commandment.

2. (:5a) Against Worshiping Idols

“You shall not worship them or serve them;”

Wiersbe: The idol worship of the pagan nations was not only illogical and unbiblical, but it was intensely immoral (temple prostitutes and fertility rites), inhuman (sacrificing children), and demonic (**1 Cor. 10:10-22**). No wonder the Lord commanded Israel to destroy the temples, altars, and idols of the pagans when they invaded the land of Canaan (**Deut. 7:1-11**).

John Davis: There is a place for religious, illustrative material. The condemnation of imagery comes when it is intended to be a representation of a god and becomes the subject of worship.

Philip Ryken: Are Reformed Protestants correct in recognizing **Exodus 20:4** as the beginning of a new commandment? The answer is yes. Having other gods and not making idols are two different regulations. The first commandment has to do with worshiping the right God. We must reject every false god in order to worship the true God, who alone is our Lord and Savior. The second commandment has to do with worshiping the right God in the right way. We may not worship him in the form of any man-made idol. Whereas the first commandment forbids us to worship false gods, the second commandment forbids us to worship the true God falsely. How we worship matters nearly as much to God as whom we worship.

B. (:5b-6) Reason

1. (:5b) God Deserves Loyalty

“for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,”

Wiersbe: In Scripture, idolatry is the equivalent of prostitution and adultery (**Hosea 1-3; Jer. 2-3; Ezek. 16; 23; James 4:4-5**). God desires and deserves the exclusive love of His people (Ex. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15).

2. (:5c) God Punishes Spiritual Adultery Down Multiple Generations

*“visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children,
on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,”*

Philip Ryken: It says that God punishes children for the sin of their fathers. What a father passes on to his children is not simply a bad example but the guilt of his sin. The principle here is covenant solidarity: God holds families responsible for their conduct as families. The Israelites were in covenant with God, and when the covenant head of any family sinned against God, his whole family was judged. To give just one example, all seventy of Ahab's sons were killed for their father's idolatry (**2 Kings 10:1-17**).

This is not to deny individual responsibility. God holds each one of us accountable for

our own sin. The Bible says, “*The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son*” (**Ezek. 18:20a**). God never condemns the innocent but only the guilty. Here it is important to notice something in the second commandment that is often overlooked—namely, how the threat ends. God says that he will punish three or four generations “*of those who hate me*” (**Exod. 20:5**). It is not only the fathers who hate God but also their children. People who struggle with the fairness of this commandment usually assume that although the father is guilty, his children are innocent. But the children hate God as much as their father did (which, given the way they were raised, is not surprising). Therefore, it is fair and just for God to punish them for their sin and for their father’s sin.

God also promises to show mercy to those who love him and keep his commandment not to serve idols. The promise is more powerful than the warning because its blessing lasts not just for three or four generations but for a thousand; in other words, it will last forever. This was God’s promise going all the way back to Abraham: “*I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you*” (**Gen. 17:7**). All we have to do is respond to the God who loves us by loving him in return.

God’s threat in the second commandment may seem discouraging to someone who comes from a family that does not honor God, but God’s blessing triumphs over God’s curse, and God often intervenes in the history of a family to turn their hatred into love and worship. He does what he did for Abraham: He calls a family to leave its idols behind and follow him. And when God does this, he establishes a lasting legacy. His grace rests on a family from one generation to the next. This is not some kind of automatic guarantee, because children are free to turn away from the God of their fathers and mothers. But it is a promise to receive by faith.

3. (:6) God Blesses Loyalty

*“but showing lovingkindness to thousands,
to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”*

III. (:7) THIRD COMMANDMENT – RESPECT THE NAME OF THE LORD

A. Prohibition

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,”

Tim Chester: Do not carry God’s name in a way that damages his reputation.

Douglas Stuart: The primary meaning of “misuse the name of the Lord” (*nāśāh šēm yahweh*, lit., “raise up Yahweh’s name for no good”) would appear to be invoking his name as guarantor of one’s words.

Steven Cole: The Lord’s name refers to His person—all that He is. To use His name in

vain includes using it in sorcery or divination, in false prophecy, and in taking false oaths (Ryken, p.580). It also means to use God's name lightly, for no purpose, whether in exclamation, surprise, or anger. The current exclamation, "Oh my God!" uses His name in vain, unless the person is truly calling on the Lord in heartfelt prayer. Also, to exclaim, "Oh, Jeez!" is to use Jesus' name in vain. This command does not prohibit taking legitimate oaths, since **Deuteronomy 6:13** commands, "*You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.*" (See, also, **Ps. 63:11; Rom. 1:9; Rev. 10:5-6.**)

David Guzik: There are at least three ways this command is commonly disobeyed.

- (1) Profanity: Using the name of God in blasphemy and cursing.
- (2) Frivolity: Using the name of God in a superficial, stupid way.
- (3) Hypocrisy: Claiming the name of God but acting in a way that disgraces Him.

B. Reason

"for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain."

Youngblood: Profanation of God's name has become frighteningly common in modern times, and yet it is among the most serious of all sins.

IV. (:8-11) FOURTH COMMANDMENT – SABBATH OBSERVANCE

A. (:8) Command

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

B. (:9-10a) Explanation

1. (:9) Six Days to Work

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work,"

2. (:10a) Seventh Day to Dedicate to the Lord and Rest

*"but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God;
in it you shall not do any work,"*

Douglas Stuart: Throughout the expression of this commandment, a balance between "stopping" and "keeping holy" is struck: clearly the purpose of the Sabbath cannot be limited either to a break from work one day a week or to the setting aside of one day a week for special attention to godliness. Rather, both are to be done on every Sabbath.

C. (:10b) Scope

*"you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant
or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you."*

D. (:11) Reason

1. Patterned after God's Work in Creation

- a. Worked Six Days

“For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them,”

- b. Rested on Seventh Day
“and rested on the seventh day;”

2. Instituted for Man’s Blessing and for Dedication to God

- a. Instituted for Man’s Blessing
“therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day”
- b. Dedicated to God
“and made it holy.”

John Davis: The demand by some that the Christian is to observe the Sabbath is, in effect, to place him under the law of the Old Testament. Particular prohibition s associated with the Sabbath indicates that this was designed as part of God’s economy for the old dispensation to teach Israel specific lessons and to prepare her for the coming of the Messiah.

V. (:12) FIFTH COMMANDMENT – OBEDIENCE TO PARENTS (AUTHORITY)

A. Command

“Honor your father and your mother,”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: involves (1) prizing them highly; (2) caring, showing affection for them; and (3) showing respect, fear, or revering them (**Lev. 19:3**).

Douglas Stuart: Now comes a commandment that follows logically because it is concerned with honoring parents, who have the awesome role in the family of representing God to their children.

B. Reason

“that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”

Gispen: With the fifth commandment the Law shifts to the relationship with the neighbor. But some feel that the fifth commandment still belongs to the first tablet, and believe that the difference between the first five and the last five commandments lies in the fact that the first five contain obligations toward God and toward those who occupy a higher position, while the second set of five commandments regulate the relationship with those who are equals.

VI. (:13) SIXTH COMMANDMENT – DON’T MURDER (SANCTITY OF LIFE)

“You shall not murder.”

John MacKay: Murder was one of the earliest indications of the evil that the Fall had introduced into human society when Cain slew his brother Abel (**Gen. 4:8**). The havoc wrought by murder and violence in the pre-flood society led to the imposition of the death penalty (**Gen. 9:6**). The sanctity of human life requires that those who unwarrantably take life should lose their own lives. Only in this way can society be kept from disintegrating under the pressure of lawlessness. The New Testament still recognises that the ruler is divinely authorised to bear the sword to bring punishment on wrong doers (**Rom. 13:4**).

Again, the command states a basic principle with far-reaching implications. If the act of murder is wrong, so too are the inner attitudes towards one's neighbour that can manifest themselves in committing murder (**Matt. 5:21–26**). *“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer”* (**1 John 3:15**). Anger and a derogatory attitude towards others are equally condemned by this command. So too is envious desire for what we do not have (**James 4:2**).

VII. (:14) SEVENTH COMMANDMENT – DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY

“You shall not commit adultery.”

John MacKay: This commandment is the basis for the laws in Israel that required the people to avoid the practices of Egypt and Canaan by maintaining sexual purity. This is spelled out in great detail in **Leviticus 18:6–30; 20:10–21**. Because the bond between the Lord and his people could also be compared to the marriage bond between husband and wife, adultery was often used to depict the way in which Israel turned away from Yahweh to worship other gods (**Lev. 20:6–8**).

VIII. (:15) EIGHTH COMMANDMENT – DON'T STEAL

“You shall not steal.”

Wiersbe: Regarding personal property – God gave Israel an elaborate set of laws to govern their use of the land, because the land belonged to Him, and they were but stewards (**Lev. 25:2, 23, 38**).

Douglas Stuart: Stealing is taking something that does not belong to you without permission. Legal possession and personal ownership of things are permitted implicitly by this commandment, which assumes that stealing is possible, something that would technically not be possible in a completely communal society.

Youngblood: Holding back a worker's wages (**Lev. 19:13**), engaging in dishonest business practices (**19:35**), charging exorbitant rates of interest (**25:36**) – all are subtle forms of theft that steal not only from man but also from God, the ultimate owner of everything (**25:23**).

IX. (:16) NINTH COMMANDMENT – DON'T BEAR FALSE WITNESS (VS. TRUTH)

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Steven Cole: Love seeks the highest good of the other person. To bear false witness undermines your integrity, undermines relationships, and damages or destroys the other person.

John Oswalt: the person who is in covenant with God does not need to destroy another person's reputation in order to make himself or herself look better or to gain some advantage over that other person. Knowing that God is the supplier of their needs, covenant people can afford to treat the reputation of the other with the same kindness with which they would like their own reputations to be treated. Fundamentally then, this principle is talking about the well-being of others. . .

X. (:17) TENTH COMMANDMENT – DON'T COVET (VS. CONTENTMENT)

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Wiersbe: The first and tenth commandments deal with what's in the heart, while the other eight focus on outward actions that begin in the heart. . . To covet is to feed inward desires for anything that God says is sinful.

Douglas Stuart: The entire verse is a prohibition against any sort of coveting of what someone else already rightfully has, with enough examples given as to leave no doubt that nothing properly owned by someone else can be coveted.

Philip Ryken: There is something unusual about the tenth commandment that distinguishes it from the rest of the Decalogue: It goes straight to the heart. The other nine commandments explicitly condemn outward actions like making idols, working on the Sabbath, and killing innocent victims. As we have seen, these commandments also forbid sins of the heart like hatred and lust. According to our “inside/outside rule,” each commandment governs inward attitudes as well outward actions. But the first nine commandments generally start on the outside and then work their way in as we learn how to apply them.

What is different about the tenth commandment is that it starts on the inside. The commandment about coveting is not concerned with what we do, in the first instance, but with what we want to do. It governs our internal desires. This has led some commentators to wonder if perhaps the tenth commandment might be superfluous. Isn't coveting really included in the eighth commandment? If God's law against stealing condemns our greedy hearts as well as our thieving hands, then why do we need the

tenth commandment?

The answer is that the tenth commandment makes explicit what the other commandments only imply—namely, that God requires inward as well as outward obedience. If God had not given us the tenth commandment, we might be tempted to think that outward obedience is all we need to offer. But the tenth commandment proves that God judges the heart. In case anyone misses the point, the command against coveting shows that God’s law is spiritual.

John MacKay: ‘Covet’ describes a consuming desire to possess in a wrong way something belonging to another, this desire being stimulated by perception of the beauty or desirability of what is coveted. It is a forbidden feeling rather than a forbidden act—at least initially. Originating within a person, covetousness covers all that comes from such a wrong desire right through to the possession of what is coveted. It is presented here as the last commandment because it points to the root of all breaches of the covenant as coming from wrong inner disposition. Rather there should be an attitude of contentment with what the Lord has placed at the disposal of his people.

Covetous desires corrupt the inner life of an individual, and because our inner disposition is so often translated into overt actions, covetousness motivates many other sins (**Mark 7:20–23**). Indeed Paul identifies covetousness with idolatry: the commandments come full circle back to where they started. “*No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God*” (**Eph. 5:5**). When godliness is accompanied by contentment there is great gain (**1 Tim. 6:6**), but wrong desires enthrone in the heart what God has forbidden. They give what is desired greater priority in our living than God himself or what he wants us to do or have. That is the essence of idolatry. We have to decide where our treasure is, for then our heart will be focused on that (**Matt. 6:19–21**).

J. I. Packer: We are all, of course, creatures of desire; God made us so, and philosophies like Stoicism and religions like Buddhism which aim at the extinction of desire are really inhuman in their thrust. But desire that is sinfully disordered needs redirecting, so that we stop coveting others’ goods and long instead for their good, and God’s glory with and through it. When **Thomas Chalmers** spoke of “the expulsive power of a new affection,” he was thinking of the way in which knowledge of my Savior’s love diverts me from the barren ways of covetous self-service, to put God first, others second, and self-gratification last in my concerns. How much do we know in experience of this divine transforming power? It is here that the final antidote to covetousness is found.

(:18-21) EPILOGUE – RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE AND OF MOSES

A. (:18) People Perceive God’s Majesty and Tremble

1. Awesome Display of God’s Majesty

“And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking;”

2. Awareness of God's Transcendence

"and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance."

Douglas Stuart: Hearing God speak audibly was frightening for the Israelites—so much so that they demanded that thereafter Moses should always relay God's words to them. This makes considerable sense in light of the consistent biblical witness to the ear-shattering volume of the voice of God. In all other cases where God is recorded as speaking audibly, the sound is described as deafeningly loud. Moses was somehow able to endure God's voice, presumably by special divine grace, but the average Israelite found it so terrifying that he wanted nothing more of it. It was not merely the sound of God's words, of course, that had such an effect: *"The people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke,"* and that combination of sensory data along with the voice of God itself was too much for them, so *"they trembled with fear"* and *"stayed at a distance."*

B. (:19) People Request that Moses Acts as Intermediary

"Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.'"

C. (:20) Moses Reassures the People

1. Don't Be Afraid

"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid;'"

John MacKay: Moses recognised that fear had gripped the people, and spoke to relieve their tension by explaining what it was that God had done. He had 'come', entered into the perceptible world in the theophany, so that he might test them. The experience they had had of a direct encounter with God should have been one that would have led to ongoing faith and obedience on their part. It was such an overwhelming spiritual experience that thereafter they should always remember it and appreciate who their King was and what he required of them. In that way they would be inhibited from breaking his commands.

2. Don't Miss the Point

a. Pass the Test

"for God has come in order to test you,"

b. Fear God

"and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you,"

c. Refrain from Sinning

"so that you may not sin."

D. (:21) People and Moses Respond Very Differently

1. People Keep Their Distance

"So the people stood at a distance,"

2. Moses Approaches God

“while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have you made something else more important than God or given your emotions or allegiance to something else instead of God?
- 2) How does Christ’s Sermon on the Mount impact your understanding of the application of each of these commandments?
- 3) How did Jesus Christ obey each of these commands during His earthly life and ministry?
- 4) What is the role of the OT Mosaic Law in our current NT church age?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tim Chester: First, we need to recognize these laws were given to people at a different time in a different culture. Many of them assume an agrarian economy. Some seem designed to avoid any confusion or contamination with Canaanite religions, which isn’t an issue for us. . . There is an accommodation to the realities of life in a fallen world with an attempt to limit the harm caused by sin.

Even more significantly, the Law of Moses was given to people at a different stage in the history of redemption. The covenant with God confirmed in **Exodus 24** is not the covenant under which we live. . . In the new covenant, the Law of Moses written on tablets of stone is replaced by the law of the Spirit written on our hearts (**Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13**). . .

The Spirit empowers us so we can obey God’s will. The great symbol of membership of the old covenant Law of Moses was circumcision. But now, Paul says, *“Circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code”* (**Romans 2:29**). In other words, we belong to God’s people and we fulfil God’s will *“by the Spirit, not by the written code.”* . .

We may not have to obey the letter of the law, but the law still matters. It still informs our understanding as Christians. And it does so in three ways –

1) The law points to God’s will

The Law of Moses expressed God's will to a specific people in a specific context at a specific moment. Those conditions no longer apply. Nevertheless, the Law of Moses did express something of God's eternal will (which is why so many of its moral regulations clearly continue to apply today).

So we can work backwards, as it were, from the Law of Moses to understand God's eternal will, and then work forwards to apply it to our own situation. . .

What the Law of Moses does – along with the rest of the Bible and supremely the Lord Jesus himself – is to show us what it means to love God and other people in different situations. The Law of Moses defined what it meant to love your neighbor back then. In so doing, it gives us lots of pointers to what it means for us now. So we should think of the Law of Moses as case law – case studies or applied wisdom which points us to God's will.

2) The law points to our Saviour

- Our need is exposed (**Romans 3:20**)
- Christ's salvation is promised (**Romans 3:21**)

3) Jesus fulfils the law (Matthew 5:17)

First, Jesus fulfils the law by embodying love for God and love for others (the law as wisdom). Jesus is the epitome of the law. He is the law in action. . .

In particular, Jesus shows that obeying God is more than outward conformity to a rule. He teaches that it about the inward attitude of our hearts (**Matthew 5**). . .

Second, Jesus fulfils the law by bringing its promise to fulfilment (the law as prophecy). He meets the need the law exposes. So the law itself contains picture after picture of this salvation.

- **Ex. 21:2-4** – laws about freeing slaves . . . Jesus setting us free from the slavery of sin
- **Ex. 21:23-24** – laws about the need for a punishment that pays for the crime -- He paid the penalty we deserved
- **Ex. 23:10-13** – Sabbath . . . points to the rest we find in Jesus

John Hannah: These commandments are the fundamental statements of a good and wholesome society as ordered by the holy and righteous God. Though believers today are not under the Law (**Rom. 6:15**), they are under obligation to abide by the holy standards represented in the Ten Commandments. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament with added stipulations that are even higher than those in **Exodus 20:3-17**. The one not repeated is the command to keep the Sabbath; yet the first day of the week is to be set aside for worship in commemoration of the Savior's resurrection.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: There are only three positive statements in **vv. 2-17** – all without a finite verb . . . these three phrases might divide up **vv. 2-17** into three sections and

govern the other seven commands. . .

1. *“I, being the Lord your God . . .”*
(Therefore observe commandments one to three)
2. *“Remembering the Sabbath day . . .”*
(Therefore do vv. 9-11)
3. *“Honoring your father and your mother . . .”*
(Therefore observe commandments six to ten)

The resulting outline would be as follows:

- (1) Right Relations With God (vv. 2-7)
- (2) Right Relations in the Worship of God (vv. 8-11)
- (3) Right Relations With Society (vv. 12-17).

John Davis: The Law and the Believer

The Old Testament saint was regenerated and justified by faith as is the one who receives Christ today. The difference then is not in salvation, but the means by which one's conduct is governed. In other words, in the Old Testament period fellowship with God was regulated by checks and penalties. This was designed to protect Israel from the idolatry that surrounded her and provide the way for the appearance of Messiah. When Christ came He brought a new era of grace and truth (**John 1:17**). For the believer the law is nonetheless revealing and instructive. It gives insight into the mind of God and helps one to determine what standards of holiness He expects of those who follow Him.

Douglas Stuart: The legal portion of Exodus is patterned after those of ancient covenants known as “suzerainty treaties,” where a conqueror made a treaty with the conquered in which he “benefited” them with his protection and care as long as they would abide by the treaty stipulations. Such covenants normally have six parts, summarized here with the coordinates that relate the structure to Exodus:

1. **Preamble:** which identifies the giver and recipients of the covenant (*“the Lord your God,”* **20:2**)
2. **Prologue:** a reminder of the relationship of the suzerain to the people (*“who brought you out of Egypt,”* **20:2**)
3. **Stipulations:** various laws/obligations on the part of the people (**20:3–23:19; 25:1–31:18**)
4. **List of witnesses** to the covenant [*“I am Yahweh,”* **Exod 29:46; 31:13; Lev 11:44**]
5. **Document clause:** providing for writing down of the covenant so that periodic reading and relearning of the covenant can take place as time goes by (see **Exod 24:4, 7, 12**)
6. **Sanctions:** blessings and curses as incentives for obedience (see **Exod 20:5–6, 12, 24; 23:20–31**; cf. **Lev 26:3–14** [blessings]; **26:14–39** [curses]; **26:40–45** [restoration blessings]).

Voddie Baucham: Introduction to Decalogue

Overview of the structure of the Ten Commandments. Not just a series of 10 circumstances with corresponding rules. There is a pattern here that is helpful to see the Decalogue as a whole. Need repetition in the teaching on this topic. “Reformed” believers hold to the perpetuity of the moral law. There are some characteristics of reformed believers that go beyond adherence to the five points of Calvinism. You must be covenantal in your view of theology and not dispensational in order to be reformed. You must be confessional to be truly reformed. To people who are not reformed, they only believe that the Ten Commandments apply to us today to the extent that the NT repeats them ... thus, they don’t believe the law regarding the sabbath is binding on Christians today. The Ten Commandments transcend the Mosaic Covenant; all were applicable before the codification of the Mosaic Covenant.

First four commands are the vertical commands = duty towards God. Last six commands are horizontal commands = duty towards fellow man. Jesus summarized the law when asked what was the greatest commandment. Gave two answers that pertained to the two sections of the law – Love God and Love your neighbor.

Case studies are civil applications of these commandments in the Decalogue.

First Table – lays foundation for our worship of God.

First Commandment (v. 3) – clarifies the **object of our worship**. Moral foundation for the moral law is God Himself. This is why God gets to give us the Decalogue – because He is God! Forever binding and indestructible. God alone is God and is our God; thus we must worship God alone. Umbrella commandment.

Implications:

- Means monotheism – importance for Israel coming out of Egypt; Why the first nine plagues? God obliterates any possibility of the Egyptian gods being actual gods. Nine plagues were not needed by God to soften Pharaoh up. More for the instruction of the Israelites. Can’t even consider other gods to be in the presence of Yahweh – not ranking in the order of importance.
- Worship is assumed here
- Obedience is assumed here – God rules and reigns so He is to be obeyed; Truth, beauty and goodness come to us from God Himself; He determines these absolutes; We don’t get to determine these authoritatively; essence of post-modernism = what is true is what is true for me – I become the fountainhead of all ethics (authority comes from either me or from the community); cf. values clarification (asking the class: “What do you think the rules should be?” instead of teacher dictating the rules)

Second Commandment – the **limitations of our worship**

We worship God the way God says He is to be worshiped. Implications:

- Prohibits Idolatry – some would argue no images of Jesus at all; cf. the Jesus film or The Passion of the Christ film; vs. Ben Hur (Jesus is not personified intentionally in that film – that is the difference); everybody agrees that you don’t make objects and worship them
- **Regulative principle** of worship = Reformed understanding – God is to be

worshiped only in those ways God has prescribed in Scripture; nothing outside of that; vs. **normative principle** of worship – we can also worship God in other ways as long as He has not expressly forbidden it; **Affective principle** of worship – overwhelmingly adopted in America today = if it makes anyone feel closer to God then it is acceptable worship (worship determined by us rather than God) – e.g. people who have drawings of whatever Holy Spirit was bringing to their mind at the moment; talking about the elements of worship: reading of Scripture, singing praying, preaching, Lord's Communion as opposed to drama

Third Commandment – **the reverence of our worship**

Goes back to the principle of God's jealousy; God has to be jealous for His own glor; can't share His glory with another; jealousy is a sin for us but not for God; He owns all position and praise and glory; don't blaspheme God's Word – it represents Him; don't blaspheme the image of God in humanity (cf. murder); this is about the holiness and righteousness of God

Fourth Commandment – **the regularity of our worship**

One day in seven belongs to God; balance of work and worship; this impacts the way we treat our employees;

Second Table of the Law (commands 5-10)

Fifth Commandment = Bridge (vs. 12) – **Honoring of God-given authority**

Heb. 13:17; Rom. 13; in this duty to our fellow man we are actually showing our submission to God;

Sixth Commandment – Don't Murder (distinct from killing) – don't deprive him of his life; goes from most severe injunction to less severe forms as you move towards tenth commandment;

Pacifism not supported in the Bible; does not speak against capital punishment

Don't deprive anyone of their God-given life

Seventh Commandment – Adultery – Don't deprive him of his family

Eighth Commandment – Theft – Don't deprive him of his goods (possessions)

Ninth Commandment – False Witness –protect your neighbor's reputation

Tenth Commandment – Coveting – Don't despise what God has given you; be satisfied with what God has given you; be satisfied with God Himself

Luke 18:18ff – Why do we call these commandments? Because Jesus does;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R88wQ0k8WXo>

Kevin DeYoung: The law is an expression of the Lawgiver's heart and character. We must think about that before we say, "I don't care for laws," or before

we bristle at the thought of do's and don'ts. The commandments not only show us what God wants; they show us what God is like. They say something about his honor, his worth, and his majesty. They tell us what matters to God. We can't disdain the law without disrespecting the Lawgiver.

They set us apart from the world. As Christians, we're a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (**1 Pet. 2:9**). We must be prepared to stand alone, to look different, and to have rules the world doesn't understand. Of course, we aren't always the holy people we should be, but that's what he has called us to be. That's who we are. We're God's people, set apart to live according to God's ways.

They don't strip our freedom, but instead provide it. We too often think of the Ten Commandments as constraining us—as if God's ways will keep us in servitude and from realizing our dreams and reaching our potential. We forget that God means to give us abundant life (**John 10:10**) and true freedom (**John 8:32**). His laws, **1 John 5:3** tells us, aren't burdensome. God isn't trying to crush us with red tape and regulations. The Ten Commandments aren't prison bars, but traffic laws. Maybe there are some anarchists out there who think, The world would be a better place without any traffic laws. A few of us drive as if that were so! . . . The Ten Commandments aren't instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free.

They were not given so that we could earn our salvation. Some people view Christianity as: God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. That's not what happened in the story of the exodus. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and God said, "I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I'm going to give you a new way to live." Salvation isn't the reward for obedience; salvation is the reason for obedience. Jesus doesn't say, "If you obey my commandments, I will love you." Instead, he first washes the feet of the disciples and then says, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*" (**John 14:15**). All of our doing is only because of what he has first done for us.

John MacKay: The Ten Commandments are rightly understood to be at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant, but if we are to grasp their true function, we must keep in mind the precise setting in which they are to be found. As has often been remarked, the Commandments were not given to Israel in Egypt so that by observing them they might free themselves from the oppression they were subjected to there. Rather the Commandments were given to the people who had already experienced the Lord's salvation. They were given so that they would have guidance as to how they ought to conduct themselves, and so continue to enjoy the benefits he had provided for them and thus be capable of fulfilling the destiny the Lord intended for them, to be "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (**19:6**). It is one of the recurring errors in theology to reverse the Scriptural order of events, and put Sinai before the Exodus; to take obedience to the Law as the basis of salvation rather than as the pattern of thankful dedication to the God of salvation.

It is as we view the Ten Commandments in this setting that we are able to answer an

objection often raised against them, that they are so negative. It is obvious that most of the Commandments are negative in form, but this is a consequence of their setting. They are given to Moses and the Israelites as they stand before God at the foot of Sinai. They are already in a position of privilege, and just as the mountain was fenced off so that the Israelites would not intrude where they had no right to go, so too the Commandments fence Israel in to keep them from conduct which would mar their continued fellowship with God. They act as so many danger signs, warning of behaviour that displeases God and undermines fellowship with him.

As time would show, the warnings are needed because of the inherent tendency of the human heart to wander off from the style of living that God expects. The negative element in the Commandments was there to protect Israel, not to debar them from what they should enjoy or to frustrate them by petty restrictions. The overall thrust of the commandments is rather maintenance of the benefits they already had received and preparation for the task of witnessing to God's grace that had been divinely extended to them.

The ultimate answer to the challenge that the Ten Commandments represent a negative, restriction-based approach to religion is the summary that our Lord himself gives of the law. *“Jesus replied: ‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments’ ”* (Matt. 22:37–40). The essence of the law is love, but even love has negative implications. *“It does not envy ...”* (1 Cor. 13:4b–6). Though expressed negatively, the Commandments are a presentation of God's gracious direction to his people, requiring that they show love to him and to their fellows.

TEXT: Exodus 20:22-26

TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

BIG IDEA:

**OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ONE TRUE GOD REQUIRES
APPROACHING HIM AND WORSHIPPING HIM ON HIS TERMS**

INTRODUCTION:

This is a transition paragraph that bridges the narrative from the giving of the Ten Commandments to the fuller revelation of the *Book of the Covenant* with its sampling of case law. It lays the foundation for the relationship of God's covenant people to the one true God. That relationship requires approaching God and worshiping Him on His terms.

Rodney Zedicher: We are in **Exodus 20:22-26**. God has saved his people and brought them to himself. He has thundered from heaven and given them his expectations for life in relationship with him. The people responded with terror and begged Moses to intercede for them. The next section, roughly the next 3 chapters, is referred to as the Book of the Covenant, a name that comes from **24:7**. This is a collection of case laws or examples of how to apply the ten commandments to specific circumstances in Israelite society. These examples are not exhaustive, covering every possible scenario, but instead give a broad sampling of issues so that anyone with a good portion of common sense could reason from the examples to the specific issue in question and apply the principles found here to render a judgment.

John MacKay: As in the Ten Commandments themselves, the Book of the Covenant begins with the relationship between the people and God. At all stages in the history of God's people the altar and sacrifice were central to this relationship because it was only through the provision of atonement that sinners who had offended God could hope to enter his presence in an acceptable manner. The altar that is described here is still the place of worship for the wanderer who as yet has no settled abode. But though he may lack a permanent residence, he has an on-going relationship with God. Wherever an altar was erected, the Lord would come to them and bless them. Unlike pagan deities which were often thought of as gods and goddesses of particular lands or sites, the Lord knows no such geographical restriction. Consequently, his people can be sure of his help and presence wherever they are. Even when the Temple was built, Solomon emphasised in his inaugural prayer that the Lord was not a localised deity, but the transcendent God. "*But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple that I have built!*" (**2 Chron. 6:18**). Christians are still "*strangers in the world*" (**1 Pet. 1:1**), but because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they are their own Temple, and have their own altar and sacrifice through the completed work of Jesus Christ (**Heb. 13:10-16**).

Motyer: **Exodus 20:21** sets a scene which does not change until **24:3**, that of Moses on the mountain in the Lord's presence in order to hear his voice. In the light of this, **verses 22–26** belong with **21:1–23:33** in the '*Book of the Covenant*' (**24:7**) and can be seen as a **transition**. The presence and voice of the Lord gave rise to an overmastering fear (**20:18–19**). The people's solution to this, to appoint a mediator, was a sensible one, and so they put Moses forward. The Lord, however, had another plan as well, the institution of an authorized altar, where he will come to you and bless you (**24**). When the trumpet called them to ascend the hill of the Lord, fear held them back (**18**; cf. **19:13**), but

There is a way for man to rise to that sublime abode:
An offering and a sacrifice . . .

The people backed off from the promised meeting with God, but the Lord was not to be deflected from his purpose to meet with them, and the altar, the place of sacrifice, was his appointed trysting place (as they will soon more perfectly learn).

In this way **Exodus 20:22–26** emerges naturally from the dramatic turn of events in **20:18–21**, but it also has its proper place in what follows.

I. (:22-23) PROHIBITION OF SUBSTITUTING MAN-MADE IDOLS FOR THE WORSHIP OF THE ONE TRUE GOD

A. (:22) Based on the Authority of God Who Communicates with His People (Authority of the Law and of His Word) to Dictate His Terms

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.’”

God loves to communicate via words with His people; this is the only way we would ever know the mind of God.

Douglas Stuart: In this reminder to the Israelites of what they had just seen and heard, four factors are prominent.

(1) Moses was now the intermediary, so God spoke through him instead of directly to the people (*“the Lord said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites ...”*).

(2) The Israelites were witnesses to their own obligation (cf. **Josh 24:22**; **Matt 23:31**) because they had seen (or perceived, i.e., seen and heard) for themselves the whole process.

(3) God had *“spoken ... from heaven”* to them; he was not merely some god who lived atop Mount Sinai, but his presence there was a localized manifestation of himself, whose real dwelling place is heaven.

(4) They had to keep the Ten Words/Commandments, of which the first two are summarized as an incipit reference to all ten.

B. (23) Based on the Uniqueness of the One True God

*“You shall not make other gods besides Me;
gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.”*

II. (:24-26) PRESCRIPTION FOR MEETING GOD AND WORSHIPING HIM ON HIS TERMS

A. (:24) Worship Involving Appropriate Sacrifices In Dependence on God’s Sovereign Grace Meets with God’s Approval

1. Nature of Proper Altar

“You shall make an altar of earth for Me,”

2. Nature of Proper Sacrifices

“and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen;”

3. Nature of God’s Approval

*“in every place where I cause My name to be remembered,
I will come to you and bless you.”*

Douglas Stuart: Worship is the first and most basic response of any believer to his or her Savior and Lord. Altars were necessary for sacrifices, which were in turn necessary for worship. At this early point in the covenant, God gave the Israelites a brief overview of altar construction in anticipation of their need to worship him properly. Now that he was becoming their covenant God, it was important that they be able to respond fully to him in worship, not merely repeating the practices of the past or simply borrowing from pagans the concepts and procedures of worship and sacrifice. . .

The initial altar God wanted was very simple: made of dirt (*“an altar of earth,”* v. 24) or optionally of stone that was not cut, shaped stone but simply found stone crudely fitted together (*“do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it”*). The insistence on a simple—even primitive—altar relates to two factors: **holiness** and idolatry. Holiness is belonging to God; the altar must be his and his alone, a part of the means by which he accepts unholy people and makes them holy, through the transference of guilt from them to an animal. Therefore the altar could not be something of which humans could take ownership because they shaped it and finished it with the same sorts of tools they might use for any mundane masonry project. Likewise, it must not be fancy enough to become like or to function as an idol, a thing that human hands had made yet was revered as possessing divine qualities. This altar must be so simple, made of natural elements that were simply assembled, that no one would make the mistake of identifying it as having in itself, intrinsically, numinous or theophoric character. The altar must be of the minimal sort of construction that would make it functional without becoming an object of appreciation or veneration in itself, something that in the mind of a worshiper might somehow rival or substitute for God. Additionally, it must not become in itself a threat to or pollution of Yahweh’s own

holiness, as things that are partial or dismembered or incomplete can sometimes do. In the same way that an animal that was sacrificed was to be full and complete (not maimed, sick, or already dismembered before being brought for sacrifice), so the stones of a stone altar must be whole and complete.

B. (:25-26) Worship Involving Man's Prideful Work-Based Efforts Rejected

1. (:25) Rejection of Man's Efforts (Contributing His Own Workmanship)

*"And if you make an altar of stone for Me,
you shall not build it of cut stones,
for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it."*

Charlie Garrett: Rather, the use of a tool profaning the stone is because the stone is something that God created. If man were to shape the stone, then it would include man's efforts in it. Thus it would lead to either idolatry of the altar which man had made in order to fellowship with God, or it would lead to idolatry of self because the man had erected the place where God and man fellowshiped.

Either way, it is a picture of works-based salvation. It is man reaching up to God by his efforts rather than man coming to God through what God has done. He made the rocks. For us to add our effort into what God had made would then be contrary to the premise of the Bible. We are saved by grace, not by works.

2. (:26) Rejection of Man's Pride (Trying to Ascend to God)

*"And you shall not go up by steps to My altar,
that your nakedness may not be exposed on it."*

John Hannah: Altars with elaborate craftsmanship and elevated platforms with staircases were common in the worship of false deities.

Charlie Garrett: There is a place where man may meet the Lord and that is through offering made at His altar. And that altar is not to be high, thus requiring steps. The word step, or *maalah*, is used for the first time here in the Bible.

It indicates a step, things that come up, high degree, go up, etc. It comes from the verb *maaleh* which means "to ascend." It is noted that around the world, altars to a god are usually built high, some exceedingly high. The higher the altar, the closer one feels they have come to their god. Consider of the tower of Babel!

The common thinking then is the more imposing the altar, the more *maalah* you go up and thus the more you will *maaleh*. Said in normal English, one does not *ascend to God* in order to be saved. *God descended to man* in order for him to be saved.

The term "*high places*" concerning altars of sacrifice is used dozens of times in Kings and Chronicles. It is a note of rebuke to the people of Israel. Even when a good king is noted for his goodness, if he allowed the high places to continue, a note of censure is placed on his record –

“And he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. 44 Also Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel.” 1 Kings 22:43, 44

When a king was specifically said to have “removed” the high places, it was with a note of commendation. If you ever wondered why these were considered wrong, now you know. It is because it was a part of man’s futile attempt to raise himself to God. Instead, the altar being at a common level with man is a picture of Christ coming down to our common level. It is through His sacrifice, at our level, that the offerings rise to God. Our attempts at reconciling with God are insufficient and worse. They are sinful because they reject what God has first instructed and then what He did for us in what the instruction pictures – Christ.

Traditional View: related to modesty:

George Rawlinson: When the dress of the priest had been so arranged that no exposure of the person was possible (27:42-43), this precept became unnecessary. Thus it would seem that Solomon’s altar had steps (cf. II Chron. 4:1 with Ezek. 43:17).

John MacKay: Human nakedness is a sign of humiliation and degradation (Gen. 3:7; Isa. 20:3-4). Those who appear in the King’s presence are to be fitly dressed (Gen. 3:21), and worthy to appear in his court. In the ritual law undergarments were to be worn by the priests to avoid such exposure (28:40-42). The worship of God was not to be blemished by indecency and pagan debauchery—then or now (1 Cor. 14:40).

Alternative View: related to nakedness being emblematic of sinfulness

Charlie Garrett: “See, this is a matter of decency and not letting people see your private parts. See!”

This is the explanation that almost every scholar gives and it has *nothing* to do with that. This verse is reaching back to the first moments of man’s existence on earth and all the way to the last book of the Bible. The translation is correct, “...that your nakedness may not be exposed **on it**.”

It is speaking of the altar and it is referring to the nakedness of sin. In Genesis 3:7, just as soon as Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, we read this –

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”

Shame of nakedness is how sin first manifested itself. And it was the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life *by which* that sin came about. Man wanted to

be like God, rising to His level. The altar was to be without steps because man *cannot* rise to the level of God.

The higher the altar, the greater the sin is revealed, and thus the more nakedness is exposed. God instead made it known that He would condescend to become a Man and meet us on our own level. In Revelation 3, as Jesus speaks to the churches, He says this

—

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” **Revelation 3:18**

The nakedness of the body only pictures our revealed sin. Christ came to take that away and to cover us with His righteousness. It was He who hung naked on Calvary’s cross so that we could be covered by Him. What a marvelous story and what a beautiful verse to end our passage today.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what way has God communicated His terms to us for how to enter into a right relationship with Him and worship Him?
- 2) Why is there such an emphasis on the first two commandments as God lays down this foundational teaching to introduce the *Book of the Covenant*?
- 3) How does Christ constitute the only sufficient sacrifice for sin to allow sinful man to worship God?
- 4) What are some of the implications of the concept of human nakedness that you can derive from studying other Scripture passages?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: God warned Israel not to manufacture idols and not to build elaborate altars such as those used by the heathen nations around them (see **2 Kings 16:10-20**). A simple altar of earth of unhewn stone would be acceptable to the Lord. If the stones were chiseled, they would become like idols, and the work of man would become more important than the worship of God. The natural stone provided by the Lord was all He would accept.

Both nudity and intercourse with temple prostitutes were a part of many pagan religious ceremonies, and these were expressly forbidden by the Lord. God commanded the

Jewish priests to wear special garments to cover their nakedness (**Ex. 28:42-43; Lev. 6:10**), and if they failed to obey, they were in danger of being killed (**Ex. 28:35, 43**).

In spite of their enthusiastic promises, Israel quickly disobeyed these commandments. While Moses was with God on the mountain, the people made a golden calf and engaged in an idolatrous orgy that led to the death of 3,000 men (**32:1-6, 25-29**). Anything in religious liturgy that encourages the sensual instead of the spiritual cannot be from God or be blessed by God.

John Oswalt: I think that commentators like **Sarna** and **Cassuto** are correct when they see these stipulations as being provisional until the implications of the Deuteronomic legislation were finally put in force in Jerusalem with the Solomonic Temple. Thus, these terms speak of the situation in the wilderness and in the early history of Israel in Canaan. As such, they do not require the building of altars, but they permit the building of such in places that God might specify (“*wherever I cause my name to be remembered*”). Clearly, these were to be of simple, unpretentious construction (“*earth*” or “*uncut stones*,” **20:24–25**) with no air of permanence about them. Thus, they would not rival the Tabernacle, either in the wilderness or when it was located at Shiloh. But God was making provision for the needs of his people in interim times and places so that they could express their worship and so that they could experience the blessing of the sense of his presence (**20:24**).

David Harr: The Book of the Covenant

Well, let’s look at this passage, this section that we read from starting in the end of chapter 20 and going into the first chapter of **chapter 23** is a section that Moses will call in **chapter 24**, he will call this section the *book of the covenant*. It is an exposition of God’s covenant laws for his people. As now here they are coming out of the land of Egypt and are about to go into the Promised Land, here is how they are to live as God’s holy people, as God’s set apart people ruled by him. . .

In many ways you could see the *book of the covenant* as kind of an exposition, an explanation, an application of the **10 Commandments**. . .

What you have here in this section, this book of the covenant is what we could call **case law**, very specific cases are given. And the idea is not to name every single possibility, but give representative cases so that you can, by extrapolation apply it to the scenario. .

What are some principles that we see laid down here for God’s people, again, called to live this set apart life?

First, that **worship is central**. This passage, this *book of the covenant*, the explanation of here is what you are going to live like as God’s people in the land, it begins and it ends with worship, regulations about the worship of God. . . This is to be Israel’s identity. Everything they do is to be focused around their worship of God. They were set free out of Egypt, free from slavery under Pharaoh to be servants of God,

worshippers of God and now this marks who they are. They are worshippers.

The other thing we see here in this material, this legal material, a good principle we could pull from it is that **Exodus fuels ethics**. In other words, what God had done in delivering them out of Egypt now was supposed to be applied in how they lived day to day as a people. . .

The other thing which we can notice here as we read about the regulations regarding slaves is that the feel of slavery here is something very, very different than what existed in the Antebellum South, very, very different. . .

Much of the material here deals with **social justice**. And, again, part of it because they are setting up a society. They are setting up a political and legal, civil system. And so there is a lot of regulations about justice. But it is more than just, well, we need some rules to keep things... keep everyone from killing one another. They are supposed to do it in such a way that fits with God.

And now the implication is now we live out lives of justice and mercy towards one another and as God gives us opportunity in the world, because we know of our own salvation and our own freedom.

Though we are not ancient Israel there is much more here than just something to slow you down in your Bible, just kind of a boring section. Hopefully you see the idea. God and who he is and what he is done is to be lived out in daily life. We need to do the thinking of what does it look like to serve God not just on a Sunday, but on a Monday morning and a Thursday. What should guide us? Well, principles like these, **worship is central. Our exodus should fuel our ethics and justice befits God's people.**

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/721094491.pdf>

Rodney Zedicher: The Need for Sacrifice

For those who have fallen short of God's perfect standard, sacrifice is God's provision to cover our sins and allow us back into his presence. Two of the primary types of sacrifice are mentioned here: burnt offerings and peace offerings. There are 5 types of sacrifice listed in **Leviticus 1-7**, the burnt offering being the first and foundational. This sacrifice didn't start here, it was offered by Noah, Abraham, and Job, and although the word is not used, this was probably the sacrifice of Abel and originated after our first parents rebelled in the garden. The burnt offering is foundational, because it is designed to address our sin problem.

The purpose of the burnt offering was to make atonement. The animal was accepted by God as a substitute, dying in the place of the sinner and making atonement, or covering guilt and bringing reconciliation. The procedure was to acknowledge guilt and symbolically transfer sin by laying the hand on the head of the animal, and then slaughter the animal and burn the whole thing (except for the hide) on the altar. This sacrifice is sometimes referred to as the whole burnt offering. The whole animal went up in smoke to God.

None of the other offerings happened on their own; they had to follow the burnt offering. The peace offering was to be placed on top of the whole burnt offering. The peace offering takes its name from the Hebrew word *shalom*. It is sometimes referred to as the fellowship offering or even the communion meal, because it celebrates the *shalom* that results from having sins atoned for. A portion of the sacrificial animal was burnt on the altar, and the rest was barbecued and eaten by the worshipers in the presence of God.

Deuteronomy 27:7 *and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God.*

The peace offering was a celebration of fellowship with God that had been restored through the whole burnt offering.

Simplicity of Altars:

God here gives clear instructions on how an altar for sacrifice is to be constructed. Make it out of dirt. If you use stones, use natural stones. No steps. Simplicity. The altar is not to attract attention. Dirt, rocks, nothing fancy. The altar is not what is important. What happens on the altar is what is significant. The blood shed, the death of the animal as a substitute sacrifice for sin – that is what is important. Two things in altar construction are expressly prohibited; if you wield your tool on it you profane it and if you use steps to go up to it your nakedness will be exposed on it.

First, use only stones as found in their natural state. Don't use cut stones. Why would God say that using a tool defiles or profanes the altar? There was to be nothing about the altar that showed man's skill or workmanship. We could argue 'no, I'm making it ornate and beautiful, something worthy of God.' God says, 'no, your work pollutes and defiles it, makes it common and unfit for spiritual use.'

Isaiah 64:6 *...all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. ...*

Even our best effort is offensive in God's sight. It is God who accepts the offering to make atonement. It is God who saves.

Titus 3:5 *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy,...*

Salvation is:

Ephesians 2:8 *... not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Works will follow, but if we attempt to apply any of our own workmanship to God's

finished work of salvation, we pollute and defile it. Our good works are in response to God's finished work of salvation and put on display that we are indeed God's workmanship.

The second prohibition is '*you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.*' Steps were something the Canaanites used for their altars, and the Canaanites included sexually perverted practices as part of their worship. There was not to be even a hint of this among God's people.

Also, steps would require human effort to ascend. God would allow no human effort in the way he was approached. There are no steps to climb up in our relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to bring ourselves closer to God. We cannot elevate ourselves. Steps would only expose our vulnerabilities and shame us. So there is to be **no human workmanship** and **no human effort** allowed when dealing with our sin problem, because our skill would only defile and our effort would only expose our shame. We are to acknowledge our guilt and our need for a substitute, and trust God to transfer our guilt to the sin-bearing substitute who is consumed in our place, restoring peace with God and opening the door to sweet communion with him.

https://pastorrodney.wordpress.com/2011/10/02/exodus20_22-26/

TEXT: Exodus 21:1-11

TITLE: *MERCIFUL PROVISIONS FOR HEBREW SLAVES*

BIG IDEA:

FREEDOM AND PROTECTION AFFORDED TO HEBREW SLAVES (IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE CUSTOMS OF SURROUNDING PAGAN NATIONS)

INTRODUCTION:

The culture of slavery described in the economic system of the Israelites as they prepared to move into the Promised Land differed both from that of the surrounding pagan nations as well as from the modern experience of slavery in America. The divine ordinances placed a priority on freedom and protection deriving from the mercy of God rather than ruthless and oppressive exploitation.

Bruce Hurt: **Exodus 21:1-23:33** is essentially a unit wherein Jehovah gives Moses a "manual" which prescribes pious practices for God's possession so that they might manifest themselves among the pagan nations as a **holy nation** (**Ex 19:6+**) pointing to the one True and Living God. In **Exodus 24:4** we read "*Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.*" Then in **Exodus 24:7** Moses "*took the **book of the covenant** and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!'*"

Wiersbe: Though the Jews were permitted to own slaves from other nations, usually prisoners of war, they were not allowed to enslave their own people. Two scenarios are presented here: a man who voluntarily becomes a servant (**Ex. 21:1-7**), and a woman who is sold to be a servant (**vv. 8-11**).

(:1) PROLOGUE

"Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them."

MacArthur: "*ordinances*" – A combination of casuistic (case-law) and apodictic (direct command) precepts laid down, as a detailed enlargement of the Decalogue, the framework for judging and resolving civil disputes in Israel. Such a combination continued to confirm the uniqueness of Israel's law among the different ancient Near Eastern law-codes. Later in a special ceremony, God entitled these precepts *the Book of the Covenant* (**24:7**).

I. (:2-6) FREEDOM POSSIBLE FOR HEBREW MALE SLAVES UNLESS THEY CHOOSE PERMANENT SERVITUDE

A. (:2) Conditions of Service

1. Terms of Service

- a. Applies to a Purchased Hebrew Slave
“If you buy a Hebrew slave,”

James Jordan: The Bible draws a distinction between Hebrew slaves and slaves who had not previously been members of the covenant. . . The slave purchased from heathendom, although immediately circumcised (**Ex. 12:44; Lev. 22:11; Gen. 17:12, 13**), was not released in the sixth year (**Lev. 25:44-46**), but the law did guarantee him the right to save money and buy his freedom (**Lev. 25:49, 26**).

- b. Term = 6 Years
“he shall serve for six years;”

2. Terms of Release

- a. On the Seventh Year
“but on the seventh”
- b. As a Free Man
“he shall go out as a free man”
- c. Without Payment
“without payment.”

John Hannah: Among the Israelites a person could sell himself and his wife into slavery due to poverty or debt (**Lev. 25:39; Deut. 15:12; 2 Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:5**), but the servitude was to be limited to six years (**Ex. 21:2**). Thus it was indentured service.

John Davis: This seventh year does not refer to the sabbatical year (**Exod. 23:11; Lev. 25:4**) but to the beginning of the seventh year after the man became a slave (**Deut. 15:12**). When the jubilee year came, however, a Hebrew slave was to be released irrespective of how many years he had served (**Lev. 25:40**). This law was designed to prevent perpetual involuntary slavery. In fact, the humanitarian aspects of Hebrew slave laws are very interesting and represent a very high ethic. . . This type of treatment of a slave finds no real parallel among other nations of the ancient Near East.

B. (:3) Normal Situations

You go out from slavery in the same condition you entered into slavery;

- 1. Alone
“If he comes alone, he shall go out alone;”
- 2. With His Wife
“if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him.”

C. (:4-6) Special Situations

- 1. (:4) Wife and Family Belong to the Master
 - a. Acquisition of Wife and Children Derives from the Master

*“If his master gives him a wife,
and she bears him sons or daughters,”*

b. Ownership Rights Belong to the Master

“the wife and her children shall belong to her master,”

James Jordan: If her husband has genuinely profited from his period of slave-apprenticeship, he will be able to save up money, and soon purchase her freedom. This is fair to all, since the master recovers the money he paid for the woman he provided the slave.

c. Male Slave Released Alone

“and he shall go out alone.”

David Thompson: Now suppose that a slave wanted to be free, but he also wanted his wife and children. If he left to be free, did this mean that he would never see his wife and children again? No way. There were at least three possible options:

(Option #1) -He could go to work somewhere else and wait for his wife and children to fulfill a six-year work assignment.

(Option #2) - He could go to work for someone else, earn enough money to purchase his wife and children and buy out the remaining contract.

(Option #3) - He could willingly decide to stay with the master keeping himself and his family working for this master for the rest of their lives.

2. (:5-6) Slave Seeks Permanent Servitude

a. Motivation

“But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,'”

James Jordan: In other words, **the slave has found true freedom in the service of this kindly master.**

b. Process

“then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl;”

James Jordan: this piercing of the ear is a sign of adoption

c. Permanent Status

“and he shall serve him permanently.”

II. (:7-11) PROTECTION MANDATED FOR HEBREW FEMALE SLAVES

A. (:7) Different Situation for Female Hebrew Slaves

“And if a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do.”

John Hannah: Some Hebrew fathers thought it more advantageous for their daughters to become concubines of well-to-do neighbors than to become the wives of men in their own social class.

B. (:8) Options for Change in Status if Found Displeasing

1. Possibility of Redemption

“If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed.”

Constable: Females did not enjoy as much freedom as males in the ancient Near East or in Israel. They were subject to the fathers or husbands in authority over them as well as to God (cf. **Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18**). **Exodus 21:7-11** describe a girl whom her father sells as a servant (Heb. "*amah*", **Exodus 21:7**) for marriage, not for slavery. [Note: **Kaiser**, "Exodus," p430.] In such a case the girl would become the servant of the father of her husband-to-be who would then give her to his son as his wife. She would remain in her prospective father-in-law's household unless someone redeemed her before the consummation of her marriage. If for some reason her prospective father-in-law became displeased with her, he was to allow someone to redeem her (set her free by the payment of a price). Her redeemer could be herself or someone else (cf. **Deuteronomy 24:1**). Her master was not to sell her to some other person, a "foreign" person in that sense (**Exodus 21:8**). Such treatment was unfair to her because it violated her legitimate human rights

2. Prohibition of Being Sold to a Foreigner

“He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her.”

C. (:9) Married Daughter Status

“And if he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters.”

Wiersbe: If the man had chosen her for his son, and the son came to dislike her and married another woman, then the son's father had to be sure she was treated like a married daughter.

David Thompson: When you think this through, there were three options:

- 1) A woman could become the wife of a master.
- 2) A woman could become the wife of a master's son.
- 3) A woman could be set free by redemption.

D. (:10-11) Options When Displaced as Wife

1. (:10) Provision of Basic Needs

*“If he takes to himself another woman,
he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.”*

2. (:11) Provision for Freedom Without Payment

*“And if he will not do these three things for her,
then she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How did the slavery practices of the Israelites differ from the surrounding cultures?
- 2) In what ways did God demonstrate mercy and compassion toward Hebrew slaves?
- 3) Why does the OT not ban slavery altogether?
- 4) What spiritual parallels can you draw to Christ’s voluntary servitude and to the commitment of a Christian to become a permanent bondservant of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Davis: One thing that is decidedly unique about the slavery situation in ancient Israel is that there was no such thing as a permanent involuntary servitude for a Hebrew slave to a Hebrew master (**Lev. 25:25-55**). It appears that slavery was not a desirable aspect of social behavior in ancient Israel. Nonetheless God permitted its practice and established laws to regulate it.

David Guzik: Some think that the Bible is responsible for slavery. The opposite is true; slavery existed long before Israel or Moses. The Bible is responsible for the elimination of slavery, not its establishment. The ideas of man-stealing and life-long servitude—the concepts many have of slavery—simply do not apply to the practice of slavery in the Old Testament.

Normally, slavery was:

- (1) Chosen or mutually arranged
- (2) Of limited duration and
- (3) Highly regulated

There were four basic ways a Hebrew might become a slave to another Hebrew.

- In extreme poverty, they might sell their liberty (**Leviticus 25:39**).

- A father might sell a daughter as a servant into a home with the intention that she would eventually marry into that family (**Exodus 21:7**).
- In the case of bankruptcy, a man might become servant to his creditors (**2 Kings 4:1**).
- If a thief had nothing with which to pay proper restitution (**Exodus 22:3–4**).

Spurgeon: The slavery which existed among the ancient Jews was a very different thing from that which has disgraced humanity in modern times, and it ought also to be remembered that Moses did not institute slavery in any shape or fashion. The laws concerning it were made on purpose to repress it, to confine it within very narrow bounds, and ultimately to put an end to it. It was like the law of divorce—Moses authored that law, but he knew that the people were so deeply rooted in it that it could not be forbidden. And therefore, as Jesus tells us, Moses, because of the hardness of their hearts, allowed them to put away their wives. And so, I may say, because of the hardness of their hearts he allowed them, still, to retain persons in servitude; but he made the laws very stringent, so as almost to prevent it. Among other repressive regulations, this was one, that when a slave ran away from his master it was contrary to law for anyone to assist in sending him back again. And with such a law as that, you can clearly see that nobody need remain a slave, since he could run away if he liked; it was nobody's business—no, it was a sin for anybody to force him back again. Now, if a man can go when he likes, his slavery is a very different thing from that which still curses many parts of the earth; but the case stood thus, and sometimes persons who were insolvent, who could not pay, were compelled by the law to give their services to their creditors for a certain number of years, always limited, as you see in this case, to six. A man who had committed theft, instead of putting the country to the expense of a prison, was sometimes fined for his theft sevenfold; and if he had no money he was placed in servitude till he had bought himself free again—an institution not altogether indefensible, I think, and having a good deal of rough justice about it. Sometimes a person who was extremely poor would sell his services for the six years, which are here prescribed, to some wealthy person who was bound to house him, clothe him, and feed him. This is very much like a system which still exists in some parts of our own country, where a person's services are hired for the year, with so much nourishment to be given, and so much of wages.

David Thompson: Now this first part of the Law starts with a focus on the treatment of human beings. Specifically, this part of the O.T. Law starts by presenting laws pertaining to human beings who could be mistreated and abused the most and that would be the slaves.

Now slaves were a fact of life when the O.T. was written. In fact, the Hebrew words translated “servant,” “slave” or “maidservant” are used more than 1000 times in the Old Testament. The normal word that is used for “slave” (*ebed*) means a servant or slave and it may also be used in a context of a worker or laborer (**William Gesenius**, Hebrew Lexicon, pp. 559-600).

During this time there were no businesses or corporations who hired people. Almost all

of the businesses were what we would call “small businesses” in the sense that they were family owned and family operated. The “servant/slaves” in the O.T. context were humans who were owned by masters and they needed work and because they worked for a master, they could be exploited. They did not have much and they did not run companies so they were subject to the masters who owned them. So God begins with a series of laws that apply to them.

What these slave laws did was to give employees and employers certain rights. The Egyptians had mistreated Israel by forcing Israel into horrible slave labor situations, and God’s Law protected that from happening in His people and nation.

Clay Curtis: The Willing Servant

First and foremost, this servant, who loved his master and loved his bride and children so much that he voluntarily made himself a servant to his master forever, typifies the Lord Jesus Christ. . .

The Hebrew servant in our text initially became a servant involuntarily through some fault of his own. But the Son of God from the beginning voluntarily took the form of a servant.

Philippians 2: 5: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

As he promised in covenant with the Father in eternity, when the time came, the Son of God—God of very God, equal with the Father—willingly took the form of servant. God said he would do so in the prophets,

Zechariah 3: 8:...*behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.*

Isaiah 52: 13: *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.*

Isaiah 53: 11: *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

Then when Christ walked this earth, he said,

Luke 22:27: *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

When he took the form of a servant, it was voluntary. Emphasize the word “give” in the following verses.

John 6:51: *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

John 10:15: *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep....18: No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.*

Ephesians 5: 25: *Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.*

Our Savior illustrated his willingness to serve us unto the death of the cross that night he washed the disciples feet. Oh, believer, let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Don't you want to serve Christ your Master by serving your brethren in the earth? I ask the Lord to enable me to serve him and serve you in whatever way he would have me to do it. It is not through the hearing of the works of the law but through hearing of his work, like we see pictured here, that we are made willing servants of our good Master!

CHRIST SERVED FOR HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 21: 2: *If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve:...*

The Hebrew servant sold himself because of poverty or crime so he was to serve for six years. Six is the number of man—the number of incompleteness and failure. Therefore, six years was the length of time God said a man was to be in servitude (**Rev 13: 18**). That pictures us—we sold ourselves because of our crimes and our poverty. But Christ came willingly to serve in place of his people to establish the righteousness of the law for his people before God, which none of his people could ever do!

From his birth throughout his days as he walked this earth, the righteous Servant served God the Father, his Master, perfectly without sin. In everything he did, he was about his Father's business. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, established his church, fulfilled all that was written and kept the law perfectly for his people. Christ was the obedient servant of God, even unto the death of the cross.

CHRIST WOULD NOT GO OUT FREE

Exodus 21: 2...*and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. 3: If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4: If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5: And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: 6: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.*

In the seventh year—the number of perfection—the servant had an option. He could go out free. If he was married when he came into servitude then his wife could go out with him. But if his master had given him a wife and she had bore him children during his time as a servant then the wife and children must stay with the master. But the servant had the option to go out free.

When the soldiers came to arrest our Savior and Peter cut off the soldiers ear, Christ told Peter, *“Don’t you know that I could go out free?”*

Matthew 26: 53: *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?*

But look what he said next

Matthew 26: 54: *But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

God the Father whom he served had given him *“a wife and sons and daughters.”* In eternity, God gave him his elect bride, the church, God’s elect sons and daughters. If he had gone out, without going to the cross, he would have gone out by himself. But the willing, righteous Servant said, *“I love my Master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free!”*

Christ loved God the Father perfectly: with all his heart, soul, mind and body and strength and he loved his bride—all God’s elect children—as himself. So he would not go out free Oh, *“the love of Christ that passeth knowledge!”* Brethren, aren’t you thankful that *“having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end!”* (Jn 13: 1)

So what was done next?—*“Then his master shall bring him unto the judges.”* Though the earthly judges Christ faced were crooked unjust judges, the service our Substitute accomplished for God and his people was in accordance with the perfect righteousness of God, the Judge of heaven and earth. The innocent Lamb of God was made to bear the sin of God’s elect so that when God poured out justice on him, it would be right!

The chief manifestation set forth on the cross is not the innocence of our Substitute—though in himself he remained holy, uncorrupted—the chief manifestation set forth on the cross is the righteousness of God. **(Rom 3: 26)** If a man thinks it is right for a judge to punish the innocent then let him maintain that Christ was not really made sin but merely treated “as if”. If a man thinks it is right for a judge to clear a wicked man then let him maintain that Christ did not really make his people righteous but God merely treats us “as if.” But if a man knows it is right for a judge to only punish the guilty and only clear the righteous then let him maintain, as the scriptures plainly declare, that *“he hath made him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

“He shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post;” Everything Christ accomplished was done openly publicly for all to see. God commanded that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word must be established. **(Mt 18:16)** *“and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul;”* His master opened his ear and marked him so that everyone knew he was the willing bond servant of his master. Our Lord Jesus, the righteous servant of God, himself, gives the best commentary on this:

Isaiah 50: 5: *The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 6: I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. 7: For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. 8: He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. 9: Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*

Christ was God’s obedient servant as he bore the sin of God’s elect and the curse due unto our sin, until justice was satisfied for all his people. Then he cried, *“it is finished!”* All the debt his bride and his children owed to God was paid in full. He made full restitution to God on behalf of his people. *“and he shall serve him for ever.”*

Since Christ highly exalted God, God highly exalted him by raising him from the dead to reign forever.

Philippians 2: 8: *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9: Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;*

CHRIST SERVES AS MASTER OF HIS PEOPLE

Now, our Lord Jesus Christ is Head and Master over his church. He is bringing this word to each of his people in spirit and in truth. He comes to us who sold ourselves into the slavery of sin, where we were served in bondage for 6 long years and finds us incomplete, frustrated, and in bondage! But through this gospel he declares the 7th year has come—the year of jubilee. The Spirit declares in our hearts that because Christ paid it all—we are free to go out free without money or price.

Not only this, when the master set his servant free, God’s law demanded the master must do something else. He must provide all things for his servant.

Deuteronomy 15: 13: *And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: 14: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy*

God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.

Isaiah 40: 1: *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2: Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.*

Christ not only paid our debts, he robbed us in his eternal righteousness, eternally justifying us. He not only sanctified us by his one offering on the cross, by the Holy Spirit he creates a new man in us which is perpetually, eternally holy. By Christ's double gift, we can never come into debt again! When he reveals this, every true believer says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:"

In accordance with God's holy law, before the just Judge, with an open confession of Christ before all, we declare that Christ has opened our ear and we are willing to serve him forever! "I am his and he is mine!"

When religious men hear us declare that we are not under the law in any shape, form or fashion they do not understand. But as the apostle Paul clearly declared and as we see pictured in our text, Christ makes us willing in the day of his power by his love for us. Therefore, all who believe on Christ serve him, not by the restraint of law but by the constraint of his love, not because we have to but because we want too. He is a good master and serving him is not a burden at all. His love and goodness toward us has made us his WILLING bond servants.

John 8: 36: *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/111218633397.pdf>

Dale Crawford: Glorious Slavery

We must also understand that the form of slavery as practiced in the United States and Great Britain is strictly condemned in Scripture. Our form of slavery was wicked for several reasons.

A. First, because in many cases it was a wicked dehumanizing of human beings.

1. God places great value upon human beings – we were created in His image.

2. We are to treat one another with honor and respect.

Colossians 4:1 – *"Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."*

B. Second, because it was based on an illegitimate slave trade that practiced kidnapping to maintain its existence. The Bible strictly prohibits this.

Exodus 21:16 – *"And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."*

1. The cruelty surrounding the slave trade was the height of wickedness.
2. **John Newton** wrote of the condition on the slave ships – "Let it be observed, that the poor creatures, thus cramped for want of room, are likewise in irons, for the most part both hands and feet, and two together, which makes it difficult for them to turn or move, to attempt either to rise or to lie down, without hurting themselves, or each other."
3. Slavery in Israel was a voluntary servitude. A person would sell himself into slavery usually to pay off a debt or to make restitution for theft. An exception would be prisoners of war which were treated as conquered foe, but the slavery taught here is that of Hebrew slaves.
4. When the Bible speaks of slavery it in no way had in mind the type of institution we had in America.

C. Third, there was no way for a slave in America to gain his freedom – there was no grace in it, no mercy.

1. Slavery in Israel was temporary. They were freed in the Sabbatical year.
Exodus 21:2 – *"If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing."*
2. When a slave was set free their masters were required to provide them with the necessary provisions to start their new life.
Deuteronomy 15:12-15 – *"And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. 13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: 14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. 15 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day."*
3. The freed slaves were to be treated with mercy and provided the means to start fresh. . .

I. The follower of Christ is a slave of Christ

- A. The New Testament uses the image of slavery to describe the follower of Christ
- B. One of the chief characteristics of the Christian is that of servitude to Christ

II. The follower of Christ willingly submits to his slavery

A. Once offered the opportunity to leave the master the Israelite slave could choose to remain

B. A Christian is one who has looked to Christ and found everything about Him most precious

C. The reason people will not embrace Christ as their Master and become His slave is because they see no value in Him.

III. What does it mean to be a slave of Christ?

A. Again, when we think of slavery we think of cruelty, harshness, hopelessness

1. With Christ we serve a gracious Lord – a loving Master

2. His yoke is easy and His burden is light

Matthew 11:28-30 – *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

3. A yoke is an image of servitude – yet servitude to Christ is glorious

a. The lost man, if he obeys God at all, obeys Him by fear. It is a harsh, unwilling service. The law condemns him and the judgment of God is terrifying to consider. His is a servile obedience motivated by a fear of God’s wrath.

b. Christians serve Christ from a heart of love.

- In Christ we have found mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- In Christ we have found freedom!!
- All of our former terror is gone. We serve Christ out of a passion for Him, out of pure delight, out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to please Him. Grace has given us a freedom to serve.

B. So what does it mean to be a slave of Christ? It is a life of service, but a willing glorious service.

1. Remember, we have been freed from the burden of the law We serve Christ out of a passion for Him, out of pure delight, out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to please Him. Grace has given us a freedom to serve.

2. The servant of Christ obeys Him out of a sincere desire to be useful to Him. We love Him. We want to honor Him. We express our love in obedience

John 14:15 – *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”*

3. As a servant of Christ our life is caught up in service to Christ our Master We awaken and say, “Master, how might I be of service to You this day?”

C. We also serve Christ by serving others.

1. Are you serving others? Do you love our Lord’s family?

2. Do you truly care for one another? Are you sensitive to the feelings of others? Are you concerned for their wellbeing? Or are you simply so wrapped up with yourself you don’t have room for anyone else.

3. Christianity is being able to put the wellbeing of others before yourself. This is service. Are you a servant?

4. This was our Lord’s constant teaching

Matthew 23:11-12 – *“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”*

5. Jesus demonstrated this by His own life

Matthew 20:28 – *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*

He washed the feet of His disciples – a task normally done by servants

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/32008155526.pdf>

TEXT: Exodus 21:12-17

TITLE: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT OFFENSES

BIG IDEA:

CERTAIN EGREGIOUS CRIMES ARE WORTHY OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Any society which does not punish these types of offenses severely will be undercutting its own survival. The rationale is not so much deterrence as it is the protection of the image of God in mankind. The sanctity of human life must be upheld. Civil government has been granted the authority by God to mete out capital punishment for such offenses. The Israelites were commanded by God to mete out capital punishment in these particular cases.

These commands are presented as ranked by the degree of violence involved – striking to kill, striking to wound, kidnapping, repudiating one’s parents, etc.

Charlie Garrett: The law concerning violence committed to another follows directly after the law concerning slaves. This is not haphazardly stuck here, but intent is seen in this placement.

As **Keil** notes -

“Still higher than personal liberty, however, is life itself, the right of existence and personality; and the infliction of injury upon this was not only prohibited, but to be followed by punishment corresponding to the crime.”

Laws which are not enforced by penalties are rather pointless. They remain inoperative because there is no accountability for a violation of the law.

Nathan Carter: So in short, what we’re going to see today from this text is just this: every crime has a fitting punishment. This was true in ancient Israel and in our contemporary civil context, but it’s also a reflection of an even weightier eternal reality – we live in a moral universe... and we are responsible for our actions... and God is our Righteous Judge... and every crime has a fitting punishment.

https://www.immanuel-baptist.net/sermon/exodus/pdf/100919_Exodus_21_12_36.pdf

I. (:12-14) MURDER AND MANSLAUGHTER

A. (:12) Murder – General Rule

“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.”

John Oswalt: Human life is so valuable to God that wanton destruction of it for one's own advantage can only result in forfeiture of the murderer's life.

David Guzik: God said also that unpunished murderers defiled the land: *Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death ... So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.* (Numbers 35:31, 33–34). The principle that unpunished murders defile a land is a sobering, humbling thought among Americans, where so many are murdered and few are brought to justice for those murders.

B. (:13) Unintentional Homicide (Manslaughter) – City of Refuge

“But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.”

Charlie Garrett: The word for “*lie in wait*” here is *tsadah*. It is used for the first of just three times in the Bible and this is exactly what it means. It means that someone willfully and with preplanning came to destroy another person.

Douglas Stuart: The present law anticipates the system of **cities of refuge** with the wording “*a place I will designate*.” These six cities, spread throughout Israel, would be controlled by Levites and would give sanctuary from the “avenger of blood” (the person who set out to avenge the death of a member of his family by seeking to kill the one who had taken his life) until such time as full, careful, patient legal processes could look into the fatality and rule fairly. God's covenant thereby eliminated for obedient Israelites what had been a long-established but inherently unfair practice that dominated the way of life in the ancient Near East, blood vengeance.

John Oswalt: However, some deaths are not the result of malicious intent, and among tight-knit clans, even accidental death can create a demand for vengeance. Almost inevitably, these vengeful killings escalate into a “blood-feud” that is all but uncontrollable. This is why God insists that vengeance must be left in his hands (**Deut 32:35; Ps 94:1; Rom 12:19**). However, human life is so precious that even accidental death cannot be simply dismissed. So God provided “*a place of refuge*” (**21:13**) where the killer could be protected while the case could be investigated and passions cooled. The fact that the precise nature of this refuge is not spelled out here is one more piece of evidence that these are covenant stipulations and not a full-blown law code.

Wiersbe: Israel didn't have a police force; the family of the victim was expected to see that justice was done. But in the heat of anger, they might be more interested in revenge than in justice, so the law stepped in to protect the accused until he was proved guilty.

James Jordan: A special provision was set up for the man who accidentally killed his fellow. [without parallel in the entire ancient Near East] The negligent manslayer could

run to a *city of refuge* to escape the avenger of blood. The details of this are set out in **Deuteronomy 19:1-13** and Numbers 35:10-34.

C. (:14) Intentional Homicide – No Escape from Death Penalty

“If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.”

John MacKay: It may have been that at the altar the individual grasped the horns of the altar (**27:2**) and in this way sought the protection of the power and holiness of the Lord (**1 Kings 1:50–51; 2:28–29**). This would have been recognised as a temporary measure until the situation with respect to the offender could be clarified. But this too was not intended for the deliberate murderer who had ‘schemed’, that is, had been inwardly raging against another and so had been driven to act in a way that went beyond the bounds of what was proper.

Douglas Stuart: In other words, the Sinai covenant allowed no such thing as altar sanctuary. When Adonijah tried to make altar sanctuary work for him in **1 Kgs 1:50–51** and when Joab tried it again in **1 Kgs 2:29**, they were doing so without warrant from the covenant. Likewise, the New Covenant makes no provision for any such practice, whether in churches or shrines or any other location. There is no location by which one can escape responsibility for one’s civil or other crimes. Neither forgiveness nor freedom from prosecution is spatially connected. Such things are instead relational and in terms of their eternal dimension, dependent upon knowing Christ and his benefits, not where to hide or flee.

II. (:15) VIOLENCE TOWARDS PARENTS

“And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

“attack with great force”

John Oswalt: The rabbis ruled that this referred to an adult child who struck an aged parent with intent to injure.

Philip Ryken: Notice as well that although these cases did not involve murder, in Old Testament Israel they still demanded the death penalty. To understand why, it helps to know what kind of attack the Bible has in mind. The Hebrew used here (*naka*) refers to a vicious assault, virtually an attempted murder. Ordinarily such a violent attack only required the death penalty if someone actually got killed. But this crime was aggravated by its assault on parental authority. The fifth commandment said, “*Honor your father and your mother*” (**Exod. 20:12**). If someone so dishonored his parents as to strike them with the intent to kill, he deserved to die. While this law may seem harsh, it was for the preservation of the family, and thus for the protection of the nation.

III. (:16) KIDNAPPING AND SLAVE TRADING

*“And he who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him
or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.”*

John Davis: The death penalty is established for the practice because it was a crime against the dignity of that man and a violation of the image of God.

John MacKay: The death penalty was also prescribed for kidnapping, that is, taking and keeping an individual against their will with a view to profiting from the situation, whether by demanding a ransom or otherwise. Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death (**21:16**). In the circumstances envisaged here it is not a ransom that is in view, but the gain from selling the individual into slavery. Although many argue that this law envisages a breach of the eighth commandment because ‘kidnap’ here is the same word as ‘steal’ there, it is much more serious than misappropriation of property. The severity of the penalty shows that such treatment of human life made in the image of God was viewed as equivalent to murder. In other ancient Near Eastern law codes kidnapping was a capital crime only when a member of the nobility was involved, but it is part of the egalitarian nature of Israel’s law that the offence was treated with the same severity no matter who was involved because all were equally made in the image of God.

John Oswalt: The fourth occasion for capital punishment was kidnapping (**21:16**). Once again, the issue revolves around contempt for human life and personhood. A kidnapped person is treated as an object to be used for one’s own gain, and this can never be. The point is underscored when this command is compared with that regarding stealing an animal in **22:1, 4**. There, if the animal is not recoverable, fivefold compensation to the owner is required. But if the animal is recovered, only twofold compensation must be given. However, in the case of kidnapping, death is the result whether the victim is restored or not. Persons are not objects to be used.

IV. (:17) CURSING PARENTS

“And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.”

Douglas Stuart: Most likely this law envisions a situation in which someone would not merely in a moment of rage say to his parents something like “I wish you were dead!” but would publicly, perhaps by an oath spoken in the name of Yahweh, assert that he wanted never again to have anything to do with his parents and would not respect or serve them any longer as their child, wishing only harm for them. Thus the curser would, carrying out the curse, neither obey his parents nor care for them in their old age as was the expected duty but would openly declare something to the effect that he wanted them “out of the way.” Such behavior was sufficiently outrageous that God would not tolerate its continuation within the covenant community, and he therefore declared it a capital crime.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: Notice that the father and mother are mentioned together, thereby stressing their basic equality.

John MacKay: “*Curse*” on the other hand is a matter of lightness, and points to speech about parents which is disparaging and insulting, repudiating their authority and treating it—and them—with utter contempt. This was an assault on the social cohesion of the covenant community and a major threat to its well-being as it sought to live out its God-appointed role.

Philip Ryken: The death penalty also applied when someone cursed his parents. What is in view here is not a single act of disrespect but a total repudiation of their parental authority. The man who cursed his father and mother disowned them. To be more specific, he treated them with such utter contempt that he refused to care for them in their old age. This is the way Jesus understood the law when he challenged the Pharisees: “*Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition*” (Matt. 15:3–6). This law reminds us to honor our parents. If we speak against them—or even worse, if we strike them—we are guilty of a great sin against God. And if we fail to care for our parents, we curse them and thus violate the law of God.

Bruce Hurt: The reason the punishment was so serious is because this type of behavior was considered to be an expression of rebellion against God's authority. And since the family was the basic unit of a society, it was critical that its integrity be stringently maintained.

Charlie Garrett: Cursing one's parents is placed on the same level as striking a parent because it stems from the same attitude of the heart. God's appointed authority and His personal majesty are violated when the parents are violated. He ordained the parents of the child and therefore He is cursed implicitly in the curse. Thus it is seen in the Bible that the cursing of parents and blaspheme against God are the two sins of the tongue which are to be punished with death – **Prov. 20:20**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What happens to societies who neglect to exercise capital punishment?
- 2) What protective measures take the place of cities of refuge in our society today?
- 3) How does the story of Joseph and his brothers highlight the extreme forgiveness that Joseph showed to ones who were deserving of death ... and how is that a type of the

forgiveness Christ has extended to us?

4) Why is cursing father and mother put on the same plane as these other capital offenses?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Philip Ryken: Death for murder is one penalty that still applies today. God established this legal principle long before he ever gave his law to Moses. After the Great Flood, God said to Noah, “*From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man’*” (**Gen. 9:5b, 6**). Every human being is made in God’s image. The murder of another human being, therefore, is an attack against God. When someone commits such an assault on his divine sovereignty, the perpetrator’s life is forfeit. Nothing less than death can pay for murder.

Once the death penalty has been carried out, it can never be undone. This means that no one should ever be executed unless guilt is certain. God’s law gave careful safeguards to protect the innocent from being put to death. For example, no one could be executed on the testimony of a single witness (**Deut. 17:6, 7**). This has implications for justice today. In the case of homicide, the Bible calls for the death penalty. However, in order for that penalty to be just, it must be administered justly. This means having fair trials that reach correct verdicts in a legal system that is free from racial bias and other forms of injustice. Since it is hard to find perfect justice in an imperfect world, there are times when it is necessary for Christians to oppose the death penalty, even though they agree with it as a matter of principle.

Ligon Duncan: Capital Punishment: Biblical or Barbaric?

I. God's death penalty commands here are all about establishing a high view of life and a culture of life.

In **Exodus 21: 12 —14**, you will see a principle about the death penalty. You will see an exception about the death penalty and you will see a clarification. You will see them respectively in **verses 12, 13, and 14**. God's death penalty command, this is what I want to say that may surprise you, God's death penalty commands here are all about establishing a high view of life, and creating a culture of life. I want you to hear that loud and clear. God's death penalty commands here, His capital punishment commands here, are all about establishing a high view of life and creating a culture of life. When you first read these verses, and especially when modern Americans, no matter how conservative we may be, because we live in a culture awash with a whole variety of unbiblical sources of thinking and ideologies, and when we come to a group of verses in laws like this, our breath is often taken away. We are stunned. We are even shocked by the stern terseness of these penalties. The dramatic demands of these laws and to many moderns, these penalties, these laws are frankly barbaric. They are reflective of a culture of death, they would say. This is a culture clearly that doesn't place a high value

on human life, thus these commands have little to teach us today. Many ostensibly Christian theologians come to passages like this and make the same deduction. What are we to do with them? What are we to say about verses like this? What can we learn from them? What are we suppose to learn from them?

Well, let me just show you a few things in **verses 12, 13 and 14**. **Verse 12** gives us a categorical command, it gives us the general principle which is going to be applied in specific circumstances and given specific qualifications or exceptions in **verses 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17**. So, **verse 12** gives you the categorical command. The command is, he who strikes a man so that he dies, shall surely be put to death.

Now, that verse virtually restates the principle which God has already stated through the mouth of Moses in **Genesis chapter 9 verses 5 and 6**. Turn with me there. Moses is not inaugurating capital punishment here. Moses is not inaugurating capital punishment by humans on other sinning humans. He is simply reinforcing, by the word of God to him as He writes it on parchment, a principle which he had articulated all the way back in **Genesis 9: 5-6**. Listen to it, *“Surely I will require your life blood, from every beast I will require it. From every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds mans bloods by man, his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God, He made man.”*

Notice two or three things. **Genesis 9:5** emphasizes the accountability of all creatures, both animals and men to God for the taking of human life. That's how seriously God takes human life. He holds even animals, as well as men, accountable to Him for the taking of human life.

Secondly, in **verse 6**, the principle of capital punishment is instituted in this connection and grounded in the doctrine of man-made in the image of God. Why is it that when man wrongfully sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed? Why is that done? You see it in the last phrase of **verse 6**, *“because he's made in the image of God.”* An assault on a human, the wrongful taking of life of a human life, is an assault on God because the human is made in the image of God. So capital punishment, even in a post fall world, Moses says, is designed to uphold the sanctity of life and the preciousness of man in the image of God, even though that image is defaced by our fall and decent. So, we see how seriously God takes human life. Capital punishment reflects this high view of life, not a low view of it. So, there is your general principle in **verse 12**. Repeating the principle which Moses has already articulated in Genesis 9: 5-6.

Notice also that these **verses, 12-17**, are going to elaborate on three commands that you have already heard in the 10 commandments. They are going to elaborate on command 5, command 6, and command 8, *“honor your father and mother, you shall not murder, and you shall not steal,”* including *“you do no man stealing.”* Murder, kidnapping, honor your father and mother parallel 5, 6, and 8 of the ten commandments. So, we are seeing societal applications of God's ten words.

Now, in **verse 12**, the reference here is to premeditated criminal homicide. It's the ultimate offense against the image of God. In **verse 12**, the principle is, when man does that kind of murder his life is required. Immediately in **verse 13**, the law of asylum is given, an exception is made. The general principle is stated in **verse 12** and now an exception is made. Here is the exception. The exception is, in the case of manslaughter unpremeditated murder. In that case, the perpetrator has the opportunity to flee to a place of refuge until such time as his case can be adjudicated.

Now we see that the blood feud and private justice is the background to **Exodus 21: 12** through 17. In ancient middle-eastern culture, where societal justice was not terribly highly developed, family justice, private justice, vigilante law and family blood feuds were common. In fact, today still in the near east, family blood feuds are not unheard of. . . the idea of blood feuds were very common in the days in which Moses was writing, and what you see actually in **Exodus 21:13** is God putting boundaries on blood feuds and putting into process principles which would restrict private vigilante justice and would establish proper justice operated through the judgments of elders and judges.

In **verse 14**, you see a law against the abuse of the law of the asylum. In, we saw that if a person had committed manslaughter he had the opportunity to **verse 13** seek asylum in a place of refuge until the case could be adjudicated, but if he has committed premeditated murder he is to be taken from the altar of God and executed. In other words, God is protecting against an abuse of this provision because of the value of human life.

Now, what do we do with all this. Let me say just a few things. First of all it is a gross misinterpretation of the sixth commandment to say that it forbids capital punishment or all kinds of taking of human life. That is clear from the context of **Exodus 21: 12-17**. Unless Moses got really confused between **Exodus 20** in **verse 21** in **chapter 21**, then these two things go together. Whatever a person thinks of capital punishment, it is clear that Moses did not see it as incompatible with the sixth commandment.

There are many Christians today who believe that the death penalty and capital punishment is absolutely immoral. . .

I want you to understand here in **Exodus 21** and in Genesis 9, that the biblical and theological ground for supporting the death penalty are different from political grounds. There is no appeal to deterrent. You will not ever find anywhere in the Bible that the death penalty will deter violent crime. That is not an argument. There is no appeal to vengeance. There is no appeal to cost effectiveness. There is no appeal to protection, because the Bible's reasons for the death penalty are God's image and the sanctity of life. That is why God says that the life of the perpetrator of murder is to be taken. In other near eastern law codes, penalties for violent acts vary depending on the social status of the victim. In God's law every life was precious. The right of every victim were protected, thus showing the grounding of the death penalty, not in economic rational, not in deterrent and penal rational, but in the **image of God**. That's why Moses, that's why God imposes the death penalty here.

II. Jesus and the New Testament nowhere contradict the principle of life for life, because of the image of God.

What does Jesus say about this? What about Jesus and the woman caught in adultery? You know the story. John 8:1-11, the Pharisees bring this woman caught in adultery. They say, in **verse 4** to Jesus, “Look she's been caught in adultery and You know what the law says.” Then Jesus says to them, “*What? He who among you is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*” Then they beat it. Then he says to her, “Go and sin no more.” That passage is often appealed to as proving that Jesus overturned the death penalty. I want to say a couple of things.

First of all, I need to say publicly that I accept this passage as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative word because it's in the canon of God's holy Scripture. Some of you will note that this is a passage that this is disputed. In some of your Bibles there will be a marginal note that says, the earliest manuscripts don't have this passage. I accept this passage as the inspired, inerrant word of God. I want you to notice a couple of things. Note that Jesus does not condemn Moses' penalty in this passage. He condemns or he defers its administration in this case under specific circumstances. What are those circumstances. There are two of them. First, let me ask you a question. Where was the guy? If you get caught in *flagrante delicto* there have to be two people. Where is the man? Well, already there is a miscarriage of justice going on. This woman has been singled out and somehow the man with whom she was committing this crime has gone scott-free.

Secondly, you remember Jesus' words, “*He who is without sin.*” In this context those words very probably mean, the one who among you who is not guilty of this sin cast the first stone. In other words, Jesus is drawing attention to the hypocrisy of these Pharisees which are about to bring to bare the ultimate penalty against this woman, and they themselves are guilty of these same crimes. Yes, Jesus, mercy is all over this passage, all throughout it. His concern is to call into question the legitimacy of the Pharisee's justice by drawing attention to their own hypocrisy.

There are very special circumstances going on in this passage. Let me say, turn the other cheek isn't relevant either, because the death penalty isn't a matter of revenge. It's not a matter of retaliation, it is a matter of **protecting the sanctity of life** because of the **image of God**.

III. God's death penalty commands here are all about establishing a high view of family and human freedom.

Now, very quickly if you will look at **verses 15-17**, there are three specific cases and two categories for the death penalty in application. The first verses I want you to look at are **verses 15-17**. Those verses make emphatic the importance that biblical religion places on the integrity of the family and respect for parental authority. **Verse 15** addresses violent assault on a parent, probably by an older child, and **verse 17** deals with verbal abuse, not of a common sort, but of a very particular sort of a parent by, again, an older child. It is dealing with flagrant verbal violation of the principles of

Exodus 20:12 and it probably denotes a parent with utter contempt and humiliation. Now, the penalty assigned here is the thing that probably takes our breath away more than anything in this whole passage; death. Death for striking a parent and death for cursing a parent. Then, in **verse 16**, you see a command with regard to man stealing or kidnapping. In the background of this is obviously the prevalence of the slave trade. Other law codes treated kidnapping as a mere economic offence, but once again God treats it as a gross moral offence. Again we see God establishing human rights in a culture of life through the death penalty for kidnapping here.

But what do we say? What do we say to this command that says to put to death these children who were striking father and mother, or cursing father and mother. Obviously one way we could apply this command in our own society is realizing the absolute vital importance of the continuation of society with regard to the family. We need to battle for the family in a crumbling culture. This is one of those passages, however, I would say that is especially designed to strike us with the exceeding sinfulness of sin. A lot of times when we come to a passage like this the reason that we recoil is that the penalty seems disproportionate to the crime. I understand that. Let me suggest that many people recoil from this passage because they don't believe what Paul said in **Romans 6**, "*That the wages of sin is death.*"

You know, there are far more shocking examples of that in the Bible than **Exodus 21:12- 17**. The most shocking example of all is that of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you don't believe that the wages of sin is death, all you have to do is look at the tree. If you don't think God is serious about sin, look at the tree. This is one of those many passages in the book of Exodus that just reminds us of how horrible sin is, what it deserves, and how awesome a thing it is for our gracious God to forgive it at the cost of His own Son.

Doug Van Meter: Crime and God's Punishment

In this passage, we have the record of how the nation of Israel, under God, was to deal with crimes that were of such a nature that capital punishment was the mandated punishment/sanction. We are probably not surprised by the sanction of the death penalty for the crime of murder, but we may be surprised by the call for the death penalty when it comes to a child's disrespectful behaviour of his parents and for the sin of kidnapping. What does this tell us about God? What relevance does this have for the church? . . .

Governments are mandated by God to punish verifiable civil sins. . .

But the reason that God legislated these penalties for these actions is not primarily because God is concerned about how we treat one another (though obviously He is), but because He views every victim of crime as representative of Him. That is, God views crimes against others as ultimately against Him. . .

Though these six verses focus on crimes which call forth the death penalty, they are not the only capital crimes in the Book of the Covenant. Nor are they the only such in the

Pentateuch. For example, the following sins against God carried out as crimes against society also call for the death penalty: Desecrating the Sabbath, homosexuality, bestiality, rape, incest, adultery, witchcraft, offering human sacrifice, blasphemy, propagation of false doctrines, sacrificing to false gods, refusing to abide by the courts decision (thus denying the law), and failing to restore the pledge or bailment.

Again, the penalty is *death* because such crimes are clearly a direct assault on the person of *God*. Such crimes are an attempt to mar His image in man whom God created to reflect Him. Walter Kaiser writes, “This is a list of offences that demand the death penalty. . . . Since men and women are made in the image of God, no money or property settlement can atone for the sinful and premeditated destruction of people and the image of God in them.”

<http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/crime-and-punishment/>

TEXT: Exodus 21:18 – 22:15

TITLE: VIOLENCE TO PEOPLE AND ANIMALS / PROPERTY RIGHTS

BIG IDEA:

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT LAYS DOWN GOD’S LAWS (INCLUDING PRINCIPLES OF PUNISHMENT AND RESTITUTION) DEALING WITH VIOLENCE TO PEOPLE AND ANIMALS AND WITH PROPERTY RIGHTS

INTRODUCTION:

Studying the civil laws of Israel might seem remote and mundane, but actually provides a lot of insight into biblical principles of justice. Our modern day conflicts and disputes don’t center around oxen and how to treat slaves in our economic system, but we face the same requirement to make sure that the punishment and/or restitution match the offense. We need to learn lessons of personal responsibility, of the sanctity of human life, of the nature of private property and property rights, of what should be the remedies for negligent behavior, etc. It is important to see that contrary to the norms of the pagan cultures around them, the God of Israel acted without favoritism when it came to sex or economic status. There is a sense of justice that derives from the character of God and should be reflected in the institutions of civil society.

David Thompson: It is clear that a good society of people is built on the basis of responsibility, honesty, integrity and respect. We need to be responsible people who care for each other and treat each other with respect. We need to take care of what we have and see to it that we do not infringe on what others have.

I. (21:18-27) VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS AND PRINCIPLES OF PUNISHMENT AND RESTITUTION

A. (:18-21) Injuries Caused by Hitting Someone

1. (:18-19) Hitting Someone in a Mutual Quarrel

“And if men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but remains in bed; 19 if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then he who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take care of him until he is completely healed.”

Here you have a disagreement between two parties that began with words being exchanged and then escalated to blows being struck.

Douglas Stuart: Behind the logic of this law appears to be the assumption that people who choose to fight choose to take the risk of injury and cannot expect compensation beyond their actual out-of-pocket expenses for injuries they incur in fighting. There is no assumption of pre-meditation in this law.

John MacKay: While a basic principle is being laid down, no attempt is being made to cover all the possible angles in such a case. We might want to know what should happen if the dispute was much more one-sided than is envisaged here. If one party was trying to avoid fighting, could he claim self-defence as a legitimate excuse for not bearing the costs of the other? Who was it who decided when the injured party was well enough to resume his normal activities? While such details are left undiscussed, the basic principle of responsibility for our actions is clearly brought out.

James Jordan: the Bible teaches us to avoid all fighting and to suppress it. Only in the case of a direct threat to one's person or property, when an appeal to arbitration is not possible, is fighting permissible (**Ex. 22:2**).

2. (:20-21) Hitting a Slave

a. (:20) Punishment if the Slave Dies

“And if a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished.”

John MacKay: It is implicitly accepted that there would be occasions when a master would beat a slave. The rod as such was not a lethal weapon, but care had to be taken not to go to extremes, and life was sacred, even the life of a slave.

Alan Cole: The great advance on ancient thinking is that the slave is considered here as a person.

b. (:21) No Vengeance if the Slave Survives

“If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken; for he is his property.”

Douglas Stuart: This law does not doubt the legitimate right of an employer to punish a servant physically. But it addresses the question of how far any physical punishment could go by using the example of a “slave”—whether male or female—who was beaten, presumably for some sort of serious wrongdoing (e.g., stealing from his employer, but cp. **Lev 6:2–4**). What the employer could not do was beat the servant so severely as to cause either permanent injury or death, for both such eventualities are clearly forbidden by this law.

If the servant died, it was murder. If the servant lost just a day or two at work, however, the owner was not obligated to do what the previous law required, that is, compensate the servant for time lost from work or for medical costs because “*he is his money*” (NIV “*the slave is his property*”). There was, in other words, no point in asking the servant's boss to compensate himself for the loss of his own servant's labor. If the servant had been too severely punished, however, so that the servant took more than a couple of days to recover completely or was permanently injured, some combination of the terms of the prior law (**vv. 18–19**) and the law in **vv. 26–27** would be used to make sure the employer did not get off without penalty.

John MacKay: ‘*Is his property*’ seems to depersonalise the slave, treating him as a mere chattel, but the phrase is literally, ‘*for he [is] his money*’. As the master had paid for the services of the slave, it was not improper for him to deal with disobedience and laziness. The owner too had rights which should be recognised.

John Oswalt: There are a couple of principles assumed in these cases. The first is **compensation**, which can include monetary payment (21:19, 22) or the release of the maimed slave (21:26). That is, a person has been deprived of some benefit by the action of another, whether intentional or not. That other person is therefore responsible to give some compensating benefit in place of what was taken. The principle is one of responsibility for one’s actions in spite of the motivation for the action. But the second common principle takes this matter of intention a step farther. Anger, resulting in a desire to hurt, is assumed in all these cases. If death results, the striker cannot claim the circumstances of 21:14—that this was merely an accident. There will be punishment meted out—and punishment beyond compensation, perhaps even the death penalty. Allowing anger to play itself out in violence is a choice, and no one can say, “Well, I couldn’t help it.” Clearly, these cases say we can help it and we are **responsible for the results**.

Kaiser: The point is not that men are mere chattel... but that the owner has an investment in this slave that he stands to lose either by death... or by emancipation.

B. (:22-27) Injuries Potentially Causing Permanent Injury

1. (:22-25) Collateral Damage

a. (:22) Miscarriage Issues

“And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide.”

Douglas Stuart: The law insists that there should be a penalty for hitting a pregnant woman during a fight, even if she is not injured. It does not specify that penalty but leaves it to the woman’s husband to suggest a penalty and to the judges (NIV “*court*”) to impose one. Presumed in the logic of the law is that men are inexcusably out of control if they engage in a brawl so wild that a pregnant woman would be hurt in the process. If our suggested translation (“*but she is still able to have children*”) or something similar (“*if she has her child without harm*”) is correct, this is a law that would require waiting until after the woman gave birth to see what sort of penalty should be imposed against those who engaged in the fight. The husband could prosecute the case even if there was no harm to his wife or to his child(ren) since the mere risk and anxiety of facing the possibility of injury to the unborn or the infertility of his wife would warrant it.

James Jordan: There are two general interpretations of **verse 22**. The first is that two men are fighting, and a pregnant woman happens to come too close and is accidentally harmed. The second is that two men are fighting and the wife of one of them

intervenes, and her husband's opponent deliberately strikes at his enemy's unborn child by kicking or hitting the stomach of the pregnant woman. . .

It is difficult to determine whether this case law deals with an accidental [in which case it teaches that a man is responsible for his actions when he deliberately places himself in a situation where he loses control of himself like drunk driving] or a deliberate assault. The vagueness of the wording indicates that we should allow it to speak to either situation.

David Thompson: Now it is very clear here that God equates a fetus in a woman as being a human because if you killed the woman or the baby, you yourself were to be executed. Both the woman and the fetus were two lives and if you killed one, you yourself were subject to the death penalty.

b. (:23-25) Laws of Retaliation

“But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

David Guzik: Our tendency is to want to do more against the offending party than what they did to us. This principle can apply to our modern practice of assessing huge punitive damages in lawsuits, and this law presents the principle that only the loss itself is to be compensated.

Douglas Stuart: The goal of laws that use the wording “*life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,*” is that the penalty imposed for causing physical injury must be appropriate to the nature of the injury. In other words, a mere monetary penalty (a fine) cannot be considered adequate justice when someone has been permanently maimed by a person in a manner that clearly demands a punishment. This kind of law represents an advance on the non-Israelite biblical-era laws, which routinely provided for fines as satisfying the legal requirement of justice in the case of a superior person's permanently injuring an inferior person. By contrast to the laws of pagan nations, the law governing God's chosen people Israel required real equity at law and forbade people with money being able to buy their way out of criminal penalties. . .

expressions like “*eye for eye*” were understood idiomatically to mean “a penalty that hurts the person who ruined someone else's eye as much as he would be hurt if his own eye were actually ruined also.” The precise penalty was left up to the judges by *talion* law; it might involve anything from banishment to loss of property (and/or property rights) to punitive confinement to special financial penalties to corporal punishment to public humiliation, or to any combination of these. In support of this understanding of how *talion* laws were actually applied, an example of the nonliteralistic application of *talion* law follows immediately in **vv. 26–27**, in which the case of a servant's master damaging the eye or tooth of a servant required the loss of the servant's labor, not the gouging out of the master's eye or tooth.

The goal of talion law was always a simple one: to see that full justice was done. Its unique wording (“x or x, y for y”) conveyed to the ancient Israelites an important principle, namely, that someone who permanently injured another person ought to be fully punished in a way that really “hurt.” Israel was not to accept a system of law that could allow one person to continue crippled for life and let the person who caused the crippling to continue merrily on, simply a bit less wealthy than he had originally been.

2. (:26-27) Injuries Against Slaves

a. (:26) Striking the Eye

“And if a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye.”

b. (:27) Knocking Out a Tooth

“And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.”

II. (21:28:36) VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS AND PRINCIPLES OF PUNISHMENT AND RESTITUTION

A. (:28-32) Animals Hurting People

Douglas Stuart: In the laws of this section concluding **chap. 21**, the bull is used as a sample animal. Sheep and some other animals were far more common, but the bull was the largest, strongest, and most dangerous of all the farm animals. So from the penalties imposed here related to bull behavior, a judge could reason “down the scale,” as it were, to various situations involving injuries by or to animals of lesser size and lethality. Again the structure of this section appears to involve a simple chiasm, this time of the laws about bulls (**vv. 28–32** and **35–36**) surrounding a law about animals falling to their death in an uncovered pit (**vv. 33–34**). In our culture grouping things chiasmically is not thought to be particularly useful; in ancient Israel, however, it served as a convenient way of ordering materials so that they could be memorized and remembered effectively. Ancient Israelites were so used to hearing concepts grouped concentrically or “sandwiched” within other concepts that they came to appreciate such patterns as mnemonic aids. Thus the law in **vv. 33–34** is neither an afterthought nor an awkward interpolation into the midst of some laws on goring bulls; it is merely a conveniently inserted law within laws of roughly similar content producing a “bull-pit-bull pattern” of farm animal laws intended to be remembered by judges and general citizens alike as a sampling of how to handle incidents that involved death or injury to or from animals.

1. (:28-29) Case of an Animal Killing a Person

a. (:28) No Punishment to the Owner for Unexpected Behavior

“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished.”

Douglas Stuart: People who own animals are responsible for their behavior, except when that behavior could not have been predicted or reasonably expected in advance. In **v. 28** the paradigm used to illustrate the legal principles intended to apply in such cases is that of a bull who killed someone, which was not what bulls usually or normally did. In such a situation, the bull's owner suffered loss of the bull (a considerable penalty in light of how expensive bulls were in any farm economy, even today) without even the chance to slaughter the bull and eat its meat (which would have been a means of partial recovery of the bull's value for its owner). Otherwise the owner had no further responsibility because there was presumably no way he or anyone else could have predicted such a thing from his bull. People worked with bulls/oxen all the time on their farms; a fatal goring from a bull was an unusual event, not a common one. Stoning the bull represented a safe way for people to kill it without danger to themselves; any other means of safely putting it to death would have been acceptable presumably as well.

b. (:29) Death Penalty to the Owner for Expected Behavior

“If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.”

Douglas Stuart: In **v. 29** the situation shifts to that of a bull already known to its owner to be dangerous. Here the owner who did not keep the bull properly confined had no excuse; if his bull killed someone, it was fully his fault that the person died, and the owner must be put to death for what today would be termed negligent homicide. The bull must also die since it would make little sense to keep it alive in light of the prospect of its killing someone else when given the chance.

How then could the law go on to say in **v. 30**, “*However, if payment is demanded of him ...*”? Doesn't this undermine the whole point of the preceding penalty description requiring the death penalty? It does not. This second part of the verse gave necessary leeway to the judges in complicated cases. Suppose the bull had tried to gore someone only once, many years previously, and someone had borrowed the bull against the owner's advice and had mistreated the bull and then was gored to death. Under such circumstances a judge might well decide (and this law gave him the freedom so to do) that the death penalty for the bull's owner would not be fair—a fine being far more appropriate to the actual level of culpability.

2. (:30) Mercy Possible When Ransom is Accepted

“If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him.”

Philip Ryken: According to God's law, when criminal negligence led to a deadly accident, strict justice demanded the death penalty. However, the law allowed a victim's family to show mercy by demanding restitution instead of retribution. Rather than executing the death penalty, they could demand a ransom, apparently set by the town's elders. The ransom was blood money, or what today we would call a death

indemnity. Obviously, no one could bring the family member back to life, and no price could ever equal the value of even one precious life. However, the payment of a ransom would at least acknowledge that the family had suffered a great loss.

3. (:31) No Differentiation Due to Sex of Victim

“Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule.”

David Thompson: So clearly the lives of children were just as sacred and significant as the lives of adults.

4. (:32) Lesser Penalty When a Slave is Killed

“If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”

B. (:33-34) Animals Hurt by Human Negligence

“And if a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34 the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead animal shall become his.”

Alan Cole: More likely for grain storage than water storage. Pits were also used as traps for animals (**2 Samuel 23:20**) or prisons for men (**Genesis 37:24**).

Douglas Stuart: X’s animal has no automatic right to be wandering around Y’s farm, near Y’s pit. Yes, animals could wander off; and yes, a deep pit was a dangerous thing to leave uncovered. But the owner of the wandering animal bore some responsibility for allowing it to wander off and therefore should be compensated at no greater a rate than the market value of the animal.

James Jordan: If you have a balcony, you had better put a rail on it, or you are liable if someone falls off (**Dt. 22:8**). If you have a pile of broken glass, make sure children cannot get to it. If you have a swimming pool, make sure access is limited. If you have an old refrigerator in your yard, make sure the door is broken so that children cannot shut themselves in it.

C. (:35-36) Animals Hurt by Someone Else’s Animal

1. (:35) Unexpected Behavior Results in Equal Settlement

“And if one man's ox hurts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox.”

2. (:36) Expected Behavior Results in Unequal Settlement

“Or if it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall become his.”

John Oswalt: The final group of covenant stipulations pertains to injury done by or to an animal (21:28–36). Here there are three principles being illustrated. The first is the sanctity of human life. So if an “ox” killed a man or woman, the ox had to be killed (21:28, 29, 32). This is in keeping with **Genesis 9:5–6**, where God said that he would require the blood of either human or animal that killed a human, who bears the image of God. This case is found in almost the same words in virtually every law code in the ancient Near East, but the idea of the absolute value of human life apart from economic considerations is unique to the Hebrew version of the case. The point is further underscored by **verse 35** which says that the ox which kills another ox is not required to be killed.

The second principle is that the degree of responsibility is mitigated by prior knowledge. If a person did not know that his ox posed a danger to others and thus did not take precautions, that person is absolved of responsibility for the ensuing death (21:28). The owner was doing everything that could be expected of him. However, failure to take precautions when the danger was known is not mere negligence; in the case of humans it is murder, and is to be treated as such (21:29), with the one provision that since no malicious intent was involved, the owner can negotiate with the family for his life by paying whatever compensation they demand (21:30). This principle of knowledge as responsibility is further expressed in **verses 33 and 34**, where it is said that if an animal falls into an uncovered pit, the one who left the pit uncovered is held responsible.

The third principle is the right of compensation for the loss of benefits through the action of another. The negligent owner, if the family of the victim permits it, can pay compensation for the lost life, and he must pay compensation to the owner for the life of a slave. Likewise, he must give the owner of a dead animal the full price of the animal (21:34, 36). Only in the case of an unanticipated killing of one animal by another do the two owners share the loss equally (21:35).

III. (22:1-15) PROPERTY LAWS AND PRINCIPLES OF RESTITUTION

Douglas Stuart: The advantage of restitution over residency is at least fourfold.

- (1) It compensates the victims of a crime more generously and more immediately than is the case in modern Western societies.
- (2) It requires the offender to deal directly with the person he has offended and to face the effects of his crime on that person.
- (3) It permits a repentant offender to continue a productive life immediately upon making restoration.
- (4) And it does not require society to provide housing, food, and clothing for the duration of the offender’s imprisonment.

In the logic of modern jurisprudence, however, potential disadvantages are also theoretically present in this system. In the main there are two: the richer the criminal,

the easier it is for him to make restitution, so only poor criminals tend to end up punished by some other means than restitution for their failure to compensate the victim; and imprisonment offers society the protection of keeping out of circulation the person who, if fines alone were allowed to suffice for his penalty, could engage in criminal activity again immediately.

Behind all the laws in this section is the simple principle that the person who causes someone else to lose something (whether personal property or real estate or money) by whatever means (from theft to mere neglect to bypassing the normal betrothal process) owes compensation to the person who has suffered the loss. The more intentional the means of deprivation (e.g., outright stealing), the higher the required restitution, normally calculated in multiples of the value of the loss suffered. Simple neglect was to be compensated on whatever level the judge in the case required. If no culpability was evident, however, no compensation was required. Some of these laws were intended to remind the Israelites that in God's providence, some things "just happened" and were no one's fault and therefore did not require restitution.

John Oswalt: This collection has to do with outright theft (22:1–4), loss through negligence by another (22:5–6), loss of something left in safekeeping (22:7–13), and loss of something borrowed (22:14–15). The principles illustrated are similar to or identical with those already encountered above. They include: Human life is more valuable than property; failure to exercise due care brings liability; situations beyond one's control usually absolve one of responsibility; accepting things for safekeeping involves a lower level of responsibility than does borrowing them. Central are the matters of intentionality and diligence. God's world is one of cause and effect in which humans have freedom, worth, dignity, and accountability, and in which they are expected to exercise due care on behalf of their neighbors' possessions.

A. (:1-4) Dealing with Thieves

1. (:1) Dealing with Stealing Livestock – Not Recoverable

*"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it,
he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep."*

Cf. **Luke 19** – example of the thief Zacchaeus – a heart transformed by the grace of God will want to make restitution

David Thompson: In God's society you were not given government handouts if you refused to work. So since criminal types are too lazy to work themselves, they are always looking to make a fast buck by stealing something someone else has. Stealing is never justifiable.

Now oxen were work animals and would be a little more difficult to steal, but a sheep would be a little easier to steal. God said the penalty is that a thief must pay restitution for each animal he stole. If he stole an ox, he must pay back five oxen for the one he stole, which is a 400% steep fine. If he stole a sheep, he must pay back four sheep for the one he stole, which is a 300% steep fine. This certainly was a detriment to stealing.

The sociologists, who claim that punishment does not deter crime, don't know what they are talking about because God's Word says it does.

Dale Crawford: We have to understand that an ox was the chief means of labor in an agrarian culture. The ox was the farmer's tractor.

- To lose an ox represented days lost of productivity.
- In addition, it took years to train a good ox – the loss of it was hard to replace.

2. (:2-3) Dealing with Thief Caught Breaking In

a. (:2) Justified Killing of a Thief at Night Time

“If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account.”

b. (:3a) Unjustified Killing of Thief in Day Time

“But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account.”

Douglas Stuart: Thus the present law allowed the use of deadly force against intruding thieves from sundown to sunup, but not during the daylight. The property owner could still defend against theft in the daytime but could not use lethal force in the process. The law, in other words, did not allow unlimited freedom to the victim of a crime to defend or retaliate. Even a criminal caught in the act of a serious crime had protections; conversely, even the victim of a serious crime could be prosecuted for murder if he resisted more violently than could be justified (thus the specific mention of being “guilty of bloodshed”).

John MacKay: In the light of day the house owner could assess the situation, identify the culprit and ensure that whatever damage or loss was sustained by his actions was brought to trial before the appropriate authorities. The owner was not permitted to deal summarily with the would-be thief. In this respect again there is a marked difference from what was permitted in surrounding countries. The Old Testament required that due regard be paid to the life of the thief.

James Jordan: I suggest that the meaning of the law is this: If you don't recognize him, and cannot deal with him in any other way, you may kill him; but if you know who he is, or have the strength to deal with him, you may not kill him. This will vary from situation to situation, and local ordinances specify what a shopkeeper or house owner may do to a person who breaks in.

b. (:3) Restitution Required of Captured Thief

“He shall surely make restitution;”

c. (:3b) Selling Into Slavery Allowed Where No Restitution Possible

“if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.”

3. (:4) Dealing with Stealing Livestock – Recoverable

“If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.”

Douglas Stuart: As in the previous chapter, in the present chapter are some instances of three or more laws being grouped in a concentric or chiasmic pattern, and vv. 1–4 appear to be such a grouping. **Verse 1** addresses victim compensation requirements for stealing livestock in the case of a thief who had actually been caught. **Verses 2–3a** address the difference between mere breaking and entering and actual burglary, indicating in the process the penalty meted out to a thief either on the spot by someone defending his farm or by a court. **Verse 3b** tells how to handle a situation in which a thief cannot make restitution for what he has stolen; and v. 4, completing the chiasm, again returns to the question of restitution for stolen animals but with the special qualification of reasonable doubt about the matter of intent on the part of the thief.

B. (:5-6) Damages Due to Neglect

1. (:5) Caused by Straying Animals

“If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed bare and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.”

David Thompson: No intelligent farmer or rancher would just allow his animal to wander over to other people's land and let them just graze and eat someone else's crops. Any responsible owner of animals knows you must protect your animals from doing destructive things to your neighbors.

At night you need to see that the animals are fenced in. Now if your sheep, goats, cows, horses, donkeys or oxen were just turned out to free graze and it went to someone else's property and ate from another man's field, the owner of the animal was responsible to make restitution by giving the best of his own field and vineyard. This could include things harvested and not harvested.

A goat would not just eat the fruit of the vine; it might eat the whole vine, so the vine would need to be replaced.

2. (:6) Caused by Out of Control Fire

“If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field itself is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution.”

John MacKay: Both these scenarios show that an individual is responsible for the indirect consequences of his actions on the property of others. He ought to consider the possible impact of what may go wrong through negligence. The principle involved is readily generalised into many other areas of life, for instance, in terms of the costs of pollution imposed by one party on others.

Dale Crawford: Both of these cases were accidents. The farmer didn't intend for his cattle to graze another man's field. The fire wasn't caused by arson. But the Bible teaches legal liability. In each case the restitution had to be made.

C. (:7-13) Disputes Over Custody of Property in Safekeeping

1. (:7-9) Property Reported Stolen

a. (:7) Restitution by the Captured Thief

"If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep for him, and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double."

Douglas Stuart: Verse 7 addresses the easiest circumstance: theft of goods given to someone else for safekeeping was the responsibility of the thief as long as he was caught. He must repay double (the standard for non-animal items), and the matter was closed between the person who entrusted his money (NIV "silver") or other goods to the neighbor.

b. (:8-9) Contested Settlement Decided by Judges

"If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property.

For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor."

Douglas Stuart: if both parties had (as the covenant expects) a proper fear of God (i.e., a fear of the consequence of disobeying him), it would normally be the case that, under oath, one of them would somehow and to some sufficient degree admit to being in the wrong in the dispute over the piece of property and would accept the requirement that he pay back double to his neighbor.

Philip Ryken: In the case of safekeeping, the person who asked his friend to watch his things assumed the risk. When it came to borrowing, however, the borrower had to take full responsibility. If something happened to borrowed property—even if it was only an accident—the borrower had to make full restitution. No penalties were involved because the borrower was innocent of wrongdoing, but he still had to make up the owner's loss. There were some exceptions. If the owner happened to be present when the accident or injury happened, then the owner had to take responsibility for his own property. It was up to him to make sure that everything possible was done to save the animal. The owner also had to take responsibility if the animal was hired rather than borrowed. In this case the rental price was supposed to cover the loss; so it was up to the owner to calculate the risk of hiring out his animal and factor it into his price.

2. (:10-13) Property Loss as it Relates to the Issue of Restitution

a. (:10-11) No Restitution if No Fault

“If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, 11 an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them, that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution.”

David Guzik: This principle is the foundation of our idea that a man is innocent until proven guilty. In this case, the man’s oath was taken as true unless proof to the contrary could be found.

b. (:12) Restitution if Stolen

*“But if it is actually stolen from him,
he shall make restitution to its owner.”*

Douglas Stuart: Verse 12, on the other hand, applies a standard that goes beyond the simple question of the innocence of the neighbor. Taking in an animal for safekeeping imposed a solemn responsibility on a person that required the person to preserve the animal from unobserved theft or pay restitution. One who agreed to keep an animal for another person for a time implicitly accepted this risk. The question might well be asked, “But since v. 13 exonerates the safekeeper from penalty if the animal could be proved to have been killed by a predator, why should the safekeeper be required to pay compensation for an animal that was stolen? The theft was no more his fault than the killing by the predator.” The answer lies in the provability: only if the thief was caught was the safekeeper innocent (v. 7). Otherwise, he could not prove that a theft had occurred and thus presumptively was considered personally responsible for the loss of the animal. Claiming that “it must have been stolen” was no defense under the law.

c. (:13) No Restitution if Proof of Being Torn to Pieces

*“If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence;
he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces.”*

D. (:14-15) Disputes Over Property Borrowed

1. (:14) Conditions Requiring Restitution

“And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution.”

2. (:15) Conditions Not Requiring Restitution

*“If its owner is with it, he shall not make restitution;
if it is hired, it came for its hire.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you think our legal system should be changed to put more emphasis on restitution and less on imprisonment? Does our legal system place enough emphasis on the victims of the crime or just the perpetrators?
- 2) In what ways were the civil laws of Israel more advanced and more just than the laws of the pagan cultures around them?
- 3) What can we learn about our own need to take personal responsibility for our actions from these case studies?
- 4) Are there any areas where we need to make restitution to others?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Oswalt: This group of regulations has to do with personal injury. The regulations fall into three subdivisions: (1) injuries resulting in capital punishment (**21:12–17**), (2) injuries not resulting in capital punishment (**21:18–27**), and (3) injuries caused by or to an animal (**21:28–36**). In the way they are formulated and expressed, either by amending, correcting, or affirming the legal traditions of the day, these covenant terms continue to reveal the character of God. As such, they teach that Yahweh places very high value on human life; that he values humans as persons not objects; that physical injury ought to be compensated, but not with physical retaliation; that intention and knowledge must be considered in applying justice; that justice is so important that it is not a matter for personal or family application; and that punishment must rest on the guilty, not on others.

John MacKay: Scripture does not try to set up some political system that would thereafter uniquely determine the social and economic conditions that should prevail. Salvation is not achieved by deciding on the optimal system to structure human society. What is required is inner change at the individual level. Even the best of systems is corrupted by the unworthy motives and wrong priorities of those who operate it. There are evil systems, and there are unfair and unjust social structures, but the real problem is a selfish and distorted perspective regarding what is equitable and righteous. It is the corruption of fallen human nature that is the fundamental flaw in the world. In his dealings with Israel, the Lord did not impose a new social and economic structure on his people. He rather sought to educate them in practices that were just and in this way to transform what was customary among the heathen nations that surrounded them. In the same way the New Testament church opposes evil and corrupt political systems, but its hope for their transformation lies in change that works from the individual level upwards—spiritual change rather than social engineering.

Philip Ryken: What these laws show is that people who don't count to us still count to God. The innocent bystander who is struck with a violent blow, the child ripped from his mother's womb, the slave beaten by his master—all of these people deserve special care. The fetus is not a mass of tissue. The slave is not a piece of property. We are all made in the image of God. Since we all need protection, we all need to protect one another. And whenever anyone is harmed, justice should be done. . .

When we take the time to study these laws carefully, we see how sensible they are. For some reason, the Old Testament has the reputation of being harsh. Probably this is because most people don't want anyone telling them what to do, as God does in his law. But the law is for our benefit, and God's laws about property are a good example. These regulations were a blessing because they taught God's people how to live in community. The law taught the people to respect one another's property. It gave guidelines for settling disputes. By demanding double compensation, it deterred would-be criminals, who knew that if they got caught they would have to pay back double what they had stolen. Through the irony of God's justice, they would lose exactly what they hoped to gain. Rather than being enriched, they would be impoverished. This kind of restitution also satisfied the victim. Not only did he get his property back, but he got double for his time and trouble. When these laws were properly carried out, they helped bring harmony to the community of faith. They dealt with sin in a way that restored relationships.

In addition to protecting property, these laws also protected life—the life of the thief. Other ancient laws generally put thieves to death. A famous example is Hammurabi's Code, which said, "If a seignior made a breach in a house, they shall put him to death in front of that breach and wall him in. If a seignior committed robbery and has been caught, that seignior shall be put to death." God's law was less harsh and more righteous because it protected property without destroying life. The law said, "*A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft*" (**Exod. 22:3b**). As far as God was concerned, putting a thief to death was unjust. If he was unable to make restitution, he was supposed to work until he could pay off his debts. So there was justice all the way around. The thief got what he deserved, and the victim got back what was rightfully his.

There was another difference between God's law and the laws of the pagans. In other ancient cultures, the penalty for theft was based on the social status of the victim. The justice system discriminated on the basis of class, determining a thief's punishment not by what he took, but by the person from whom he took it. Here again Hammurabi's Code provides an example when it imposes penalties on theft that vary with the status of the victim, depending on whether the ox was stolen from the king, temple, a man of middle station, a slave, etc. The sliding scale of penalties ranged from death at one end to tenfold at the other with thirtyfold in the middle for good measure. If the thief could not pay the penalty it was death. Several scholars have pointed out that one of the crucial differences between the Torah and the Babylonian codex is the fact that the former makes no distinction between rich and poor, king or priest.

Israel's law was different because the Israelites served a just God, who offers equal protection under his law. God is not on the side of the rich but also defends the poor. The more we study the legal cases in Exodus, the clearer it becomes that God's law is right and good. In fact, the Biblical principles of property law would help our own society. We are no longer bound by the specific details of the civil law given to Israel as a nation under God. These laws are not the law of our land. However, we are wise to follow their general principles for justice. When it comes to theft, our own justice system demands incarceration, but it doesn't always provide restitution. Sometimes thieves are thrown in jail, but they don't always have to pay what they owe. Or if they do, the fines are sometimes paid to the state rather than straight to the victim, as the law of Moses required. Corporate fraud is the perfect example. Even when crooked executives are found guilty—which isn't often—their victims almost never get back what they've lost. But God's property law is different. It doesn't demand jail time at all, but it does require thieves to pay back everything they owe.

God's law also requires restitution when people are negligent. The wildfire in the farmer's field is an interesting example because the same thing sometimes happens in America. . .

Whenever we do something that damages someone else's property—whether we meant to do it or not—we need to rectify the damage. It is not enough to say, "Sorry! It was an accident" and then expect other people to pay for what we've done. An apology is a good start, but justice demands that we make things right. . .

Sometimes victims demand too much. Everyone has heard stories about outrageous lawsuits, like the man who sued the fast-food restaurants for causing his heart disease. However, it is right for genuine victims to have their true losses restored. If people would simply follow this basic Biblical principle for restitution, it would solve many problems in personal relationships.

The other property laws can be applied in similar ways. We should be careful to take good care of anything we borrow—better than if it belonged to us. And if anything happens to what we borrow, we should be prepared to make full restitution. Anyone who has stolen anything should give it back, and then some. In most situations this means giving back twice as much as we took. To apply this personally, ask the following questions: Have I helped myself to something that wasn't really mine? Have I taken advantage of a client in a business deal? Is there anything in my home that doesn't belong to me? Even if it's something that was stolen a long time ago, it needs to be given back. To be right with God, we need to make things right with another, which means giving back anything that doesn't belong to us.

TEXT: Exodus 22:16 – 23:9

TITLE: MORE RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND JUDICIAL OBLIGATIONS

BIG IDEA:

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT REVEALS HOW OUR VIEW OF GOD MUST IMPACT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS (ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE) AND OUR PURSUIT OF JUSTICE AND HOLINESS

INTRODUCTION:

Our theology must impact how we live out the details of our daily lives. These specific commands from the Book of the Covenant reveal how the character of God should be manifested in how we treat others and how we pursue our relationship with God. Since God is gracious and merciful and compassionate, we must act likewise. Since God is the protector of the most vulnerable in society, we must make sure that their rights are not abused. Since God is holy, we must pursue consecration and holiness. Since God is just, we must be committed to impartial justice.

Kevin McAteer: This passage describes various societal crimes that Israel was to avoid. So what does God want us to learn from this?

- Be sexually pure (22:16-17)
- Don't engage in idolatrous practices (22:18-20)
- Help the weak (22:21-27)
- Honor God (22:28-31)

I. (22:16-17) PROVIDING DOWRY PAYMENT FOR SEDUCING A VIRGIN

A. (:16) Necessity of a Dowry

“And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her to be his wife.”

John MacKay: Betrothal, the pledge to enter into marriage, played a far more significant role in the ancient world than engagement does today. Betrothal was a public and legally binding act in which the bridegroom paid the bride-price to the bride's family. Although the marriage was not at that point consummated, the marriage bond was considered as validly instituted. The bride-price was not really paid to purchase the girl, though that was what occurred in the case of a concubine (21:7–11). The bride-price, or bridal money, was a form of compensation for the loss of a daughter's services. It is probable that her father only acquired the right to enjoy the property or anything produced by it, and that it became the woman's when her father or her husband died, or the marriage broke down.

Robert Rayburn: We still today require the young man to pay if a child is conceived, but we have stopped caring about the loss of virginity itself. The social problems that

have ensued from that loss of concern for virginity are some of the most painful and costly that we face as a society. You will notice that the father isn't under any obligation to give his daughter to this man.

B. (:17) No Necessity for a Marriage

*“If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him,
he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.”*

Douglas Stuart: Paying a price for a bride can seem a practice degrading to women, one that treats them as mere property. This was not the way it was understood in ancient Israel. In fact, it honored the value of a woman. Consider that the system does not allow one to think of price paid as an indicator of worth since the bride pays zero for her husband (there was no dowry system in ancient Israel), yet there is no doubt of the husband's worth. Part of the utility of a bride price was the way it forced a man to make a full and formal arrangement for marriage that properly involved both his interests and those of his bride-to-be, as well as the interests of his family and hers. The bride price requirement necessarily involved the families in substantial formal negotiations, and the price showed that something serious and important was at stake. Taking a woman to oneself and taking away her virginity were honorable if the proper negotiations had been completed, and a proper indication of her worth had been paid to her family, and the couple were legally married. Simply having sexual relations with her, with or without her permission, devalued her and showed blatant disregard for her worth. It also showed that a person (or when the premarital sex was consensual, that the couple) viewed marriage or its covenant sign (sexual intercourse) as less than a formal, legal, lifelong contractual commitment. The betrothal/bride price system was designed to make marriage harder to come by than what could be achieved on whim or quick decision, and it elevated marriage accordingly because people instinctively value what is hard and costly to get.

Thus when a couple failed to go properly through the marriage negotiation process and had sexual relations anyway, the law required the man to pay the bride price. The father of the bride remained in the negotiator's position of being able to refuse to give his bride to her suitor (because if he loved his daughter, he would hardly want to see her married permanently to someone wrong for her just because she had been “seduced”). Since it would be much harder to marry her to someone else once she had been sexually compromised, he was still owed the bride price for her, lest no bride price ever be paid in the case that she was never, in fact, married thereafter. If he did allow her to marry the man she had already compromised herself with, whatever bride price was negotiated for the marriage prevailed.

Philip Ryken: A bride was not a commodity. In fact, rather than treating a woman as a piece of property, these laws were for her protection. There are always men around who would like to have the pleasures of sex without the responsibilities of marriage. Given the chance, they will take advantage of a young woman. But sex should never be separated from a covenant commitment. So in Israel a man couldn't just sleep around. If he seduced a girl, he had to do the right thing, which was to marry her.

There was one exception. Even after a seduction, a father could refuse to allow a man to marry his daughter. By itself, the act of intercourse did not establish a marriage, as if the couple were “married in the sight of God.” No; if they were to be married at all, they had to be married properly, which included having the father’s blessing. In most cases he would probably consent, partly to protect his daughter’s reputation. But if he thought that the man was unsuitable, he had the right of refusal. This provided a strong incentive for a man who wanted to get married to conduct himself in an honorable way. If he went ahead and had sex with a girl, he was really pushing his luck! He still had to get her father’s permission, only now his character was in question.

Furthermore, if her father did refuse, then the man still had to pay the wedding-price! He had robbed the woman of her virginity, which would make it harder for her to get married. Some people would probably treat her as “damaged goods.” However, if she had her wedding-price, then at least she would have some means of support. This might also make it easier for another man to marry her, because he wouldn’t have to pay the wedding-price.

These laws were designed to promote godly patterns of courtship, marriage, and sex—in that order. Although the cultural context has changed, many of the same basic principles still apply. Ordinarily a couple who has shared intercourse should get married, but this is not automatic. It is better to avoid a bad marriage. And when it comes to marriage, fathers have a duty to look after their daughters. Under ordinary circumstances, when a couple (especially a young couple) wants to get married, they should seek the permission and blessing of the woman’s father.

Sex is for marriage, and not just for personal pleasure. Therefore, single men are called to sexual purity, and they bear full responsibility before God for any misconduct. This is not to say that women don’t have to answer to God for their own sin. But there is a Biblical principle of male leadership that is designed to protect women. These days most women have to look out for themselves, which puts them in an extremely vulnerable position. Things ought to be different in the church. A real man of God can be trusted to preserve his own chastity and to protect the purity of women. When a man fails to do this he causes real damage, and God will hold him accountable. This may seem old-fashioned to some, but it is in keeping with the character of God. Because he is holy and pure, he wants us to preserve the purity of our sexuality.

II. (22:18-20) PRONOUNCING DEATH PENALTY FOR SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

Douglas Stuart: That we have entered in **22:18–23:9** a new section of the Covenant Code is signaled by the change of legal style: virtually this entire section is written in **apodictic** legal wording, the alternative to the previously dominant **casuistic** legal style. In apodictic law the commands are given mostly in the second person, and the

individual laws represent generally applicable legal instruction rather than the citation of cases designed to give a feel for particular situations and how to deal with them. . .

These apodictic laws pay special attention to crimes that should receive the death penalty (**22:18–20**, expressed paradigmatically by three capital punishment laws), laws forbidding the abuse of one's neighbor (**22:21–27**), laws that call attention to the importance of preserving God's holy honor (**22:28–31**), and a series of laws impressing on Israel the need for honesty in all relationships (**23:1–8**). Helping to unify this section of the Covenant Code is the twice-stated reminder that since the Israelites were themselves aliens in Egypt, they should remember the painful disadvantage of noncitizen status and be careful not to take advantage of anyone in an inferior social position (**22:21; 23:9**). This double reminder concludes both the opening set of laws (**22:18–20**) and the closing set (**23:1–8**) in the section and thus generally serves the function of an *inclusio* to surround and set off the remainder.

John Oswalt: The three stipulations in **22:18–20** involve the **death penalty**, probably because all of them involve behavior that grows out of the pagan understanding of reality and are thus in defiance of the true order of reality that God was trying to teach through the covenant. . . As later Israelite history would show all too amply, to lose the battle on these points would, without divine intervention, be to lose the entire war. God is not the world; there is a boundary between him and it which creatures cannot cross. Furthermore, there is a boundary between humans and the rest of creation. Paganism, insisting that humans, the natural world, and the divine are continuous with one another, denies these boundaries in every way it can. Activities such as sorcery, bestiality, and polytheistic idolatry were central expressions of this worldview of continuity. If the actual nature of God's transcendence was to be learned and accepted, these activities and all that they represented could never be granted acceptable status in Israel.

James Jordan: Why these three laws? Obviously they are designed to sum up the demand for covenant fidelity, but what is the reason for their selection? I believe that it relates to the three offices of prophet, king, and priest. Offering false sacrifices is infidelity to God in the area of priesthood. Witchcraft is used to gain knowledge and information the false way (cf. **1 Sam. 28**), infidelity to God in the area of prophecy. (But cf. **Ezk. 13:17–23**.) Bestiality is religiously an act of chaos, designed to obtain power, and thus infidelity to God in the area of kingship or dominion. Man was made to rule animals, not to get power from them (**Gen. 1:28**). The suitable mate for a man is a woman, not an animal (**Gen. 2:18–25**). Bestiality entails a thoroughgoing reversal of dominion.

J. Ligon Duncan: we see three capital crimes dealt with: sorcery, bestiality and idolatry. Notice here how the first, second, and seventh commandments are being applied. What we learn from this passage is that there are some crimes that are particularly spiritually injurious to the covenant community. These laws are all put in the imperative; they sound just like The Ten Commandments. "You shall not allow; shall surely be put to death; shall utterly be destroyed." You get the imperative feel of The Ten Commandments even though they are dealing with specific situations. They are not

phrased like the previous case laws--if this happens, if this happens, if this such and such. They are imperative; they are categorical laws about society; they are categorical ethical statements or religious stipulations and that reminds us that they are basic and fundamental.

A. (:18) Sorcery

“You shall not allow a sorceress to live.”

Douglas Stuart: Sorcery led people astray from placing their faith in Yahweh alone by inviting them to think that with the help of a medium (as in the story of Saul and the medium at Endor, **1 Sam 28**) or enchantress or the like, they could learn hidden information or gain power over their enemies, and so on. The term “sorceress” encompasses a range of occult practices, any and all of which were forbidden to Israelites. Sorcery is condemned throughout the Old Testament (e.g., **Lev 19:26; Deut 18:9–14; 2 Kgs 9:21–26; 17:17; Jer 27:8–11; Mic 5:10–15; Nah 3:1–4; Mal 3:5**) and in the New Testament as well (e.g., **Acts 8:9ff; 13:6–8; 19:19**).

Philip Ryken: Sorcerers told fortunes, communicated with the dead, and generally practiced the rituals of the occult. All of these activities were absolutely forbidden in Israel (see **Deut. 18:9–14**). Other ancient cultures tried to make a distinction between black magic and white magic, which supposedly was used for good rather than evil. But white magic is as much a tool of the devil as black magic. Any attempt to know God’s will apart from his revelation or to prevail over his will by using satanic powers is an evil attack on his sovereignty. Sorcery is a sin because God wants to be trusted, not manipulated.

J. Ligon Duncan: Sorcery is a challenge to the sovereignty and providence of God. It is either an attempt, in some cases, to know the future that God has prepared, or in other cases, it is an attempt to manipulate the future that God has prepared. In other cases it is an attempt to usurp His sovereignty and providence over His people by doing harm to people through magic; and therefore, it is a challenge to God and is considered a capital crime in Israel.

B. (:19) Bestiality

“Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.”

Douglas Stuart: Bestiality (“sexual relations with an animal”) is a relatively uncommon practice but stands paradigmatically as an example of the sorts of perversions Yahweh’s covenant will not countenance. A person who practices bestiality shows himself to be someone who has no regard for godliness, but the practice goes beyond this in its significance. It also was apparently associated with various Canaanite fertility practices and thus was somewhat like the prohibition against boiling a goat kid in its mother’s milk. It represented the replacement of sexually based fertility religion for the saving truth of Yahweh’s covenant.

Bruce Hurt: Why is bestiality condemned so strongly? First, it is an unnatural perversion. Clearly, human beings were designed/intended to mate with other human beings, not animals. In the creation account, none of the animals were “suitable” for Adam (**Genesis 2:20**). Second, bestiality represents the ultimate of sexual deviancy. The fact that the animal was to be put to death (**Leviticus 20:15-16**), despite the fact that it would be “innocent,” indicates how wickedly perverse bestiality is. Third, and perhaps most importantly, bestiality essentially denies the uniqueness of humanity which God created in His image (**Genesis 1:27**). Bestiality lowers humanity to nothing more than an animal, a beast which is unable to distinguish right from wrong, natural from unnatural, love from lust.

Robert Rayburn: In those days as in our own, sex had widely been detached from its divinely ordered purpose and used simply as a means of physical thrill or, worse, as a method of accessing spiritual power. In jaded ages, the thrill is more and more likely to be induced by various forms of perversion. But this debases God’s gift and uses it not to adorn and bless the life of mankind, to draw men and women together in a sacred and unbreakable bond, to imitate God in creating life, but only for sensual fulfillment. Such behavior strips man of his dignity and renders him more like a beast than a creature created in the image of God. Such behaviors are not private in their consequences. Abroad in a culture such as ours, such practices alter man’s view of himself and of the nature of human life. We have seen this alteration happen before our very eyes in recent years. Additionally, it seems very likely that bestiality also had some religious significance for the Canaanites (who practiced sexual fertility rites of various kinds) and this is another commandment meant to separate Israel’s religious practices entirely from those of the peoples of the Promised Land to which she was going.

C. (:20) Polytheism or Idolatry

“He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed.”

Douglas Stuart: “Whoever sacrifices to” is the virtual equivalent of “whoever worships.” There was no religion in the ancient world that did not employ sacrifice (the offering of food) as a key part of worship, so “sacrifice” functions as a synecdoche for “worship.” Thus this command says, in effect, “Worship only Yahweh, and if you try to introduce any other worship into the covenant people, you must be put to death.” Again the severity of the crime stems from its potential to keep people from the eternal salvation that was possible in the true God alone and therefore simply could not be achieved by fidelity to any other gods, whether by themselves or in syncretistic tandem with Yahweh.

III. (22:21-27) PROHIBITING OPPRESSION AGAINST THE VULNERABLE

Douglas Stuart: The terms “aliens,” “widows,” “orphans,” “poor/needy” are not intended to be an exhaustive list of certain categories of people. Instead they are intended to be evocative of the entire range of disadvantaged, unprotected, and easily

mistreated individuals and groups in ancient times, including those among the Israelites who were disadvantaged in any way. Any of these words or any group of these words in any combination can function as a synecdoche for “any or all unprotected people.” No government welfare system existed in Israel. It was the responsibility of the covenant community—each Israelite, assuming the covenant was actually kept faithfully—to contribute his share of the welfare burden personally (rather than through taxes), to avoid personally any discrimination against the needy in any way, and to treat all those in need or of limited resources as brothers and sisters, virtual family members. Yahweh himself was the enforcer of this demand for fair treatment of all the “little” people anywhere in Israel (vv. 23–24, 27). He would not allow his people to act in a discriminatory manner, that is, in the manner of pagans. Their calling was to a higher standard, which reflected his own compassion for all. If they obeyed his covenant fully, he would prosper them sufficiently that they could have enough for themselves and enough left over to take care of those who, for whatever reason, could not make a living (cf. **Deut 15:4**).

John Oswalt: But if there is one God, who is not the world and cannot be manipulated through the world, and if he has made all humans in his own image and, as such, values them too much to manipulate them for his own ends, then everything is different. That is what we see in this section. Three specific classes of people are mentioned to represent all the rest. They are the non-Israelite permanent resident (**22:21**), the widow and orphan (**22:22–24**), and the poor (**22:25–27**). All of these people are vulnerable in one way or another, either because they have no clan, no husband or father, or no economic means with which to protect themselves. So God establishes himself as their protector (**22:24, 27**). Anyone who tries to abuse them for his or her own ends will have God to contend with, and they may well find themselves in the condition of those they are trying to exploit (**22:24**).

In all, God provides three reasons why the people should give up any attempt to manipulate those who are weaker than they. First, they should remember that they are finally no different than those they are tempted to oppress. They were once resident aliens in Egypt, and that they are no longer so is through no merit of their own (cf. **Deut 10:18–19**). Second, such manipulation is contrary to the character of the God with whom they are in covenant (**22:27**). Third, these are God’s covenant people (“*my people*,” **22:25**), and it would be dangerous to tamper with his partners.

If I have understood the relationship between **22:18–20** and **22:21–27** correctly, it makes the content of the third section (**22:28–31**) more understandable. If it is necessary to counteract the wrong view of humanity that a wrong view of reality produces, what practices (and attitudes) will be characteristic of a right view of reality? That is the question I believe this group of stipulations is addressing. **Verse 28** is then somewhat **transitional**. It would dishonor God to treat the poor as mere stepping stones to one’s own wealth. He does not treat them as objects and neither may those who name themselves by his name. But they would also dishonor God when they gave him less than their best. If they gave him only what they did not have a better use for, they were

suggesting that he is not the one, the ultimate creator, outside of time and space, beyond the grasp of their magical offerings.

So **verses 29 and 30** call for the giving of one's best, one's first, to God. By giving the first of crops, children, and animals, they were testifying that all they had was a gift from him. Thus, the offerings of the first and the firstborn were not an attempt to magically manipulate God into giving more, but rather a way of expressing thanks for what he had given and faith that as he had given so he would continue.

The final verse, **22:31**, wraps up this point first in a very holistic way and then in a very specific way. First, it sums up what has been said: "*You must be my holy people.*" Why was God calling them to abandon the pagan way of understanding reality? Why was he calling them not to treat people as though they could be manipulated for one's own benefit? Because he wanted them to belong exclusively to him and to share his character—to be holy (cf. **19:6**). That is God's goal for the entire human race, and he began with Israel. But then from the completely global he honed in to the narrowly specific. He gave Israel a glimpse of the broad picture, but knowing that they were hardly ready to grasp even the edges of that picture, he focused them on something practical that they could grasp in its entirety: Blood contains the mystery of life; that mystery is entirely in God's hands; people who belong completely to God leave that mystery in his hands, so they don't eat meat with blood in it.

Alan Cole: **Verses 21–27** deal with the protection of the 'underprivileged' classes; aliens, widows, orphans and poor folk in general. It is striking, as **Noth** says, that all this is apodeictic, not casuistic; that is to say, it is basic to Israel's law, not a deduction from it. Israel must care for the poor and helpless, because YHWH cares for them: that is his very nature.

Robert Rayburn: Taking all biblical texts together, the loaning of money at interest is not forbidden in the Bible. What is forbidden is excessive interest when circumstances make that possible and loaning money at interest to a fellow believer who finds himself in difficult straits. If a fellow Israelite wanted money with which to build up his business, this law would not prohibit such a loan, even from a fellow Israelite. What is being forbidden is taking advantage of someone's misfortune. That would be mistreatment of the poor. God himself is merciful and his people must be as well. If they are not, they will have to answer to him. That is, you remember, a large part of the argument of prophets like Amos and Hosea. They accuse Israel of mistreating the poor and threaten God's vengeance as a consequence.

A. (:21) Oppressing Foreigners

1. Prohibition

"And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him,"

David Thompson: Strangers were not citizens of Israel; they were "resident aliens." They could not own permanent land among the Tribes and they could not have family backing in legal matters and they could not be involved in political matters. God did not

want His people treating these strangers in an abusive way. He did not want them treated in an alienated or discriminatory way. He wanted them treated decently and with respect.

2. Rationale

“for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

John MacKay: Such individuals were liable to be exploited, and their situation could be difficult because they had no family connections in the community or anyone who would help them protect their rights. A motive clause recalling Israel’s own history gives the reason why they were not to ‘ill-treat’ (act unfairly or with lack of consideration) or ‘oppress’ an alien. ‘Oppress’ is literally ‘squeeze’ and was used of the way Balaam’s donkey pressed both herself and his foot against the wall (**Num. 22:25**). It came to be applied to all forms of physical and psychological oppression. The Israelites knew what it had been like to be aliens in Egypt and to receive such treatment (**1:11**). They were therefore to treat aliens among them with care and respect (**Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19**).

B. (:22-24) Afflicting Widows and Orphans

1. (:22) Prohibition

“You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.”

2. (:23) Petition

*“If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me,
I will surely hear his cry;”*

3. (:24) Retribution

*“and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword;
and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.”*

C. (:25-27) Charging of Interest to Poor Israelites

1. (:25) Prohibition

“If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The main problem was that charging interest of one’s brother was a way of avoiding responsibility to the poor and to one’s fellow man.

2. (:26-27a) Qualification – Taking of a Pledge

“If you ever take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, 27 for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in?”

Douglas Stuart: This law addresses loan sureties, the properties that people put up as “collateral” for a loan to assure the lender that they will repay. Normally a lender’s incentive to grant a loan is the confidence that if the borrower defaults, the lender can

then take the property as his own in compensation for the unrecovered money. In the case of this law, as opposed to the law immediately preceding, a distinction is made between the way a poor person and a non-poor person must be treated. The presumption of the law is that most people have property that does not represent their very survival or the continuance of their health and that if that sort of property is pledged as surety on a loan, such collateral is allowable.

By contrast, people who own so little that they would actually have to pledge an essential item to obtain a loan (the instance paradigmatically cited being a cloak needed to keep warm at night) must be exempted from the requirement of putting up a surety—or else have the essential surety returned to them nightly. Otherwise their health would be put at risk by the loan, and that is unacceptable to Yahweh. A law such as this is patently paradigmatic; for “cloak” one could substitute food, job, shelter, family member, or any other “essential” thing.

3. (:27b) Petition

*“And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me,
I will hear him, for I am gracious.”*

John MacKay: There is then spelled out the reason why this sort of behaviour is expected in Israel. It is because it reflects the character of the Lord himself. This is a unique feature of Israel’s law code, not found in the surrounding nations, for what king—or for that matter what modern legislator?—would set himself up as the standard for the behaviour he expects to see among his people? But it is different with Israel’s covenant King. He both sets the standard of behaviour for his people and provides them with a living embodiment of it. The law code he has given is not a document for administrators and judges, but one that he expects to be regularly read to his people, and in it he urges them to become like himself.

IV. (22:28-31) PURSUING HOLINESS

A. (:28) Cursing Authorities

1. Cursing God

“You shall not curse God,”

2. Cursing Rulers

“nor curse a ruler of your people.”

David Thompson: Now the word “curse” is in the Piel stem and it has been debated as to the purpose of the stem. It seems to stress the fact that this is a serious, aggressive form of verbal attack with the goal of undermining or harming a leader.

B. (:29-30) Consecrating Offerings to the Lord in a Timely Fashion

1. (:29a) Offerings

“You shall not delay the offering from your harvest and your vintage.”

Douglas Stuart: Respect for God’s holiness also implies keeping basic rules such as the tithe and the firstborn offering because these are things that he rightfully owns and are thus due him automatically. Withholding these from him represents a direct act of defiance, an open (to him even if not to others) refusal to cooperate with his covenant by keeping from him those things that directly show that he is the sovereign and that all things belong to him. Any Israelite might be tempted to keep back offerings or payments to God of any sort, just as people today tend to make religious and charitable offerings from what they regard as their discretionary (leftover) income rather than even placing such giving in the same category as mortgage or car payments—let alone giving them the highest priority of all. God can seem less demanding, less threatening, more “distant,” more forgiving than the tax collector or the lending institution, and what is owed him can therefore end up being treated as secondary to what is owed to others. Note also the stern reminder in **30:15** relative to bringing tithes and offerings to the central sanctuary at the annual feast times. “No one is to appear before me empty-handed” (**23:15**).

2. (:29b-30) First-born

a. (:29b) Sons

“The first-born of your sons you shall give to Me.”

b. (:30) Livestock

*“You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep.
It shall be with its mother seven days;
on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.”*

C. (:31) Call to Holiness

1. Command

“And you shall be holy men to Me,”

Philip Ryken: This is what God wants from us as well: comprehensive holiness. We have been set apart to serve God. God wants us to be like him, so that our whole lives are stamped with his character. What we do with our bodies, the way we care for the needy, the way we handle our money—in all these things, both large and small, we are called to holiness because we serve a holy God. The Scripture says, “*Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’*” (**1 Pet. 1:15, 16**).

2. Application

*“therefore you shall not eat any flesh torn to pieces in the field;
you shall throw it to the dogs.”*

John MacKay: All this reflected on the special status of Israel as the ‘*holy nation*’ (**19:6**), the people set apart for special divine service. They are therefore required to acknowledge this status by acting in an appropriate way. You are to be my holy people. So do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs (**22:31**). Regulations regarding what to eat and what not to eat may seem to us to be far removed

from holiness, but they were given by God to act as perpetual symbolic reminders to Israel of their privileged status as individuals and as a community. They had been given life by the God of life, and this was reflected in the fact that they were not permitted to eat animals that they found in open country. ('By wild beasts' is a free rendering of 'in the field', that is, open country.) Such animals had been killed by unclean predators and their flesh was not fit for consumption by God's special people. It should only be eaten by scavenging animals such as dogs. Later in Deuteronomy permission is also given to give such meat to aliens living in their midst or to sell it to foreigners (**Deut. 14:21**). The problem was not with the quality of the flesh, but with its associations and the fact that the Lord wanted the best for his people.

Wiersbe: The reason behind this law is both religious and hygienic. The bodies of animals slaughtered incorrectly would still contain blood, and the eating of blood was forbidden (Lev. 22:8). Furthermore, a carcass lying in the field could quickly become spoiled and spread disease.

John MacArthur: Flesh of an animal killed by another and lying in the field became unclean by coming into contact with unclean carnivores and insects and with putrefaction by not having had the blood drained properly from it. A set-apart lifestyle impacted every area of life, including from where one collected his meat.

V. (23:1-9) PURSUING JUSTICE

Douglas Stuart: The laws in this section appear to be grouped chiastically, with **vv. 1–3** and **vv. 6–9** employing apodictic legal style in addressing various sorts of potential violations of the legal system, including denial of justice to easily oppressable groups. Sandwiched between them are **vv. 4–5**, a small group of laws in casuistic format addressing the kind of attitude toward others in the community and basic moral behavior that should characterize God's covenant people even when no legal requirement per se is at issue.

John MacKay: But what all of these do have in common is the idea that behind all the circumstances of life stands the inviolable truth. That truth stands regardless of a person's station in life, and regardless of the number or type of people who are for it or against it. Just as there are inviolate boundaries between creator and creation, and between human and nature, so there are inviolate boundaries between what is so and what is not so. And what is so—the truth—may not be corrupted for self-serving or self-protecting reasons. It supersedes the circumstances of a person's situation. If the truth is in a person's favor, then so be it. But if it is not in a person's favor, so be it as well. Thus, these deceptively simple requirements are a powerful attack on the relativity of truth. But at the same time, they are also an attack on truth as mere abstraction. Precisely because the truth about truth is presented in the context of the life and behavior of persons, it is made profoundly clear that God is not first of all concerned about truth for its own sake. Rather, just as he is "true" in all his dealings with his creation, he expects his people to be true in all their dealings with one another and with

their world. It is in being true to others whether they are rich or poor, powerful or helpless, friends or enemies, innocent or guilty, that we show whether we know the truth.

J. Ligon Duncan: With this message, we come to a section that in the main applies the ninth commandment-- the commandment not to bear false witness. In the main, this set of laws or exhortations, calls on the people of God and especially on those who are in positions of influence—judges for instance, to be truthful in their dealings in the settings of the courts, but also it exhorts us to kindness to our enemies....First, **verses 1 through 3**, where we see these dictates for personal and practical obedience to the ninth commandment. What we learn in this passage is that our personal commitment to holiness is to show itself in our public fairness and truthfulness in the context of disputes. The language of this whole section, really **verses 1 through 9**, but especially **verses 1 through 3**, sounds a lot like the Ten Commandments. Did you catch the five “you shall nots” in the first three verses? **Verse 1:** “You shall not.” **Verse 2:** “You shall not.” **Verse 3:** “Nor shall you.” Over and over “you shall not.” General exhortation, general prohibition, no penalty. These are not like those case laws we were studying just a few verses ago. These sound like those grand exhortations of the Ten Commandments. “Thou shall not kill.” The language sounds like the Ten Words. We have here, then, categorical laws; these aren’t like the case laws. If this happens, then you do this; if this happens, then you do this. These are categorical laws—no penalties—they are exhortations. They come with some threatenings. Five prohibitions are found in **verses 1 through 3** which outlaw behavior in courts of law that would jeopardize the integrity and the impartiality of the judicial process. These laws in **verse 1 through 3** are applications of the ninth command. You shall not bear false witness, and the exhortations of **verses 1 through 3** are especially directed at the people of Israel. When we get to **verses 6 through 9**, they will be directed primarily to the judges of Israel. But first Moses speaks to the people of Israel specifically about their behavior in legal settings and legal proceedings. And these commands indicate how seriously God takes impartial justice and the well-being of our neighbor even if we are in dispute with our neighbor.

A. (:1-3) Integrity in the Context of the Legal System

1. (:1) Avoid False Reports

*“You shall not bear a false report;
do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.”*

Douglas Stuart: False reports undermine the legal/judicial system by creating conditions that can lead to the conviction and punishment of an innocent person, robbing that person of the liberty that Yahweh’s deliverance and protection of his people was intended to provide.

David Thompson: When we spread something false, we damage the individual and the community. False allegations, unproved speculations can do great harm to someone innocent. Wise counsel is do not start a false report, do not give a false report and do not spread a false report.

2. (:2) Resist Peer Pressure

“You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;”

Douglas Stuart: This law calls for individual believers, who in so many other cases are expected to conform to the group (as in worship or in keeping any apodictic law applicable to everyone at all times) to be willing to think and act as individuals clearly enough and righteously enough that they can stand against all others in their actions or testimony.

John MacKay: Even if you have to swim against the tide of prevailing ideas, pressure to conform to the outlook even of an overriding majority should be avoided if it involves injustice. This is not a matter of actively conspiring as in **verse 1**, but of permitting one’s perception of an affair to be unduly shaped by the consensus viewpoint.

David Thompson: God’s people are never to join in with a majority mob that is moving away from God and His Word and is out to do evil. Justice is never to be perverted even if the multitude of people is behind it. This is exactly what happened to Jesus Christ.

3. (:3) Don’t Show Partiality

“nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.”

Douglas Stuart: But the law, in an efficiency of expression, covers both the more likely temptation and the less likely temptation by citing the latter, *“and do not show favoritism to a poor man.”* It has the effect of saying, “Do not show favoritism to anyone in any testimony you ever give or judgment you ever make—neither out of fear of the powerful or hope for personal gain nor out of sympathy for the suffering of the lowly.” *“His lawsuit”* is ambiguous; it could mean the lawsuit initiated by a poor person, but could also refer to virtually any involvement in a legal case of a poor person, either as plaintiff or defendant.

B. (:4-5) Assistance Even Towards Your Personal Enemies

1. (:4) Catch and Return

“If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him.”

Douglas Stuart: By placing these sorts of laws in the midst of laws that concentrate on honest, godly behavior in cases of lawsuits, God in effect said to his people, “In the midst of giving you laws about lawsuit behavior, I want to insert a reminder that I expect you truly to love your neighbor in every situation, no matter how your selfish inclinations might cause you to feel.”

The commands to catch and return to one’s enemy his errant ox or donkey and to help one’s enemy take care of his donkey in an accident represent serious challenges to normal selfish behavior and even to what might narrowly be regarded as prudent

behavior. Most people would be disinclined to help an enemy (someone resented or troublesome or to whom one is motivated to be hostile for whatever reason) or would at least stay away from someone who showed hostility. Note that v. 5 provides as a parallel for “*your enemy*” in v. 4 the expression “*someone who hates you*” rather than “someone you hate,” thus eliminating the possibility of arguing, “I’d be glad to help someone I hate, but it might not be safe to get involved with someone who hates me!” Comprehended in the law is virtually every situation of helping people. If one is required to help even those who have made themselves one’s enemy, surely one would be required to help those who were more neutral on the scale of hostility, such as complete strangers or people who might merely be regarded as lazy in their care of their animals or the like. And, of course, friends and family and actual neighbors would be included as well.

James Jordan: God’s law is realistic. It does not command us to feel a liking, in the modern sense of “like,” for our personal enemies, which we may well be simply unable to do. Rather, it commands us to do good to them, which is well within our power. Doing good will bring about an emotional change in us, if such is needed.

2. (:5) Release and Return

“If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.”

Aid the Ass!

Wiersbe: The words *enemy’s* (23:4) and *someone who hates you* (v. 5) probably mean “a legal adversary”; an Israelite was to be kind even to the animals of someone with whom he had a legal disagreement.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: **Deuteronomy 22:1-3** gives fuller details on a man’s responsibility to his brother in the matter of restoring a lost animal or helping one in difficulty. This act of compassion was owed to one another regardless whether the man was an enemy (v. 4) or one who hated him (v. 5). Kindness to one’s enemy is commanded in **Job 31:29** and **Proverbs 25:21-22**. Never does the OT command, “*Hate your enemy*,” as the oral tradition of Jesus’ day enjoined (Matt. 5:43).

C. (:6-9) Integrity in the Context of the Legal System

1. (:6) No Perversion of Justice

“You shall not pervert the justice due to your needy brother in his dispute.”

John MacKay: The judge is not to deny them justice. The picture is that of an outstretched hand barring access or pushing them away. Rather there is to be an acknowledgement that the person involved is ‘your poor’ (compare **Deut. 15:11**). No matter what their background or economic circumstances, there is the covenant bond

between fellow Israelites that should ensure they are fairly treated. Judges, in particular, should be careful not to favour the ruling elite or the rich and influential.

2. (:7) No False Charges or Wrongful Punishment

“Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.”

Douglas Stuart: “*Have nothing to do with* [lit., “stay far away from”] *a false charge*” (v. 7) rings yet another change on the prevailing theme of absolute, uncorrupted justice as essential for the people who agree to Yahweh’s covenant. What was implicit in several laws already stated now appears explicitly and specifically: no one should ever be involved in any way with a complaint against someone in a court case that is not entirely true. Honesty must prevail throughout the legal system or the system cannot function fairly. Neither a witness nor a defendant nor a judge nor a jury may contribute to a false charge.

3. (:8) No Taking of Bribes

*“And you shall not take a bribe,
for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just.”*

4. (:9) No Oppression of Strangers

“And you shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Douglas Stuart: The goal was to keep them from the natural human tendency to befriend those most like them and discriminate against those thought to be somehow different.

John MacKay: This same requirement was found earlier in a similar form (22:21). It is presumably added here because the alien was another category of person who lacked influence in the community and so was liable to be treated unfavourably in the administration of justice.

John Davis: here it probably has specific references to courts of law as opposed to private reaction in the previous passage.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How am I showing respect to God and to His appointed authorities in my life?
- 2) How am I taking a stand against spiritual adultery?
- 3) How am I ministering to the vulnerable members of society – those who lack

protection like the aliens and the widows and the orphans? Am I protecting their rights?

4) How am I promoting justice by not initiating or entertaining or spreading any false reports or slander about another?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacKay: Israel as a holy people had been specially set apart by God to fulfil his purposes. There were many regulations introduced that constantly reminded them of their privileged position before God. This holiness was not arbitrary but derived from the character of God himself. Although the food laws of ancient Israel have been annulled, the people of God are still required to be holy for the same reason in principle. “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘*Be holy, because I am holy*’ ” (1 Pet. 1:15–16). Here Peter urges the New Testament believer to strive after holiness on the same basis as was repeatedly urged in Leviticus (Lev. 11:44).

Two characteristics of God’s holy people are specially mentioned here. The first is the lack of materialism that should characterise them. Material possessions are not their first priority, but serving their King. They are therefore prepared to give ungrudgingly in the Lord’s service. The same characteristic should prevail still. “*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Cor. 9:6–7). Is the spiritual barrenness of much of the church in the Western world a result of the adoption of the prevailing materialism of our culture and an unwillingness to give cheerfully to the Lord?

The second characteristic of the holy people is the claim that the Lord makes on them individually, as his right to their firstborn reminds them. It is not just material giving that is required, but a personal devotion in the service of God. “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship*” (Rom. 12:1).

Robert Rayburn: Remember now, we are in the midst of the covenantal stipulations – most in the form of case laws (that is, rules to follow in various situations) – that followed the Ten Commandments or Ten Words, which served as a summary or epitome of the covenant. We will be reminded again tonight of one of the great differences between the stipulations of other ANE law codes and that of the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai: viz. that often *a reason if provided* for obedience. A motive, a rationale is added to the laws themselves. Ethics come from theology in the Bible and that means that there is a distinctive motivation in biblical ethics. And that motivation is always regarded as crucial, not only for its power over the conscience, but

for the purification of behavior. We all know how different the behavior becomes when the right thing is done for the wrong reason.

We have considered so far a body of personal injury laws and a body of laws concerning the loss of property. Now we turn to a more general class of moral offenses of various types. . .

introduce two points of great significance in the collection of laws we have read tonight from **Exodus 22** and **23**.

In the first place, there is an organic and intrinsic connection between our theology and our ethics.

This is why Christian belief does and must produce a certain kind of life: such a life is the inevitable outgrowth the overflow of our knowledge of God's nature and of our salvation. To know Yahweh and to know what he has done for us must shape the way we live our lives.

In several instances this point is made explicitly and the suggestion is certainly that the connection between indicative and imperative, between what is true about God and his grace and what we must do is always present and always at work. . .

The simple point of all of these reasons, these rationales, these arguments for obedience added to the several commandments is that there is an inevitable logic to these laws, that they are rooted in the way things are, that they must be what they are because God is what he is and his grace to us has been what it is.

It is the inevitability and the power of this connection between our belief in God and his salvation and a very particular way of life that explains not only the distinctive character of God's law among the laws of the ANE world and the fact that serious-minded and devout believers do, in fact, live the Christian life to a noticeable degree. . .

Once you come to know God as the being he is and salvation as the gift of God's grace it is, you must live your life differently. We may fail to do this perfectly, to be sure, but that there is and must be such a real connection between faith and life the Bible teaches from beginning to end.

Second, true biblical holiness is a totality, an integrated whole, an indivisible and inseparable embodiment of divine goodness.

It sometimes confuses us, the way the Law of God, follows one commandment upon another. Here, for example, we have a law about sexual impurity followed by laws about sorcery, bestiality, idolatry, compassion for the poor, blasphemy, tithes and offerings, eating the meat of an animal killed by other animals, lying and false testimony, being kind to an enemy, and so on. Some of them concern quite private forms of godliness, others quite public. Some concern what we would nowadays call

social justice and others concern what we might call personal piety. The law seems, in other words, to jump around and take in order very different things.

Now, there is no doubt that we Christians are tempted to cherry-pick from God's law and concentrate our attention on certain commandments or certain areas of the Law. Some Christians are all about private godliness – devotion in the narrower sense: prayer, Bible reading, praise, and, perhaps witness to the unsaved – while other Christians are more interested in the more social and public aspects of biblical justice and righteousness.

But the Law does not permit us to choose, to specialize as it were. Daniel, again, was a man whose life was lived on the grand stage of Babylonian politics, but he got into his most serious trouble because he was so faithful at his private prayers. And, in the same way, the fact that we are active in pro-life efforts or give to the relief of the poor does not mean that we can be indifferent to God's worship or that we can be promiscuous in our sexual lives.

God's people are to be reflectors of his nature and his mercy in public and just as careful to please him when they are alone or with only one other person. The great heresy of the 20th century – viz. that collective virtue could be pursued without reference to personal behavior – is precisely a viewpoint forbidden in the Law of God. The private and public, the individual and the social is thoroughly mixed in a single holiness and is connected to one another all the more profoundly by the fact that the rationale for the one is the same rationale as for the other. God's nature and God's grace will make us virtuous in public and private – will make us care for others we don't know in the same way that it makes us care for the glory of God in our own bodies and souls.

The old canard that Christians are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good is the sort of slur that not only is false on its face – eternity alone will tell how much good Christians have done for others in this benighted world – but *must* be false. The same reasons that make a Christian care for his enemies' property and be truthful in his public speech, the same reasons that make him compassionate toward the needy, are the reasons that lead him to chastity in his relations with the opposite sex and honesty in his business dealings.

<https://www.faithtacoma.org/exodus/2005-11-06-pm>

thefellowship.site: THE SOCIETY OF GOD --

A. (22:16-25) LAWS GIVEN TO SHAPE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

. . . Hence, what we can understand is that sex is for marriage, not merely for personal pleasure. Furthermore, we can see that God is concerned for our relationships with one another to display God's character rightly, and we flourish as we live in God's design. The purpose of the law extends beyond protecting the vulnerable and the weak, but also to protect the institution of marriage.

In the next verses, we see how God condemns sorcery, bestiality and idolatry, where anyone who practices this must be put to death. What strikes out is that capital punishment is reserved for these three offences. And in order to know why, it would be important to understand the nature and severity of these offences. . .

we can see that these are not private sins; these are intentional acts of rebellion, directly opposing God. The outright and obvious nature of these sins leads to a distortion of who God is, and stumbles others, hence justifying a heavy sentence. In doing so, God shows that He protects His people. He leads them to understand that this is not the way that the people of God should act.

What do these commandments reveal about God? We learn that He is good and sovereign: whatever He wills is best; hence, it is sinful to use dark powers to control His world. We also learn that He is good and pure, and that He is the only God. We must not worship anyone else but Him.

We also learn that God cares about the way we perceive Him. He wants us to know Him rightly. This is important, because how we know Him shapes how we live. How we know Him shapes how we live, and how we live shapes our worship of Him. . .

B. (22:21 – 23:9) TO ONCE SOJOURNERS IN EGYPT: LAWS GIVEN TO SET ISRAEL APART FOR GOD, TO CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE AND TO UPHOLD JUSTICE

The way that [verses 21-26] apply to us today is readily apparent: are we caring for the sojourners, the needy, the vulnerable, the poor? While many of us may not be actively causing harm, we still show a lack of care for them in many ways. Within our own churches, who are the people we often talk to? Do we only speak with people we are comfortable with? Do we step out of our comfort zone, to reach out to people in difficult situations? And in our own ways, if we are silent and if we ignore the poor, the vulnerable among us, are we not doing the same as the oppressor? . . .

From **Exo 23:1-9**, we learn about what it means to be a truthful witness (**verses 1 to 3**) and a fair judge (**verses 6 to 8**) We can see multiple characteristics of both from these 9 verses:

A Truthful Witness: (Ex 23:1-3)	A Fair Judge: (Ex 23:6-8)
Does not spread a false report (Exo 23:1a)	Shall not pervert justice due to the poor (Exo 23:6)
Does not join hands with a wicked man to be malicious (Exo 23:1b)	Keeps far from a false charge (Exo 23:7a)
Does not join the many in evil (Exo 23:2)	Does not kill the innocent and righteous (Exo 23:7b)
Does not act partially to a poor man in a lawsuit (Exo 23:3)	Does not take bribes (Exo 23:8)

We see that the model witness is one who does not just go with the crowd's opinion, not joining hands with the wicked, and joining in their evil (**Exo 23:2**). The truthful witness shows a justice that cannot be swayed. Similarly, we learn that the fair judge is one who executes justice proportionately, giving to all what they deserve. We learn from

here that the view of justice is one that can't be bought.

Remember again that the laws say something of the lawgiver. Hence, God's commands for a fair judge and a truthful witness reveal the nature of His justice: a justice is what cannot be changed by circumstances, or bought by money. That is His standard for what is just, for what is right. We see God's standards of righteousness in these laws. . .

We learn from these passage that God cares about our everyday interactions. He cares about how we see Him, and how we portray Him. He cares for those in the fringes of society, and how we react to the vulnerable among us. He cares for how we trust in Him, on how we hope in Him. All these aspects are wrapped up in how we live as a Christian: to know that my belief in this God has implications on my daily life. Hence, we are compelled to ask ourselves: what kind of impact and witness would we have to others, if we lived by His laws? And what hope does Christ's redemptive work bring to us, for those of us who have rejected Him? Finally, how should our theology, our understanding of God, shape the way we live our lives? Let us remember and hold fast to the truth that we serve and worship a real God, even in the smallest aspect of our lives.

<http://www.thefellowship.site/archives/exodus-part-four/the-society-of-god>

TEXT: Exodus 23:10-19

TITLE: SABBATH OBSERVANCES AND FEAST CELEBRATIONS

BIG IDEA:

GOD INSTRUCTED ISRAEL TO OBSERVE SABBATH LAWS AND CELEBRATE THREE ANNUAL PILGRIM FEASTS

INTRODUCTION:

There was a distinct rhythm to the life of the Israelites that the Lord commanded in order to keep their focus on His redemptive work as their sovereign covenant God. He wanted His people to constantly remember and celebrate their Exodus from bondage in Egypt and His miraculous care for them in their wilderness journey to the Promised Land. He wanted them to show mercy and consideration to those under their care so that they would not overwork them as the Israelites had been oppressed in Egypt. There was a time to work and a time to rest. There was a time to celebrate and partake of special feasts as well that would bring together the nation in unity and rejoicing. Through it all the Lord was concerned with the details of how they lived their lives so that His holiness would be honored by their obedience.

James Jordan: Man was made a creature who needs a day of rest in a pattern of one in seven. Also, he needs times of festivity during the year. God has revealed to us a rest pattern and a festival pattern. In the New Covenant, in its fullest form, men will be in continuous rest and festival, in the resurrection. Thus, the New Testament writers tell us that the sabbath day has been done away in the New Covenant; it has been fulfilled (**Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:9-10**). In essence, the New Covenant entails a perpetual sabbath and festival.

I. (23:10-13) SABBATH OBSERVANCES

A. (:10-11) Observe the Sabbath Year = Every Seventh Year

1. (:10) Work the Land for Six Years

“And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield,”

2. (:11a) Rest the Land on the Seventh Year

a. Regulation

“but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow,”

Unclear whether they were allowed to stagger which fields lay fallow at which times ... or whether this was a blanket command that applied to all of their fields at the same year – which would have made it difficult for the poor to glean.

Philip Ryken: Although the Sabbath rest was good for the land, this was not its stated purpose. The Sabbath was mainly for the people and the animals who depended on the land for food. In the seventh year the orchards, fields, and vineyards were left to grow

on their own - "unpruned, unguarded, and unharvested." There is some question as to whether the whole land of Israel rested in the same year, or whether the rest was staggered field by field (the latter would seem most beneficial to the poor). However it was timed, the Sabbath year was one of the ways God provided for the hungry, and also for the animals that he created. Plenty of food was left for wild animals and the poor, who were free to gather whatever they needed.

James Jordan: God's promise was, however, that there would be a triple harvest in the sixth year (**Lev. 25:20-22**), which would make up any financial loss.

Even though we do not have such a guarantee of a miracle today, the principle of crop rotation, of letting the land lie fallow one year in seven, remains sound. The use of fertilizers to keep soil in continual production eventually destroys the earth.

David Thompson: J. Vernon McGee made a very interesting observation about Sabbath day things. He said that he observed that people who claim to be Sabbath day keepers ignore Sabbath year responsibilities. In other words, they pick some Sabbath day concepts but disregard Sabbath year concepts. . .

If we were to make some real Sabbath year application of this principle, it would be we are to work for six years and then not take a paycheck or any income in year 7 and let the poor and the needy have it. Of course, no modern day Sabbatarian would be willing to do this, which shows the ignorance people have about the Sabbath day.

b. Reason

*"so that the needy of your people may eat;
and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat."*

John Hannah: The sabbatical year reminded Israel that God owns the land and that it was theirs merely as a trust (**Lev. 25:23**). Also the sabbatical year provided for the poor, who could glean from the fields.

3. (:11b) Same Pattern for Vineyard and Olive Grove

"You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove."

B. (:12) Observe the Sabbath Day = Every Seventh Day

1. Work for Six Days

"Six days you are to do your work,"

2. Rest on the Seventh Day

a. Regulation

"but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor"

b. Reason

*"in order that your ox and your donkey may rest,
and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may*

refresh themselves.”

John MacKay: The word for ‘*refreshed*’ implies catching one’s breath, as well as regaining strength to go on (**31:17; 2 Sam. 16:14**). The need for this would have been especially evident to those ground down by the unrelenting oppression of Egypt and would show them that the service of the Lord took into consideration their welfare.

John Oswalt: That is, when we obey God, living and worshiping as he wishes, those whose lives and well-being are dependent on us, far from being harmed, will, in fact, be helped. If we are true to God, we are necessarily true to those around us.

Philip Ryken: As a day of rest for both man and beast, it was really a form of social justice. The Sabbath was God’s guarantee that workers and livestock would get a day off.

C. (:13) Guard Against Idolatry

1. Be Vigilant

*“Now concerning everything which I have said to you,
be on your guard;”*

John MacKay: Why include this warning here? -- While consideration was to be given to their [aliens] welfare, there was to be abhorrence for, and avoidance of, their false worship.

2. Be Loyal

*“and do not mention the name of other gods,
nor let them be heard from your mouth.”*

Walter Kaiser Jr.: There would come a “day” when God would cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they would “be remembered” no more (**Hos 2:17; Zech 13:2**). This was the practice of David in **Psalms 16** (note **Exod 20:3; Josh 23:7**).

Douglas Stuart: Calling on gods by name has always been essential to worshiping and obeying them. To prohibit saying a god’s name is to prohibit all exercise of the religion associated with that god. Accordingly, this law represents an unmistakably clear assertion of monotheism within the Covenant Code from the time of Moses.

II. (23:14-19) PILGRIMAGE FEASTS

A. (:14-17) Observe Three Annual Feasts

1. (:14) General Command

“Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me.”

Application to church today: Christians need to memorialize and celebrate their own salvation through acts of remembrance, celebration, sacrifice, and offering.

John Davis: Having twelve tribes as the foundation of the nation created great concern when it came to the matter of national unity and identity. The one thing that provided the cohesion necessary for national unity was Israel's God and her religion. The maintenance of national, spiritual and social unity was provided for in three major feast. It was required that all males should appear before the Lord during these three feast seasons (v. 7). The practical effect of this would be a continued uniting at a central place: namely, the tabernacle.

David Thompson: No matter what the dispensation, true Biblical worship requires corporate worship. All Israelite families were to gather together three times a year and participate in a worship service that was designed to offer adoration and praise to God. By the way, it is obvious that all of this was for Israel, not the Church. The specific promise to Israel was that if she would do this as a nation three times a year, God would in fact run foreign nations out of her land and expand her land borders (**Ex. 34:23-24**).

2. (:15-16) Specific Feasts

a. (:15) Feast of Unleavened Bread – March-April

*“You shall observe the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.”*

About the time of the barley harvest

John Davis: It began with the Passover and a holy convocation and lasted for seven days. At the end of the seven days another holy convocation was held (cf. **Lev. 23:5-8**). During this seven-day period unleavened bread was to be eaten in commemoration of the hasty exodus from Egypt (**Exod. 12:33, 34, 39**). This feast had many spiritual lessons to teach the children of Israel. Foremost was the fact that God constantly wanted sin to be put away from their midst.

John MacKay: ‘*Appear before me*’ refers to the presence of the Lord which was especially found at the sanctuary. This was the palace of their King, and when they gathered round him to express their allegiance they were to bring appropriate tribute to him (**34:20**).

The word “empty” is *reqam* – empty-handed or vain. The last time the word was used was in **Exodus 3:21**

*“So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. 21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go **empty-handed**.”*

b. (:16a) Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits – early summer

*“Also you shall observe the **Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits** of your labors from what you sow in the field;”*

John Hannah: also called the Fest of Weeks (**Ex. 34:22**) because it was celebrated seven weeks (50 days) after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the New Testament (**Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8**) it is called the day of Pentecost.

John Davis: This feast was always a joyful occasion (Deut. 16:9-11) simply because it was an expression of gratitude for all that God had provided for them. To give expression to such thankfulness for the grain which God had provided, two loaves were baked with leaven and presented before God (**Lev. 23:17**).

- c. (:16b) Feast of the Ingathering – beginning of October
*“also the **Feast of the Ingathering** at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.”*

John Oswalt: elsewhere called “*the Festival of Shelters*” (**Lev 23:34**), occurred as the harvest season was ending with the gathering of the olives and the grapes (about the beginning of October). The second name was probably drawn from the fact that the harvesters, needing to save time from walking back to the village at the end of the day, and also to guard the harvest, would spend the nights in the field, sleeping in hastily-built shelters. Among Israel’s neighbors this festival tended to be a time of sexual orgies aimed at ensuring that the god of vegetation would return from the dead in the spring. But for Israel it was once more a festival of thanks for God’s immediate past provision and for his care in the more distant past when the people had lived in temporary shelters in the wilderness (cf. **Lev 23:39–44**).

3. (:17) General Command

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.”

James Jordan: These three festivals come together in the Lord’s Supper for Christians. . . Because these festivals are fulfilled in the lord’s Supper, we have no more required feasts. Man is still a creature of festivity, however, and where the Church refuses to set up a festival calendar, men simply use whatever pagan calendar surrounds them. Churches which attack Christmas and Easter as “pagan” holidays (because pagan cultures also celebrate feasts at these times of year) generally wind up making a big to-do about Thanksgiving, New Year’s Day, and the Fourth of July, festivals which tend to partake of the genuinely pagan idolatry of nationalism.

Philip Ryken: The three major Old Testament feasts were rich in their teaching about salvation. Jesus Christ is the Savior God always planned to send; so already in the Old Testament he gave his people experiences that would help them (and us) understand the meaning of their salvation. Jesus is the source of our sanctification, the firstfruits of our resurrection, the Lord of the harvest, the water of life, and the sacrifice for our sin. This is the gospel according to Moses, as recorded in **Exodus 23**.

B. (:18-19) Obey Specific Instructions Regarding Sacrificial Worship

1. (:18a) Don’t Mix Blood with Bread

“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread;”

Douglas Stuart: The first command prohibited Israelites from offering *“the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast.”* Ancient peoples were well aware that when the blood was drained from an animal, the animal would die. They thus rightly concluded that the life of an animal was in its blood. In an attempt to strengthen or prolong their own lives, they started drinking or eating blood from animals sacrificed for worship or merely for eating, performing in effect an act of what is known as “sympathetic magic.” This was strictly forbidden to the Israelites (**Lev 3:17; 7:26; Deut 15:23**) and even to the patriarchs long before there was an Israel (**Gen 9:4**).

Philip Ryken: But what about the yeast? Why were the Israelites forbidden to offer a sacrifice that included any form of yeast? As we have seen, the Bible uses yeast as a symbol of growth, and especially for the spread of spiritual corruption. Thus, keeping yeast away from the sacrifice was a symbol of separation from sin. It would not be right for the people to present themselves to God—no matter how regularly—and then return to their old patterns of sin. They were called to put away all unrighteousness, and this was symbolized by making unleavened offerings.

John MacKay: Blood represented the Lord’s gift of life in creation and all use of it was reserved for presentation to him.

2. (:18b) Don’t Save Leftovers

“nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning.”

Douglas Stuart: The fat portions were separated from the muscle meats and were supposed to be presented as burnt offerings on the altar to God. Someone who tried to keep them for any other purpose—perhaps something as “minor” as keeping them overnight for use along with the morning offering, but perhaps for actual eating—was failing to sacrifice properly. At a minimum keeping the fat until morning would be “making God wait for his portion of the sacrifice,” and could not be tolerated. Canaanites and other pagan peoples did not necessarily burn all the animal fat as a divine offering at the time of cooking animals on their altars: thus the temptation of the Israelites to imitate their neighbors instead of following God’s decrees and the need specifically to obviate such an approach.

John MacKay: As the fat was considered to be the choicest part of the offering, there might be a greater temptation to keep any that was not immediately consumed. Perhaps to avoid the festivals being improperly lengthened there was a prohibition on leaving the fat (and presumably by implication anything else as well) until the next day.

3. (:19a) Give Your Choice First Fruits

“You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God.”

4. (:19b) Avoid Fertility Cult Practices

“You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother.”

Douglas Stuart: The prohibition “*Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk*” occurs three times in the Pentateuchal law (also in **34:26** and **Deut 14:21**). Canaanite fertility religion imitated the fertility practices generally found throughout the ancient world. These included “marrying” seeds when planting a field (**Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9**) on the theory that such a ritual would magically stimulate the powers of nature to procreate, producing more fertile crops. Since mother’s milk (the milk of the goat doe) was what made the goat kids grow big and strong, the folk theory developed that doe’s milk employed in the process of a sacrifice (in this case by boiling rather than by roasting on an altar) would somehow impart strength to the goat flock, making the whole flock more fertile. Such nonsense, if believed, could have led the Israelites to conclude that the power to shape their destiny and to live the abundant life was to be found in magical practices and fertility religion rather than in the only true, alive God. Even if all other people groups known to them practiced these sorts of rituals, the Israelites could not. As Yahweh’s people, they were to be above such things, attributing all life to the single Source thereof.

John MacKay: it may be that the element of heartless cruelty involved in cooking the young animal in the milk that should have sustained it made it especially objectionable.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What were the purposes expressed in this passage for the annual and weekly sabbath observances?
- 2) How does the Lord’s Supper serve as a sufficient celebration of our redemption and look forward to the Lord’s return?
- 3) Should we be formally presenting our gifts and offerings to the Lord as part of the worship service as opposed to the common practice of conducting our giving online today?
- 4) Why does the Lord include these seemingly random odd commandments at the end of this passage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Davis: As Israel indulged more and more in apostasy and embraced the practices of the Canaanites the sabbatical year was abandoned. The seventy-year captivity was

intended to make up for the failure to observe these sabbatical years (**II Chron. 36:17-21**). To fail to observe the year was to incur the displeasure of God as indicated in **Leviticus 26:34-43; II Chronicles 36:21; Jeremiah 34:14-22**. The culmination of the sabbatical years was reached each fiftieth year known as the year of the jubilee. The law of the sabbatical year is intricately tied in with the weekly Sabbath institution. The latter, of course, is grounded in God's creative activity (cf. Exod. 20:11). All Sabbaths were reminders of the sovereignty of God in His exercise of power in creative acts.

Bruce Hurt:

The Feasts of the Lord				
Name	Scripture References	Time	Purpose	Prophetic Significance
1. Passover (<i>pesah</i> , Heb.)	Ex 12:1-28, 43-49; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16; Deut 16:1-8	The evening of the fourteenth day of Nisan (Abib), the first month of the biblical year (March/April).	1. To commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. 2. To remind the children of Israel that God "passed over" their houses, i.e. spared the firstborn of the Israelites (Ex 12:27)	1. Christ is our Passover (cf. John 1:29; 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:18, 19). 2. The Passover is the foundation for the Lord's Supper (cf. Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:1-20). 3. The Passover foreshadows the marriage supper of the Lamb (cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16-18).
2. Feast of Unleavened Bread (<i>matsot</i> , Heb.)	Ex 12:15-20; 13:3-10 Lev 23:6-8; Num 28:17-25; Deut 16:3-8	It began on the fifteenth day of Nisan (Abib) and continued for one week (March/April)	To commemorate the hardships of Israel's hurried flight from Egypt (Ex 12:39). The absence of leaven symbolized complete consecration and devotion to God.	1. Unleavened bread is a type of Christ (cf. John 6:30-59; 1 Cor 11:24). 2. Unleavened bread is a type of the church (cf. 1 Cor 5:7, 8).
3. Day of Firstfruits (<i>bikkurim</i> , Heb.)	Lev 23:9-14	On the day after the Sabbath of Passover week (March/April)	To dedicate and consecrate the firstfruits of the barley harvest.	1. Firstfruits is a type of the bodily resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23). 2. Firstfruits is a guarantee of the bodily resurrection of all believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-23; 1 Thess 4:13-18). 3. Firstfruits is a type of the consecration of the church.
4. Feast of Pentecost (or Weeks; <i>shabuot</i> , Heb.)	Lev 23:15-22; Num 28:26-31; Deut 16:9-12	The day after the seventh Sabbath after the Day of Firstfruits (May/June)	To dedicate and consecrate firstfruits of the wheat harvest.	The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The two loaves, representative of the Jew and Gentile, contained leaven because sin is found within the church.
5. Day of Trumpets (<i>rosh hashanah</i> , Heb.)	Lev 23:23-25; Num 10:10; 29:1-6	The first day of the seventh month (Tishri), the sabbatical month (September/October)	To usher in and consecrate the seventh month as the sabbatical month.	In the N.T. the blowing of the trumpet is associated with the return of our Lord (cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).
6. Day of Atonement (<i>yom kippur</i> , Heb.)	Lev 16; 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11	The tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri -- September/October)	To make annual atonement for the sins of the priests and the people, and for the tabernacle (temple).	The Day of Atonement finds its ultimate fulfillment in the crucifixion of Christ (cf. Heb 9). It represents the redeeming work of Christ more adequately than any other O.T. type.
7. Feast of Tabernacles (Booths or Ingathering; <i>sukkot</i> , Heb.)	Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-38; Deut 16:13-17	The fifteenth through twenty-first of the seventh month (Tishri), with an eighth day added as a climax to all the feasts (September/October)	1. To commemorate God's deliverance and protection during the wilderness wanderings (23:43). 2. To rejoice in the completion of all the harvest (23:29)	The Feast of Tabernacles foreshadows the peace and prosperity of the millennial reign of Christ (Zech 14:16).

Philip Ryken: By being kind to animals, these Sabbath laws teach us to care for the environment. Many conservative Christians are suspicious of environmentalism, sometimes with good reason. Some people seem to worship the environment. This is to mistake the creation for its Creator. Others treat animals as if they were more important than people, which overturns the divinely ordained order of nature. Still others make vegetarianism a moral imperative, even though God has given us certain animals for food. Nevertheless, caring for the creation is one of the ways we glorify God. Taking care of plants and being kind to animals are important parts of being a Christian, and so is giving rest to the land. Sadly, today many farms are run more like factories. We squeeze everything we can out of our fields and then pump them with fertilizer to make them stay fruitful. We confine animals and feed them to the point of obesity. But this was not God's plan. When God gave us the creation for food, he wanted us to receive it as a gift that requires the best of our care. The whole creation bears the effects of God's curse against our sin, and it is only right for us to work for its redemption.

These Sabbath laws also teach us something about caring for the poor. The Sabbath year reminds us that the poor need to eat. Under the Biblical workfare system, the poor were expected to gather what they needed from the Sabbath fields. But in order for this system to work, people with means had to obey God's law by giving their fields a rest. The Sabbath day reminds us that workers need to rest too. The Sabbath was not just something the people owed to God, but also something they owed to one another. When they were slaves in Egypt, the Israelites never had a chance to rest. However, God did not want that sin to be repeated in Israel. Workers, including household servants, needed to be refreshed by celebrating a weekly Sabbath.

TEXT: Exodus 23:20-33

TITLE: EPILOGUE OF THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

BIG IDEA:

THE DIVINE PROMISE OF GUIDANCE AND VICTORY MOTIVATES OBEDIENCE TO THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT IN LOYAL WORSHIP -- DESPITE THE THREAT OF IDOLATRY

INTRODUCTION:

This is the Epilogue of the Book of the Covenant. It offers compelling motivation to obey the commandments of the law to secure the promised blessing and victory in the land. The divine presence in the person of the Angel of the Lord will accomplish the ultimate victory – which involves protection, guidance and the expelling of all enemies from the land.

John MacKay: When the great kings of the ancient world entered into a treaty with their vassals, after they had stated what they required their vassals to do, they presented the blessings that would flow from obedience to the treaty and the curses that would result from disobedience. Here the Lord follows a similar course, but with two different emphases: the major focus is not on the people's obedience, but on the Lord's provision for them, particularly the presence of his angel; and the blessings that are bestowed on those who are obedient to the covenant and loyal to its King are stressed with the potential curses on disobedience only being implied.

John Oswalt: Yahweh committed himself to provide four things for his people. First, he promised his immediate presence, guiding and protecting them on their journey (23:22). Second, he promised to destroy all their enemies (23:22–23, 27–28). Third, he promised health, fertility, and long life (23:25–26). Fourth, he promised to establish them in the land (23:29–31). While some of these promises are stated in **unconditional terms**—*“My angel will go before you and bring you into the land ... I will destroy them completely”* (23:23); *“I will send my terror ... I will make all your enemies turn and run”* (23:27–28); *“I will fix your boundaries ... I will hand over to you”* (23:31)—there is still a **necessary condition** that runs throughout. Sometimes it is stated explicitly—*“if you are careful to obey”* (23:22); *“you ... serve only the Lord”* (23:25); *“if you serve their gods”* (23:33)—and it is always at least **implicit**. If Israel broke its covenant with Yahweh on this most crucial of points, the worship of other gods, the covenant would be effectively nullified. To do such a thing is to rebel (23:21). As demonstrated by such passages as **1 Kings 12:19; 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5, 7; 8:20, 22** this term had a technical connotation of covenant-breaking. If the people broke the covenant with this behavior, Yahweh would have no more obligations to them.

This pervasive air of conditionality, however, cannot wipe out the **unconditional thread** that runs throughout these promises. God will give them the land; he will destroy their enemies; he will give them posterity in the land. This issue of God's

faithfulness against all the odds will be one of the great themes of the Old Testament. For the people would break all their promises; they would rebel against him and his covenant again and again. Yet his determination to save them and the world by bringing as many as possible into a life-giving relationship with himself has won out again and again. The key to understanding this point is to recognize the **intermingling of individual and community** in the Old Testament. The fact that God will be faithful to his covenant to create a people for himself is not a guarantee to every individual under the covenant. Individuals who rebelled would experience the results of that rebellion, as that generation was to learn to its sorrow. But not every individual would rebel, and out of that remnant, God would forge a people again and again. The same is true of the church today. The church of Jesus Christ will survive and triumph because God keeps his word. But that does not mean that every individual who was ever once a faithful member of Christ's church will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

I. (:20-23) PROMISED GUARDING AND GUIDING TO REACH THE PROMISED LAND – CONTINGENT ON OBEDIENCE

A. (:20) Promised Guarding and Guiding

1. Guarding

“Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way,”

MacArthur: The key to victory in the upcoming takeover of the Land would not be Israel's military skill but the presence of this Angel, who is the pre-incarnate Christ.

David Thompson: So God is promising that His angel, who is specifically Jesus Christ, is going to protect them and lead them. Just think of this. It is possible to actually have Jesus Christ as your Personal guide through life. In fact, it is interesting that when Jesus was here, He specifically said that he had protected and guarded His own and not one of His own perished (**John 17:12**). This is a great **motivation** for obeying the Word of God. When we choose to obey the Word of God, we have the personal protection and the guidance of God.

2. Guiding

“and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.”

B. (:21) Contingency of Obedience

1. Obey

“Be on your guard before him and obey his voice;”

Douglas Stuart: Success requires **obedience**. The people could not hope to enjoy God's benefits, including his abiding protection, if they tried to make decisions on their own. Would they be so stupid and headstrong as to try to arrange for their own invasion of the promised land rather than following faithfully his leading? Absolutely. That was exactly what they eventually did after learning that they might not be able to enter the promised land as soon as they hoped by reason of their own lack of courage (**Num**

14:41–45). Knowing their capability to disobey, God reminded them sternly that only through obedience to his leadership and his word would they prosper in the conquest of Canaan.

2. Don't Rebel

*“do not be rebellious toward him,
for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.”*

John MacKay: In the light of **Mark 2:7–10** (“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”), the angel is divine. This is what is in effect said in the phrase “my Name is in him”. ‘Name’ represents the revelation of the character and attributes of God (**6:3; 34:5**). It is virtually a synonym for God’s effective presence. Such an idiom was not exclusively Hebrew. In Mesopotamia the name of the god was frequently used as an expression for the god himself. Here we have a unique dignity accorded to the angel as manifesting all that God has made known regarding himself. That is why the angel can command complete obedience and trust: his presence is the equivalent of the presence of the Lord himself.

Gispén: Forgiveness and retribution are the two aspects of the Lord’s revelation of Himself as the God of the covenant (cf. Nah. 1:2-3).

C. (:22-23) Leadership of the Angel of the Lord Secures the Victory

1. (:22) Obedience Makes the Lord the Adversary of Your Enemies

*“But if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say,
then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your
adversaries.”*

Douglas Stuart: By reason of human imperfection, this kind of expectation is hard to follow, and it is not difficult to predict that Israel might fail to keep these commands fully. In effect, then, a need for **divine grace** was created implicitly by such demands, a grace that would allow for complete forgiveness and would provide for the complete presence of God among and within believers.

2. (:23) Victory Assured by the Leadership of the Angel of the Lord

a. Guidance

*“For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the land of
the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the
Hivites and the Jebusites;”*

Douglas Stuart: The special emphasis here is on **God’s presence**: the promises made are all ways of saying “I will be with you, right there as you travel toward the promised land, right there as you begin the conquest, right there as you fight, right there as you settle in.

b. Dominion

“and I will completely destroy them.”

Alan Cole: *I blot them out* cannot be the correct translation of the verb, or it would contradict the verses below, which suggest a gradual reduction. Some lighter meaning is required, perhaps ‘*make them disappear*’.

II. (24-33) PROMISED VICTORY OVER THE ENEMIES IN THE LAND

A. (:24-25a) Two Human Requirements for Victory Associated with Loyal Worship

1. (:24) Reject Idolatry

a. Prohibition of Worshipping Idols

*“You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them,
nor do according to their deeds;”*

G. Campbell Morgan: Concerning the people to be driven out, it is worthy of note that this paragraph shows that ‘their gods’ were their undoing. Everything in the life of a man or a nation depends on the character of its worship.

b. Props for Idolatry Must be Destroyed

*“but you shall utterly overthrow them,
and break their sacred pillars in pieces.”*

2. (:25a) Serve the Lord

“But you shall serve the LORD your God,”

B. (:25b-26) Four Physical Blessings Associated with Victory

1. (:25b) Material Provision

“and He will bless your bread and your water;”

2. (:25c – 26a) Health

“and I will remove sickness from your midst.”

3. (:26a) Fertility

“There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land;”

4. (:26b) Longevity

“I will fulfill the number of your days.”

Douglas Stuart: As a result of proper worship (exclusively of Yahweh and exclusively according to his standards), there would ensue abundance of food and rain (“*his blessing will be on your food and water*”), health (“*I will take away sickness from among you*”), fertility (“*none will miscarry or be barren in your land*”), and long life (“*I will give you a full life span*”).

These blessings can be considered reiterations of the original blessing to Abraham (“*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you,*” **Gen 12:2**). This sort of blessing

is repeated often in the Mosaic corpus (e.g., **Gen 26:3, 24; Num 6:27; Deut 7:13; 15:6, 10, 18; 16:15; Deut 28:28**) and is to be distinguished from the restoration (eschatological) blessings of the covenant, whose fulfillment follows the curse era of the exile. In other words, these are pre-exile blessings, promises for the first era of Israel's history, that of their life in the promised land prior to their rejection and exile. The restoration blessings (e.g., **Lev 26:40–45; Deut 4:29–31; 28:1–13; 30:1–10**) are commonly reflected in the prophetic promises of the new age as a future hope after the exile. These original promises for Israel in the land were, however, for the prophets something that was either coming to an end in their day or had ended already before the exile, depending on the time of the prophet.

C. (:27-31) Three Divine Keys to Victory

1. (:27-28) Unleashing the Terror of the Lord

a. (:27) Creating Terror and Confusion

“I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.”

b. (:28) Clearing the Land of All Enemies

“And I will send hornets ahead of you, that they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.”

Douglas Stuart: Four kinds of **curse**s (predictions of disaster), known from the covenant curse collections in the covenant sanctions passages of **Lev 26** and **Deut 28–32**, are mentioned here as God's methods of subduing the Canaanites in order to make possible Israel's conquest of the promised land. They are terror/fear, confusion/helplessness, defeat in battle, and attack by wild animals/insects. The principle we have noted before applies here as well: whenever a few of the dozens of types of covenant curses are mentioned, the reader is expected to understand them as samples of the full range of curses that will actually be unleashed. We should therefore not take these four types of curses as the only or even as the primary sorts of afflictions God used to cow the Canaanites into submission, nor should we be surprised if no specific mention is made of them in the book of Joshua, where the actual conquest accounts are provided. Mentioning these four is a way of saying, “I will use whatever it takes to cause the Canaanites to be unable to resist your conquest of their land.” Somewhat similarly, only three of the usual six or seven nations native to the land of Canaan are mentioned in **v. 28**, in contrast to the six listed in **v. 23**. Again this is typical of the sort of synecdoche commonly seen throughout the Old Testament.

John MacKay: It may refer to actual stinging insects, and Jewish tradition tells of two plagues of hornets, one in the time of Moses and the other in Joshua's day. But many think it may well be a metaphorical use that refers to the fear and panic mentioned in the preceding verse. In that case it would involve a vivid comparison. Just as people scatter in confused alarm before a swarm of hornets, so the reports of the Lord's effective action on behalf of his people would lead to their enemies becoming unwilling and unable to stay and fight them.

Wiersbe: The Hebrew word is similar to the word for Egypt, so some students believe that the reverence is to the Egyptian armies that frequently invaded Canaan before the Jews arrived. In **Isaiah 7:18**, Egypt is compared to a fly and Assyria to a bee.

2. (:29-31) Driving Out All Enemies Gradually

a. (:29) Explanation from a Negative Perspective

*“I will not drive them out before you in a single year,
that the land may not become desolate,
and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.”*

b. (:30) Explanation from a Positive Perspective

*“I will drive them out before you little by little,
until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.”*

John Oswalt: The explanation that God would not destroy the inhabitants of Canaan “*in a single year*” (**23:29–31**) suggests that he wanted to wean Israel from a dependence on instant results and to return them to a more normal experience of life. Surely, the God who had devastated Egypt and her chariot forces with a few stunning strokes could have so intervened in the normal course of affairs that the Canaanites would have simply ceased to exist while the land remained cultivated and wild animals were kept in check. But that is not the usual way in which God manages his affairs on earth. Usually, he allows matters to develop in slower and more involved ways, incorporating the full participation of human agency. He had used the more direct and immediate means in connection with the Exodus and Sinai because of the critical importance of those events. But he values human involvement too much to make that his normal mode of operation. So he told the people in this context to prepare for that new state of affairs. He would be no less involved in the events, and ultimately the Canaanites would only be defeated because of his involvement, but there would be a much greater proportion of human causality engaged in the future.

Philip Ryken: This teaches us something important about the Christian life. It is not always God’s plan to give us instant and total victory. Usually our spiritual progress comes little by little. However, even this can be for our benefit. We would prefer to be sanctified right away, without any struggle. But for many merciful reasons, God does not allow this to happen. He wants us to learn how to depend on him in ways we never would unless we had to persevere through the gradual conquest of our sin.

James Jordan: So that the wild beasts would not multiply in a deserted land, god promised to drive the Canaanites out little by little (**v. 29-30**). Man was created to take dominion over the animals, and even the dominion of wicked Canaanites was preferable to complete wildness.

3. (:31) Protecting the Boundaries of the Land from Enemies

“And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates;

*for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand,
and you will drive them out before you.”*

Gispen: Verse 31 contains a promise concerning the extent of Israel’s future territory: from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, i.e. the Mediterranean, and from the desert, the southern steppe, to the river, i.e. the Euphrates (cf. **Gen. 15:18**). And this is possible only because the Lord would give the inhabitants into the hands of the Israelites, so that they could drive them out.

D. (:32-33) Two Fundamental Principles of Maintaining Separation

1. (:32) No Concessions to Allow Them to Live in the Land

“You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods.”

MacArthur: International diplomacy, with its parity or suzerainty treaties, was not an option open to Israel in dealing with the tribes living within the designated borders of the Promised Land (**Dt 7:1, 2**). All these treaties were accompanied by the names of the nations’ gods, so it was fitting to deliver a charge not to make a treaty (covenant) with them, nor to serve their pagan gods. The situation with other nations outside the land being given to Israel was different (cf. **Dt 20:10-18**).

2. (:33) No Comingling Due to Threat of Idolatry

*“They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me;
for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”*

John MacKay: While the Israelites might not have initially appreciated that the presence among them of those worshipping false gods constituted a real danger, the situation was extremely serious. The aggressive nature of false religion, appealing as it does to the fallen nature of mankind, would imperil the loyalty of Israel to Yahweh. Nothing was to be allowed that would break or diminish the essential link between the Lord and his people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you balance the seemingly unconditional nature of many of these assurances with the clear obligation to obey the Lord and reject idolatry?
- 2) How has the Lord provided guidance to you in your spiritual journey to victory?
- 3) How has the Lord made Himself an enemy to the enemies that threaten your victory in Christ?
- 4) What temptations or areas of compromise do I need to get rid of that are holding me back from total obedience to Jesus Christ and experiencing His victory in my life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Douglas Stuart: The Israelites had already been through much that was new to them in their exodus from Egypt and their travels in the Sinai wilderness, concluding at Mount Sinai, where God had so impressively—indeed, overwhelmingly—appeared to them and begun to give them his law. Yet great adventures and risks lay ahead of them, not merely behind them, and they would face challenges to their faith in Yahweh from various directions. In the passage found here, God encouraged the Israelites to trust his generous and mighty provisions for them and at the same time warned them of some of the dangers they would encounter during the conquest of the promised land and their settling in to occupy it and build new lives there for themselves as his landed people.

A natural question that might arise from this material is: “What is it doing here?” After all, this is a passage of promise and warning, so how does it fit within typical legal material? Part of the answer comes in noting that all Old Testament law is promise and warning. Covenant laws are instructions for how to please the covenant Sovereign, with the implicit, and occasionally even explicit, promise attached to each that keeping the law would bring the blessings promised in the sanctions portion of the covenant. Likewise they bear the implicit warning that failure to keep the law would lead to miseries of all sorts (the curses of the sanctions portions). Indeed, Israel’s law was not merely a law code but a covenant, a national agreement with Yahweh, whose purpose was to help people entrust themselves fully to him and live all of life under his gracious rule, not just a set of rules to control their behavior. The admixture of legal reminders, promises, and warnings in the prophetic books of the Old Testament provides a telling parallel to the purpose of the present passage: the prophets were covenant enforcement mediators, seeking to motivate the people to whom God had sent them to take his covenant seriously and embrace fully its guidance for their lives.

Motivation is what the present passage is especially about. It forms the conclusion to the Covenant Code, reminding the Israelites of who they were, where they were going, and how they were to get there. In that regard it may be considered something of an inclusio with the introduction to the covenant, especially the generally comparable words of encouragement and warning in **19:3–6**. The special motivating force behind this concluding section of the Covenant Code is Yahweh himself. The angel he sent to guard and lead his people (**vv. 20–22**) was his angel (“*my angel*,” **v. 23**), and God promised to oppose personally any who opposed themselves to his people (**v. 22**). The promise of abundant life he offered (**vv. 25–26**) came from his own grace, in response to his people’s worshipping him exclusively (**vv. 24–25**). The terror he would send on the nations opposing Israel’s conquest (**v. 27**) represented his own direct fighting for his people in a manner as irresistible as the flight of a hornet (**vv. 28–30**), so from the Israelite point of view he would simply have handed the land to them as a gift (**v. 31**) so little would have been their military contribution and so great his. Israel was a small and weak nation who would have to grow over time into the size and strength necessary to

control all of Canaan (vv. 29–30). And the greatest danger of allowing the inhabitants of the promised land to live was not the threat they could do harm to Israel's peace but that they might keep Israel from being close and faithful to God, who was to be their exclusive focus (v. 33).

The Covenant Code is thus a means to an end: fidelity to the one on whom Israel's wellbeing entirely depended. Without Yahweh, they were nothing, could do nothing, and would end up as nothing. With him leading and them following obediently, however, all would fall properly into place, and their purpose as a people would come to fulfillment. . .

Why would Israel be tempted to worship local Canaanite deities? The answer is that once settled in Canaan, they would surely desire agricultural success, which in the ancient world was generally attributed to proper involvement of the deities in the agricultural process through worship. In general, ancient peoples believed that the gods could do anything but feed themselves. Humans therefore had the job of raising food for the gods, which was then "sent" to them through the offerings humans gave in the presence of the gods' idols. What part did the gods have in this process? They caused the crops to grow and the flocks and herds to multiply. The ancient farmer thought that the gods were absolutely essential to the agricultural process and that the way to involve the goodwill of the gods on behalf of one's farming was to worship them. The essence of worship was providing food for them in the form of sacrifices. When Israel would arrive in the promised land, the temptation to plant as the Canaanites planted, to cultivate as they cultivated, to harvest as they harvested, and to worship as they worshiped would be almost irresistible since all these were thought to go together as part and parcel of farming in any given locality.

John MacKay: Western civilization has developed a tolerance of **pluralism** and indeed approval of it. This has led to the promotion of the view that no one religion can lay claim to superiority over another. It is an expression of intolerance to criticize or deny the religious views or claims of another.

Over against this religious pluralism stands the **exclusivism** of Biblical religion. If Yahweh had been content to be counted as one of the gods of Egypt, there need have been no Exodus. But he makes the claim that he alone is truly God, and that claim is forcefully advanced in the New Testament as Peter made clear in testifying to Jesus Christ of Nazareth before the Sanhedrin. "*Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Such exclusivism is repudiated by the modern Western mindset as primitive and outmoded, promoting bigotry and hatred.

A similar situation faced Israel of old. The religion of Canaan was always open to the possibility of adopting another god into its pantheon, but not a God who claimed exclusive and supreme rights. What was more the Lord instructed his people not to compromise in any way with heathen religion or practices (22:21; 23:13, 24). Given the sinful propensities of the human heart, it is far easier for the false and debased to

degrade the true than for the pure to elevate the corrupt. It is only by the regenerating influence of God's Spirit that humanity can recover from the downward pull of their fallen nature. Therefore in the New Testament as in the Old separation is presented as the appropriate standard of conduct. *"What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty' "* (2 Cor. 6:15–18).

But such religious exclusivism does not imply a personal hatred for the unbeliever. Though Israel were told to pull down pagan shrines, they were also instructed to have the utmost regard for the welfare of the alien—the stranger who had come among them and who would inevitably have worshipped pagan gods. They were not to ill-treat or oppress such people on religious grounds (22:21; 23:9). They were to be treated as fairly as any of their Israelite neighbors, and their well-being was to be a concern to the Lord's people. By acting like this they would commend their religion and their God to the alien. In the same way, the believer still is commanded to do good to all (Luke 6:35; Gal. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:15).

Of course, there are differences. Israel as a nation had civil enactments to follow regarding the physical destruction of pagan images. The New Testament church does not possess such authority. But the battle is just as intense even though the destruction to be effected is spiritual and not material. *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

Motyer: There are two great truths in 23:20–33: the accompanying angel (20–26), and the forerunning terror (27–33). The terror is not explicitly said to be the angel, but identification is reasonable, since the angel will bring them into the Promised Land and drive out their foes (23), and this is what the terror does too (27–28). Also the angel and the terror are both in fact the Lord himself: when the angel speaks, it is the Lord who speaks (22), and when the terror drives out the inhabitants of Canaan, it is the Lord who is driving them out (28–29). Thus, the Lord who calls his people to costly and demanding obedience, himself accompanies them in appropriate ways and goes before them to secure their victories and promised possessions.

A1 The accompanying angel (20–26)

- a1 The function of the angel (20)
 - b1 The perils of irreverence (21)
 - b2 The blessings of obedience (22)
- a2 The function of the angel (23)

- B1 The monotheistic people (24–26)
a No alternative allegiance or tolerance (24)
b Sole loyalty and consequent blessing (25–26)

- A2 The forerunning terror (27–33)
a foregoing panic (27)
b foregoing victory (28–31)
b1 gradual possession (29)
b2 assured possession (30)
b3 complete possession (31)

- B2 The monotheistic people (32–33)
a No alliances (32)
b No cohabitation (33)

J. Ligon Duncan: Loyalty to God (:20-33)

I. God will finish what He starts but He expects obedience from His people. (:20-23)

This strong language of conditionality helpfully emphasizes the requirements of the covenant. Obedience is not an option for Israel. . .

But you see that this whole passage is a warning to the people of God. He expects obedience from them.

II. God expects an absolute uncompromising loyalty to Himself in our obedience to the first command. (:24)

There are four directions given in **verse 24**.

- First: There is to be no participation in the religious worship of the Canaanites gods. *“You shall not worship their gods.”*
- Second: There is to be no following after the religion of the Canaanite gods. *“You shall not worship them nor serve them.”*
- Third: There is to be no emulation of their worship practices nor do according to their deeds.
- Fourth: Canaanite worship sites are to be obliterated. *“You shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces.”*

You see, this is another one of those passages that teaches us that the Exodus was all about **God's glory**. The Exodus is all about bringing into being a people who will glorify God and syncretism doesn't glorify God. Mixing loyalty to the one true God and to false gods doesn't glorify God, and so God wants everything wiped out that would detract from His glory. And at the very heart of covenant loyalty to God is our commitment to worship Him and worship Him alone. And not only are we to worship Him alone, we are to worship Him as He commands and not according to the way of the nations around us. This is the absolute uncompromising loyalty that God is calling for and again it is precisely that which will be violated in **Exodus chapter 32**.

III. Faithfulness to God's covenant means blessings for God's people. (:25-31)

And it is vital for us to see that this passage is not about the health and wealth gospel. This is precisely the kind of passage that health and wealth teachers go to and say, “See, you obey God and you get blessing. You obey God and everything will be great in your life.” This is a passage about **loyalty** to God and about the goodness of God's will and about the blessing of obedience and about the particular situation in redemptive history that Israel found herself in. Soon Israel was going to violate all of these directives. And God is warning her now, and He is reminding her of the **blessing of obedience** and the **curse of disobedience**. Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. You could have summed up the passage just like that.

IV. God expects an exclusive covenant loyalty to Him and no human relationship must detract from it. (:32-33)

John Davis: Four basic ideas emerge in the remaining verses of this chapter>

- *First*, there is emphasis upon obedience to divine leadership (**vv. 20-23**). . . Since this is Jehovah himself who leads, He demands absolute obedience (**v. 21**). Those who disobeyed were regarded as enemies and treated as such (**v. 22**). This angel would also lead them in the land as they confronted the major enemies and it would be He who would provide the key to victory (**v. 23**).
- The *second* important theme of this section deals with the worship of the true God (**vv. 24-26**). True worship involved complete separation from idolatry as well as in a positive sense doing that which God desires.
- The *third* theme centers around the provisions that God would make for their victory while fighting in the land of Canaan (**vv. 27-31**). The means by which He would dishearten the enemy thus making successful battles possible for Israel would be to send His “*fear*” before them. . .
- The *fourth* section of **Chapter 23** concludes with the warning that no covenant was to be made with the peoples of Canaan or with their gods (**v. 32**). The procedure for conquest and colonization involved driving the enemy completely out of those territories in order that the temptation of idolatry would be removed (**v. 33**).

TEXT: Exodus 24:1-18

TITLE: *RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT*

BIG IDEA:

THE RATIFICATION OF THE COVENANT IS ROOTED IN THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT AND IS DESIGNED TO MANIFEST THE GLORY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

The structure of this important transitional chapter in the book of Exodus is very intentional. There are two main sections. Each begins with an upward call (v. 1, v. 12) and each ends with a significant meeting with God (v. 11, v. 18). This important ratification of the Old Covenant ties the knot on the previous revelation of the Book of the Covenant and opens the door to the emphasis on the tabernacle and approaching God in worship in the latter chapters. There is both continuity between the Old and New Covenants and discontinuity. So this passage has great application to believers today. It reveals much about our covenant relationship with a holy God; about our commitment to obey God's commandments; about our vision of who God is; and about how we can approach God in worship. Kevin DeYoung [see notes at the end] structures his sermon on this chapter around:

- The Book of the Covenant
- The Blood of the Covenant
- The Bread of the Covenant

J. Ligon Duncan: **Exodus 24** is a transitional passage that shows the great covenant confirmation ceremony. Israel has now received the Ten Commandments from God's own mouth, and Israel responds, now confirming for the third time that she would indeed embrace God in covenant, in obedience, and follow in His ways and be loyal to Him. There were several things emphasized in **verses 1-11**. God's holiness was emphasized by the fact that Moses alone was allowed to approach Him, not even the rest of the elders were allowed to come into the presence of God. We also saw the significance of the law highlighted by the fact that Moses recounted and wrote down all the laws of the Lord that had been recorded for us in Exodus in **20-23**. Then, we saw Israel's understanding of God's grace in the Exodus placed a requirement upon them to be holy, to be set apart. The very fact of God's grace claimed an obligation from Israel to be uniquely loyal and faithful to Him. We saw something of the binding fellowship and obligation of the covenant expressed in the sacrifices that were offered up in **Exodus 24**, and Moses' words of institution in **Exodus 24:8** indicated the sacramental nature of the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and people. A divinely instituted ritual, an outward action designed to illustrate and confirm an inward spiritual reality, the union between God and His people.

Finally, in **verses 9-11**, the amazing theophany, that vision of feet of God, as it were, sitting on the heavens of the earth, was designed to illustrate the kind of awesome God

in which Israel enjoyed an intimate communion, even being invited to bring their knees up under the table for fellowship with the living God. Above all, that covenant made there, confirmed in **Exodus 24:1-11**, serves as a vehicle for our worship of the living God, and worship entails both communion, that is meeting with God, and adoration, or giving to God the glory due His name, praising His name. And the rest of the book of Exodus is really given over to that very theme, of meeting with God, and giving to Him the glory due His name. . .

Exodus 24 is the **swing chapter** in the book of Exodus. On the one hand, it records for us the people of God's response to the law which had been given in **Exodus 20-23**. We see there the response of the people of God to God's giving of the law. They agree to embrace the covenant and be loyal to Him. But on the other hand, we see in **Exodus 24**, a preparation for everything else that happens in the Book of Exodus. Specifically, in the text before us, we find the hints of two themes that will preoccupy the remainder of the chapters of Exodus. First, the theme of the building of the tabernacle is hinted at in Exodus. In fact, the reason for the building of the tabernacle is explained by two things that happen here, and secondly, even the incident of the golden calf, which is going to be recorded in **Exodus 32-33**, and which will interrupt the focus of the rest of Exodus, just on worship positively, and illustrate negatively how not to worship, even that incident is hinted at here in **Exodus 24**. So Exodus 24 looks back at everything that has happened so far in Exodus, and looks forward to everything that will happen in the remainder of Exodus.

John MacKay: **Chapter 24** brings to a completion the inauguration of the covenant which had begun in **Exodus 19**. Moses has now received greater detail regarding the commands and promises of the covenant King, and so the way is open for the covenant to be ratified by solemn ceremony (**verses 1–8**) and sacred meal. The people had earlier indicated their preliminary acceptance of the terms of the covenant when they all responded together and said, “*We will do everything the Lord has said*” (**19:8**). The repetition of these words here in **verses 3 and 7** links this scene with the earlier one as an integrated act of acceptance of the covenant. This is followed by the representatives of the people being privileged with an audience with God, where the God who cannot be seen permits himself in some way to be viewed (**verses 9–11**). But more than that Moses, the covenant mediator, is summoned into even closer fellowship with the Lord for forty days and forty nights (**verses 12–18**).

Philip Ryken: **Exodus 24** is one of the most important chapters in the whole Old Testament. It lays out the Biblical pattern for worship. It establishes God’s covenant with his people on the basis of blood. It tells how God gave his law. It shows how mortal men met their Maker face-to-face ... and lived to tell about it. But the climax comes at the end, when Moses entered into glory. . .

God revealed his glory many times during the exodus. He showed it to his prophet back at the burning bush. What Moses saw in those unquenchable flames taught him about God’s self-existence and self-sufficiency. God revealed his glory again when the Israelites escaped from Egypt. He led them in a fiery pillar of cloud, which was another

visible manifestation of his invisible glory. He revealed his glory yet again when they reached his holy mountain. God descended in fire and smoke, “*and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai*” (**Exod. 24:16**). When the people looked up, they saw what “*looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain*” (v. 17). God was there, indwelling and inhabiting the cloud of his glory. In the exodus God revealed glory upon glory.

Chapter 24 ends at the climactic moment when Moses entered God’s cloud of glory. It was his unique privilege not simply to see glory or merely to admire it but actually to enter it. He was drawn closer and closer to the glory of God, until finally he was swallowed up inside.

I. (:1-11) THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT ALLOWS GOD’S PEOPLE TO ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP OF WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

A. (:1-2) God’s Holiness Constrains His Accessibility and Requires Mediation

1. (:1) Upward Call -- Priority of Drawing Near to God to Worship

“Then He said to Moses, ‘Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance.’”

Tension between drawing near and maintaining appropriate distance in our worship.

John Currid: God directs three different groups to go up the mountain: Moses, as covenant mediator, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, as leaders of the future priesthood, and seventy ruling elders of Israel. They are representative of all Israel in their leadership positions. In fact, in Scripture the figure of ‘seventy’ is often symbolic of totality—i.e., the wholeness of Israel. This is an exceptional scene, considering the stricture of **19:12** that ‘*Anyone who touches the mountain shall certainly die.*’

Douglas Stuart: Here begins the invitation from God to Moses to ascend Mount Sinai yet another time, for the special purpose of ratifying the Covenant Code. God’s holiness must still be protected; so only Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s two oldest sons, and the seventy elders of Israel were allowed to form the ratification meal party, representing the rest of Israel through their leadership status. Everyone other than Moses in the leadership group (addressed as “you”—the Hb. is plural—in the statement in v. 1, “*You are to worship at a distance*”) was required to stay away from the most direct contact with the presence of Yahweh. That nearest proximity was granted to Moses exclusively (“*Moses alone is to approach the Lord,*” v. 2), as had been the pattern since the first encounter with Yahweh on Sinai in **chap. 3**.

In the ancient biblical world, covenants were normally concluded with a special covenant meal in which animals were symbolically cut in half (symbolizing the shared responsibility of the two parties as well as the severity of the penalty for breaking the covenant), then the parties to the covenant walked between the pieces, and then the meal was eaten together as a sign of friendship and alliance.

John MacKay: Moses' special position as covenant mediator is acknowledged in that the command is addressed to him, and the others are merely associated with him. '*Come up*' is a natural consequence of the location of the camp at the foot of Sinai below where the Lord was revealing himself on the mountain. But this situation had not arisen accidentally. It was intended to emphasise that even when the Lord has condescended to draw near to his people, there is still a gulf between them. The language of ascent was used for approach to the Lord at other times not just because of the physical location of the sanctuary but because of the privilege of drawing near to one who is majestic and exalted in his own being (**34:24; Ps. 24:3; 120–134**, titles).

John Oswalt: By starting with the reference to worship and the covenant meal in **24:1–2, 9–11**, Moses was underscoring the ultimate goal of covenant obedience: personal relationship with God. Although the actual meal would follow the sealing of the covenant, the notice of it at the beginning of the discussion prepares the reader not to see the sealing as an end in itself. As elsewhere in the Old Testament, the word translated "*worship*" actually refers to prostrating oneself on the ground. "*Worship from a distance*" may refer to the custom of approaching a great person with a series of prostrations, the first one being at some distance (cf. Jacob approaching Esau, **Gen 33:3**). There can be no question about the greatness and majesty of God. Manifesting himself to people in an expression of his desire for fellowship with humanity does not signal even the tiniest diminution in his terrifying holiness (see **24:15–18**). Prostration in awe, gratitude, and praise is the only way to approach him.

2. (:2) Principle of Representation Due to God's Holiness

*"Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD,
but they shall not come near,
nor shall the people come up with him."*

Spurgeon: Nearer to God than the people were allowed to come, but still at a distance from him. It was a covenant of distance, — bounds were set about the mount lest the people should come too near. Yet they were near unto God as compared with the heathen, but far off as compared with those who now, by the teaching of the Spirit of God, have been brought near to God through the precious blood of Jesus. Moses alone could come near to Jehovah on mount Sinai, the people could not go up with him, — nor even with the man who was their mediator with God, for such Moses was; but you and I, beloved, can go up with him who is far greater than Moses, — with him who is the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ at Jesus, for God "*hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*"

J. Ligon Duncan: He's the singular representative for Israel, for Moses to go up to meet with God is for Israel to go up to meet with God, because he's the mediator. You see, God is teaching us something. In one man, all of Israel is represented. Moses. God had promised to commune with His people, and by Moses alone coming up the mountain, the people of God are communing with God, because he is the representative.

B. (:3-4a) God's Word Dictates the Terms of the Relationship = Obedience

1. (:3a) Recounting Orally the Words of God

*"Then Moses came and recounted to the people
all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances;"*

2. (:3b) Responding in Commitment to Obey the Words of God

*"and all the people answered with one voice, and said,
'All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!'"*

David Thompson: Here we go again. As one writer said, this is "*commendable enthusiasm*" but frankly it is delusional. Israel is in that self-trusting fog and she actually believes that she will obey all the Word of God. As we have said, she will not even make it past commandment number one. What really should have happened here and what should have happened in the Garden of Eden, where they had just one commandment, is that the people should have said—God, please help us to obey you because we can't do this ourselves and we won't do this ourselves. Had Adam and Eve or had Israel really drawn near to God, she would have seen God help her. But she was self-sufficient and self-reliant and that is when we fall flat on our faces. But we do see something that is important. If we want fellowship with God, we should have a desire to obey the Word of God. It is true we will not ever totally measure up, but that should be our desire. We should want to know the Word of God so we may apply it to our lives.

3. (:4a) Recording in Written Form the Words of God

"And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD."

Constable: Moses first related the content of God's covenant with Israel orally, and the people submitted to it (**Exodus 24:3**). Then he wrote out God's words to preserve them permanently for the Israelites (**Exodus 24:4**).

J. Ligon Duncan: From those four verses alone we learn two glorious principles. We cannot worship God without a mediator because we are sinners. Like the children of Israel, we can't touch that mountain. We need a mediator, a mediator counted as holy in the sight of God, and Moses serves as the peoples' mediator in this place. The fact that the people themselves cannot come in behind the curtain, they cannot ascend the mountain, they cannot go up with God, shows the distance and it also shows the imperfection of that mediatorial relationship. But it does teach us clearly that you cannot worship God without a mediator because of sin. This passage also teaches that you cannot worship God without honoring and obeying His word. . .

C. (:4b-8) God's Propitiation Depends on the Blood of the Covenant – 7 Key Actions:

1. (:4b) Building the Altar for Covenant Sacrifices

*"Then he arose early in the morning,
and built an altar at the foot of the mountain"*

2. (:4c) Erecting Twelve Stone Pillars

“with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.”

MacArthur: Unlike pagan stone markers (**23:24**), these were built to represent the 12 tribes and were placed alongside the altar Moses had erected in preparation for a covenant ratification ceremony. They did not mark the worship site of a pagan deity.

Douglas Stuart: Five elements centered the people’s focus on their new relationship with God: an altar, twelve stone pillars, animal sacrifices, blood application, and the reading of the covenant. All this was to prepare the people for yet another—and this time the most “official”—verbal agreement to the newly revealed covenant with Yahweh.

John MacKay: Altars had been a feature of worship since earliest times, the first recorded in Scripture being that of Noah (**Gen. 8:20**). It was on the altar that slaughtered animals were offered as sacrifice to a deity, and around it various sacred rites would be performed. Altars were more essential to worship than structures such as temples. An altar could exist without a temple, but no temple could exist without an altar. Frequently altars were built at sites where there had been a theophany (**Gen. 12:7; 26:23–35; 35:1–8**). In such situations the altars commemorated the divine appearance (**17:15**). The altar mentioned here would have been constructed according to the regulations given in **20:24–26**. ‘*At the foot of the mountain*’ indicates that the altar lay on the camp side of the boundary fence (**19:17**). It represents the Lord in the ritual enactment of the covenant ceremony.

3. (:5) Offering Covenant Sacrifices

*“And he sent young men of the sons of Israel,
and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls
as peace offerings to the LORD.”*

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The “young Israelite men” were the firstborn, who officiated until the Levites were appointed in their place in **Numbers 3:41**.

J. Ligon Duncan: That slaughter of the animals represents the principle of vicarious sacrifice, that we cannot come into fellowship with God apart from a sacrifice on our behalf, because we're sinful and we're in need of atonement.

Douglas Stuart: “*Burnt offerings*” are offerings dedicated entirely to God, burnt to ashes on the altar. “*Fellowship offerings*” are offerings eaten by priests and worshipers alike, with a portion of fat from the animal being sacrificed symbolically dedicated to God and burnt to ashes on the altar.

4. (:6) Pouring Blood in Basins and Sprinkling Blood on the Altar

*“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins,
and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.”*

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The division of the blood points to the twofold aspect of the blood of the covenant: the blood on the altar symbolizes God's forgiveness and acceptance of the offering; the blood on the people points to a blood oath that binds them in obedience. In other words, the keeping of the words and laws was made possible by the sacrificial blood of the altar.

Douglas Stuart: Since without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (**Heb 9:22**), making a visible display of the blood from an animal killed for sacrificial purposes highlights for all to see the concept of atoning death. Such vivid reminders helped the Israelites keep in mind the source and nature of their forgiveness and acceptance: God and his grace (as he allows the slain animal to substitute for the sinner, based on the eventual perfect sacrifice of Christ to which all OT sacrifices point and upon which all OT sacrifices depend for their ultimate validity).

5. (:7a) Reading the Book of the Covenant

*"Then he took the book of the covenant
and read it in the hearing of the people;"*

6. (:7b) Committing to Obey the Covenant

*"and they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do,
and we will be obedient!'"*

Constable: There is some disagreement among the commentators about the meaning of "*the Book of the Covenant*" (**Exodus 24:7**). Most take it to mean the "Bill of Rights" that God had just given (**Exodus 20:22 to Exodus 23:33**). [Note: **Wolf**, p153.] Some feel it included "the whole corpus of Sinai laws." [Note: **Childs**, p506; **Johnson**, p74.] Others hold that ". . . it denotes a short general document, a kind of testimony and memorial to the making of the covenant." [Note: **Cassuto**, p312.] I prefer the view that it refers to the covenant stipulations God had made known to the Israelites at this time including the Decalogue and the "Bill of Rights." This seems most consistent with other references to this book in the text.

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The Book of the Covenant includes in its narrowest meaning in scholarly use today words from **20:22 to 23:33** but more fully, here, the contents of **chapter 19**, the Decalogue of **chapter 20**, and the case laws of **20:22 to 23:33**.

Philip Ryken: Next Moses read the law again. The Bible says that after offering sacrifices (more on this in a moment), Moses "*took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people*" (**Exod. 24:7a**). This is the verse that gives the Book of the Covenant its name. It is also a verse to which some scholars object, on the grounds that it is redundant. If Moses read "*all the Lord's words and laws*" in **verse 3**, why did he do it again in **verse 7**?

There are at least two good answers. One is that reading the law was a necessary part of the ceremony for confirming the covenant. Moses read God's law the first time so the people would know what they were getting into. As soon as the Israelites heard what

God wanted, they decided to accept his terms: “*When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the Lord has said we will do’*” (v. 3). But even after they decided to accept God’s covenant, they needed to hear the law again to confirm the covenant. The second reading of the law was part of the ceremony. The law was read once to help the people understand what God demanded; it was read a second time so they could promise to do it.

7. (:8) Final Sprinkling the Blood of the Covenant on the People

“So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

Walter Kaiser Jr.: The **blood** by which the covenant was ratified and sealed was the basis for the union between Yahweh and the people. This phrase becomes most important in the NT in its reappearance in the Lord’s Supper (**Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9:20; Heb 10:29; also Heb 12:24; Heb 13:20; 1 Peter 1:2**).

J. Ligon Duncan: This is the blood that seals the covenant. This is the blood that shows that you have been brought into covenant relationship with God. This is the blood that spares your judgment. This is the blood that unites you with the family of God. And on the night that Jesus was betrayed, on the night in which He stood in that upper room and the account of it is recorded in every one of the gospels and in John, Jesus lifts up the cup to explain what He is about to do for the disciples the next day. He uses this phrase, this language from **Exodus 24**, and He says, “Behold, this is the blood of the covenant.” No, He doesn’t! He says, “*Behold, My blood of the covenant.*” Jesus is saying that it is “My blood which is going to seal this covenant.”

You see, the author of Hebrews, in **Hebrews 10:4**, explains to you that “*the blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin and cannot cleanse the conscience.*” And Jesus is looking to His disciples, He’s looking into their eyes, and He knows that they know this passage, and He knows that they know the significance of that blood bringing the people of God into fellowship with God Himself, and He’s saying, “My friends, that blood couldn’t bring you into fellowship with God, but My blood can and will. Behold, My blood of the covenant.” And He adds in Mark, “*which is shed for the forgiveness of your sins.*” **You can’t worship God without that Mediator.** There is no way into fellowship with the God who rules over heaven and earth, but by the name and merits and blood of Jesus Christ.

MacArthur: By this act [sprinkling of the blood], Moses, in response to the positive acceptance and assertion of obedience by the people after hearing the Book of the Covenant read to them, officially sealed the treaty with blood; a not uncommon custom (cf. **Ge 15:9-13, 17**). Half of the blood used had been sprinkled on the altar as part of the consecration ceremony. The representatives of Israel were thereby qualified to ascend the mountain and participate in the covenant meal with Yahweh (**24:11; cf. Heb 9:20**).

Philip Ryken: At the same time, the blood was a sign of God's mercy. God was not simply showing his people what would happen if they failed; he was also showing that there was a way for them to remain in his favor, even after they sinned. To put this another way, although the relationship God established with his people under Moses had a legal basis, it was a covenant of grace. This was shown by the sprinkling of the blood. First Moses sprinkled it on the altar of God, which showed that the people's sins were forgiven. This is what a bloody altar always signifies: the forgiveness of sins. Atonement has been made; God has accepted a sacrifice as payment for sin. The blood was also a propitiation: It turned aside God's wrath. Then the blood was sprinkled on the people. This showed that God had accepted their sacrifice and that they were now included in the covenant through the forgiveness of their sins. The blood—and therefore its benefits—was applied directly to them.

God's relationship with his people was maintained on the basis of a sacrifice. Since there were two sides to this relationship, the blood was sprinkled on both parties, tying them together. The covenant was a blood relationship, "a bond in blood" between God and his people. It is significant that the blood was put on God's altar first. For the people to have any kind of relationship with God at all, God had to accept the sacrifice they made for their sins. Notice as well the way Moses describes this relationship: "*the covenant that the Lord has made with you*" (**Exod. 24:8**). There were two sides to the relationship, but it all started with God. The Israelites did not go to God and say, "Look, Lord, we'd really like to have a relationship with you." On the contrary, the whole arrangement was his idea in the first place. **Peter Enns** thus notes that "this covenant is essentially not a matter of a mutual agreement or pact made between God and the Israelites. It is, as we read, '*the covenant that the Lord has made with you.*' It is by his initiative. He is the instigator. What the Israelites are to do is to accept and agree to live by the terms of the covenant that God and God alone has stipulated."

D. (:9-11) God's Appearance Inspires Both Fear and Intimacy – Meeting with God

1. (:9) Approaching God

*"Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu,
and seventy of the elders of Israel,"*

John MacKay: Audience with the King -- As the final stage in the covenant ratification ceremony the representatives of the people are permitted an audience with the covenant King. In **chapter 19** the people had been banned from approaching the mountain, but now they have fully entered into the office of the priestly nation, their representatives are permitted to have fellowship with God. The Lord presents himself in a way that is quite different from the awesome darkness of the theophany of **chapters 19 and 20**, but there is no diminution of the otherness of God in this scene of peaceful majesty and bright grandeur. It could not, of course, be a direct perception of deity, nor was the experience at the same level that Moses would subsequently be privileged to have. But the remarkably restrained language shows the Lord's appearance to have been a profound and elevated experience.

2. (:10) Facing God and Seeing His Majesty

*“and they saw the God of Israel;
and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire,
as clear as the sky itself.”*

Wiersbe: this doesn't mean they beheld God in his essential being, for this isn't possible (**John 1:18**). They saw some of God's glory and they probably saw the throne of God on the sapphire pavement (see **Ezek. 1:26**), but the invisible God was hidden from them. After this vision of God, they shared a fellowship meal that climaxed the ratifying of the covenant. To eat together was a mark of friendship and agreement. God is glorious and high and lifted up, but He also condescends to fellowship with us!

John Hannah: Apparently the sight was so grand and awesome that their eyes saw only below **His feet**.

Philip Ryken: Skeptics often say, “If only I could see God, then I would believe in him.” But the skeptics have it backwards. God has revealed enough of himself in his Word and in creation for us to know him and love him. But his existence still has to be taken on faith, and the gift of seeing him is only given to those who believe. When it comes to religion, people often say, “I have to see it to believe it.” But God says, “You won't see it unless you believe it. If you believe, then you'll see! You'll see me in the person of my Son, when he comes in glory at the end of days.”

John MacKay: The description of the pavement would then correspond to the expanse that Ezekiel saw supported by the cherubim and itself supporting the divine throne (**Ezek. 1:22–26**). The expanse in Ezekiel is here described as being like a pavement, a paved area of brick work. But this was an extraordinary pavement because the bricks were not made from sun-dried mud, but from clear, deep-blue sapphire (or, as the margin notes, from ‘*lapis lazuli*’ which is azure blue). Clear as the sky itself suggests there were no imperfections in the gem stones. ‘*Clear*’ is literally ‘cleansed’, presumably in the way in which the wind can blow away a heat haze from the skies of the east and leave them so intensely bright that it is difficult to look directly up. The whole scene is an appropriate emblem of the vast extent of the rule of the heavenly King, whose throne is higher than the heavens and who rules over all beneath him.

Bob Deffinbaugh: I therefore understand that the revelation of God in each of these three passages [Ezekiel and Revelation] is similar, but that God is progressively more closely and more intimately revealed, and from a slightly different perspective. I believe that the elders of Israel (**Exodus 24**) saw God enthroned high above them, from under the crystal floor, looking through it. They would thus have seen only the feet of the God who was enthroned, since the throne would have obscured the rest of Him. Since the floor was crystal clear, they could see God above them through the floor, with the throne sitting on the floor, and God on the throne. Ezekiel's vision describes God as enthroned on the crystal expanse, above the heads of the four living creatures, but more of Him is seen. Thus, Ezekiel must have been closer, and perhaps elevated and looking

at the throne of God from a different angle. John, on the other hand, sees God enthroned “from heaven,” so that his view of God is not restricted. Appropriately, those who behold God at later times see more of Him.

3. (:11a) Fearing God and Experiencing His Mercy

*“Yet He did not stretch out His hand
against the nobles of the sons of Israel;”*

J. Ligon Duncan: the expectation is that when a sinful human sees the awesome, the holy, the mighty God, it means death. It means certain death. But God in His mercy spares them.

4. (:11b) Fellowshiping with God and Eating Together in the Context of a Covenant Ratification Meal

“and they beheld God, and they ate and drank.”

J. Ligon Duncan: And that meal that they eat symbolizes the sweetness of union and communion, the enjoyment of the presence of God which the people of God enjoy because of the covenant.

II. (:12-18) THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP IS DESIGNED TO MANIFEST THE GLORY OF THE LORD

A.. (:12-14) God Initiates and Defines the Covenant Relationship

1. (:12-13) Upward Call – Priority of Drawing Near to God to Worship

a. (:12) Invitation to Approach God to Receive His Word

*“Now the LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain
and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets
with the law and the commandment
which I have written for their instruction.’”*

J. Ligon Duncan: Behind the law of Israel, behind the instruction of Israel lies, not Moses but God. It is divine authority, it is transcendent authority that lies behind the instruction that Moses gives to Israel simply as a messenger.

Douglas Stuart: Yet another trip up to the top of Mount Sinai now commences. It may be assumed that Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s two sons, and the seventy Israelite elders had descended the mountain once they finished the covenant meal described in **24:11**. The present trip, involving only Moses and Joshua (**v. 13**), was of a very different nature from the previous one: it was for a lengthy stay atop the mountain (**v. 18**), with special attention to receiving God’s own written guidelines for Israel’s relationship to him (**v. 12**). This stay on the mountain continued through the events described in **32:1–16**; Moses’ sojourn atop the mountain would be cut short this time by God’s own command (**32:7**).

- b. (:13) Key Leaders Allowed to Approach God on the Mountain
*“So Moses arose with Joshua his servant,
and Moses went up to the mountain of God.”*

Significance of the role of Joshua introduced here

2. (:14) Instructions to the Elders

*“But to the elders he said, ‘Wait here for us until we return to you.
And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you;
whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them.’”*

B. (:15-18) God Manifests His Glory in the Context of Covenant Relationship -- Meeting with God

1. (:15-17) 3 Manifestations of the Presence of God = His Glory

a. (:15-16a) Glory in the Cloud

*“Then Moses went up to the mountain,
and the cloud covered the mountain.
And the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai,
and the cloud covered it for six days;”*

Douglas Stuart: The cloud had already served as a protection and guide for the Israelites in their flight from the Egyptians. It was the same cloud previously indicated in **19:18**. In Exodus as elsewhere in the Bible it represented God’s glorious presence: awesome, multifaceted, partly mysterious but also protective and encompassing.

J. Ligon Duncan: The great blessing of worship is the presence of God. The great blessing of worship is meeting with God. The great blessing of the Christian life is knowing and meeting and fellowshiping and communing with the living God. And all through these verses we have intimations of the presence and the glory of God. . .

And it will not be until **Exodus 32** when Moses comes back down from the mountain. A quarter of the book later it will be before he comes down. What's the point? The point is the presence of God is the central reality and the central blessing of the book of Exodus, and Moses is representatively as the mediator, coming into the presence of God. And without that presence of God, nothing else matters. Without communion with God, without fellowship with God, without the presence of God, without the favor of God, without meeting with God, nothing else matters.

John Oswalt: Here, just as previously, the “cloud” (**24:15–18**) and the “consuming fire” (**24:17**) were symbols of the transcendent holiness of God that creatures can never cross over. But the remarkable thing about the biblical understanding of transcendence is that while it forever limits creaturely initiative to participate in God, it places no conditions whatsoever upon God. He is able to come across the boundaries and to take creatures into his presence. And in doing so, he in no way compromises his transcendence. At this point, merely human understandings of logic give out, but there it is. God does not change himself to come to us, but he does intend to change us so that we can live in the

midst of the fire as Moses did. In fact, that is the direction of the entire book of Exodus: While the goal of the people might be the Promised Land, God's goal is that he may dwell in their midst, in effect bringing the "*mountain of God*" (24:13; cf. 3:1; 19:1) into the center of the camp (40:34).

b. (:16b) Glory in the Voice of God

"and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud."

c. (:17) Glory Appearing as a Consuming Fire

"And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top."

2. (:18) Moses Enters Into the Presence of God

"And Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

Constable: Having given directions clarifying Israel's obedience in the Book of the Covenant (**Exodus 20:22** to **Exodus 23:33**), God now summoned Moses up into the mountain again to receive His directions regarding Israel's worship. The Book of the Covenant specified how the Israelites were to live with one another, but the tabernacle showed them how God wanted them to worship Him.

John Davis: During this entire time he was without food (**Deut. 9:9**). The whole purpose of this long time of fellowship was to receive the tables of stone on which the law would be written (v. 12; cf. **Deut. 9:9**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What areas of **continuity** do you see between the OT and the NT? What areas of **discontinuity**?
- 2) What do we understand to be the primary purpose and function of **corporate worship**?
- 3) What do we learn in the Book of Hebrews about the **blood of the New Covenant** in distinction to the blood of the Old Covenant?
- 4) How does the **Lord's Supper** serve as a proper memorialization of the reality of the New Covenant?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Ligon Duncan: The Blood of the Covenant (:1-11)

I. The principle of representation and the centrality of the word in the covenant at Sinai.

II. The principle of vicarious sacrifice and duty from gratitude in the covenant at Sinai.

III. The covenant is both the means and the end of God's saving design-binding relationship and fellowship.

IV. Our Lord Himself connects and explains His saving work on the cross with Moses' words in Exodus 24:8.

Charles Biggs:

Define Covenant: "A bond in blood sovereignly initiated and administered" (**Robertson and Biggs**). Covenant put simply is: "A sacred relationship" (**Enns and Ryken**).

What is the Form of a Covenant Treaty in the ANE? (Exodus 19:3-6; 20-23):

Moses is Covenant Mediator between YHWH and the people (The reason why God allows him to come all the way to the top of the mountain in ascension):

1. Preamble: Suzerain (Sovereign King) identifies himself and initiates the covenant with the people.

2. Historical Prologue: YHWH the Sovereign King recounts the past relationship between Israel and himself.

3. Stipulations: "If...then" clause. The people must "truly obey".

4. Covenant Ratification: The people respond without knowing fully the Torah, or Law of God to be revealed in **chapters 20-23**. The people respond in full agreement to keep the law covenant with God.

Christ's blood or life is required of him for covenant breakers; he is the one who consecrates us for fellowship with God -- peace with God with no more guilt before the presence of God!

<https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/71506234047.pdf>

Bob Deffinbaugh: The Magnificent Meal on Mt. Sinai

The text we are about to study is one of the most fascinating passages in the Old Testament. One of the attractions of this passage is its uniqueness. The God who cannot be seen, is seen, not only by Moses, along with Joshua, his servant, but by Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the priests, and also by seventy of the elders of Israel. The description of God is one that we would not have expected to find in the Old Testament. In addition to seeing God, the nobles of the nation Israel also sat and ate a meal in His

presence. If nothing else would motivate us to study this text, our curiosity could inspire us.

The 24th chapter of Exodus is noteworthy also because it records one of the most significant and solemn events of the Old Testament. The nation Israel has been camped at the base of Mt. Sinai for some time. They will continue on there for a considerably longer period. It is at Mt. Sinai, in the 24th chapter of Exodus, that the Mosaic Covenant is ratified. Centuries before, God had promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, through his offspring. He promised Abraham a seed (a son, which would become a great nation), a land (the land of Canaan), and the promise that this nation would be blessed and a blessing to all nations (**Gen. 12:1-3**). The promises which God made were ratified as a covenant between Himself and Abraham in the 15th chapter of Genesis. . .

The events of this chapter are critical in the history of Israel, as we shall point out at the conclusion of the message. We might wonder, however, how important this text can be to us, since we are not living under this “old covenant,” but under the “new covenant,” the covenant inaugurated by our Lord. **What is in this text for us?** This is a logical and valid question. Answers to it must include these:

(1) The ratification of the Mosaic Covenant in the 24th chapter of Exodus is the key to the remainder of the Book of Exodus. I have to admit that I was tempted to leave Exodus right after the giving of the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, we must see the Law of proportion at work here. In the Gospels of the New Testament, the greatest amount of detail is given with respect to the last week of our Lord’s life. We thus must surmise that the events of this week were of great importance.

So, too, when we come to the Book of Exodus, we find that the “human interest” accounts of the book are heavily outnumbered by the details bearing upon the design, the construction, and the inauguration of the tabernacle. The 24th chapter of Exodus is the transition point, where once the covenant is ratified, the **tabernacle** becomes the most prominent subject. If we are to understand the Book of Exodus as a whole, we dare not neglect chapter 24. This matter will be pursued more fully later.

(2) We cannot possibly understand the message and the meaning of the Old Testament apart from an understanding of the old covenant, which is instituted here in Exodus 24.

(3) We cannot understand the New Testament apart from an understanding of the Old, of which the Mosaic covenant is the key. Even a casual reading of the Book of Hebrews underscores the need to understand the old covenant and the Old Testament, if we are to grasp the work of Christ in bringing the new covenant. Understanding covenants is important to Christianity. The concept of a covenant must be understood, since the gospel is the proclamation of a new covenant, which was instituted by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As the Book of Hebrews indicates, the new covenant is to be viewed in contrast to the old. In a word, the new covenant is “better” than the old. On the other hand, there is a great deal of continuity between the two covenants, and thus we can also learn much by focusing on the similarities of the two covenants.

The ratification of the Mosaic Covenant was not only important for the nation Israel, it is also important for us. It is well worth the time and effort which we expend as we explore the 24th chapter of Exodus. . .

The Structure of Our Passage

In its simplest form, this chapter in Exodus falls into two divisions:

- (1) A Divine Call and the Ratification of the Covenant (verses 1-11) and
- (2) A Divine Call and the Recording of the Covenant (verses 12-18).

The first and second divisions of this chapter are similar in that they both begin with the call of God (“*come up*,” **vss. 1, 12**). The first call includes Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. The second call is for Moses alone. Both divisions end similarly, as well. The first division ends with a description of the revelation of God as seen by the elders. The last division ends with a description of the revelation of God as seen by the Israelites in the camp.

The Call to Worship and the Confirmation of the Covenant (24:1-11)

God clearly distinguished between Himself and His subjects in three ways:

- (1) He initiated the covenant. He brought Israel out of Egypt, and He declared the covenant, and He invited the seventy elders to come up to Him.
- (2) God invited the seventy elders to come up to worship Him (**24:1**). Worship is not practiced among equals. The inferior always worships the superior being.
- (3) God invited the elders to worship Him “*from a distance*” (**v. 1**), allowing only Moses to come near to Him. While the leaders of Israel had to keep their distance, the nation as a whole had to remain even further removed. God is the superior Being who institutes this covenant with Israel.

The Upward Call of Moses and the Tablets of Stone (24:12-18)

The second “upward call” is given in **verse 12**, calling Moses alone to the top of Mt. Sinai. This is for the purpose of giving to him the commandments written on stone by the finger of God (**24:12**). It is also for the purpose of revealing to Moses the “*heavenly pattern*” and the blueprints for the tabernacle and its furnishings. . .

The ratification of the Mosaic Covenant had great meaning for the Israelite of that day. It meant that there was now a way for God to identify with Israel as His people. Because of this, the tabernacle could be constructed and the glory of God which once

was manifested on Mt. Sinai could now come down to this dwelling place: Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (**Exod. 40:34**).

For the Israelites of a later time, it was a great comfort to know that God had established a unique relationship with the nation Israel, and that even when the nation sinned and suffered the discipline of God, their future was assured, for God had committed Himself to His people. . .

Application:

The application of this text thus stems from the similarity of both covenants, as covenants.

(1) The new covenant, like the old covenant, must be ratified, in order for its benefits to be attained.

(2) The new covenant, like the Old, must be communicated clearly, so that men can make a choice based on an adequate understanding of the commitment required.

(3) The new covenant requires not only commitment and communication, but commemoration.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/24-magnificent-meal-mt-sinai-exodus-241-18>

Kevin DeYoung: The Covenant Confirmed

It's a high point, literally and figuratively, because it gives us both a glimpse of what God looks like and of what worship should look like. . .

Basically, there are two difference scenes in this chapter. Scene 1 (vv. 1-11) is the 74 going up the mountain. That's Moses; his brother; and his brother's two sons, Nadab and Abihu; plus the 70 elders. . .

The second scene starts in verse 12: "*The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain...'*" It appears that some time has passed, and that Moses has gone down the mountain. . .

What's he getting while he's up there? The instructions for the tabernacle: how to build it, and how to attend to its service. That's what's recorded in Exodus 25-31. . .

When he comes down from the mountain, he has the tablets. There are two tablets: one for the people, and one as a copy. That's what you did when you established a covenant in the ancient world. You had two copies: one for the sovereign, and one for the people. So, even though we tend to see artistic renderings of the first tablet having commandments 1-4 (the first table of the law) and the second having commandments 5-10, that's not why he got two. The copies would have been identical: one for the Lord, and one for his people. That's what Moses comes down with in Exodus 32. . .

The Fundamental Goal of Worship

Some answers that people give to the purpose or function of corporate worship:

- Entertainment
- Inspiration – creating a dynamic experience
- Opportunity for people to use their gifts
- Primarily a teaching time

When we gather for worship we're performing a service of **covenant renewal**. . .

Notice three elements in this covenant ceremony: first, the Book of the Covenant; second, the blood of the covenant; and third, the bread of the covenant.

The Book of the Covenant

Here we come to the very heart of worship. It's not just about feeling the heart of worship. It's about this book. In this service, the book must be read, and the people must respond to it. That's why, in a worship service, we don't typically say, "Sermon. Amen. You're dismissed." There's a lot of thought given to having a song that gives you some opportunity to voice a response and praise God in light of what you've heard—to express your desire to serve him, follow him, and go out and love your neighbor as yourself. You can't just hear it. You must respond to it.

God's word is read and taught—all the stipulations, promises, blessings, and curses. God's people hear it, receive it, understand it, and respond to it. That's what you do in the ratification of the covenant: focus on the Book of the Covenant.

The Blood of the Covenant

In this case, blood not only accompanies the administration of the covenant, but makes possible the provisions of the covenant. . .

The altar speaks of **substitution**. That's why Moses also has 12 pillars erected: to stand for the 12 tribes of Israel. On this altar, the sins of the people will be paid for by a substitute: a bird, a bull, or a sheep. This covenant is only possible on an altar.

Then there is a sacrifice, speaking of **propitiation**: the good theological term which refers to how God, who has every right to be against us, is now for us. That's what it means for God to be "propitious" toward us. He's pro-us. Why? Because sacrifices have been offered in our stead, so that we can enter into a covenant. . .

How can you come near a holy God? You need an altar, and a sacrifice. You need substitution, propitiation, and consecration.

That's what the sprinkling is: **consecration**. . .

Blood smells like something else. It stains. All of these people literally have the blood

of the covenant sprinkled upon them. Why? To mark them out as ones who are set apart and made holy—holy in the sense that they are separate, set apart from the nations, and consecrated. They have received initiation into the covenant by the sprinkling of blood.

The Bread of the Covenant

Quotes **Michael Horton**:

It is in this context that we talk about the “covenant renewal ceremony.” Whenever we gather for public worship, it is because we have been summoned. That is what “*church*” means: *ekklesia*, “called out.” It is not a voluntary society of those whose chief concern is to share, to build community, to enjoy fellowship, to have moral instruction for their children, and so forth. Rather, it is a society of those who have been chosen, redeemed, called, justified, and are being sanctified until one day they will finally be glorified in heaven. We gather each Lord’s Day not merely out of habit, social custom, or felt needs but because God has chosen this weekly festival as a foretaste of the everlasting Sabbath day that will be enjoyed fully at the marriage supper of the Lamb. God has called us out of the world and into his marvelous light: That is why we gather.

Application:

(Heb. 10: 24-25) -- We have this one day where we can go up the mountain together and behold God, and he can speak to us, and we can respond to him. How can this gathering not be the highlight of our week? We have a better covenant, a better redeemer, a better sacrifice, and a better book, and we go to a better mountain.

<https://www.universityreformedchurch.org/sermons/16199/>

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