



FROM PASTURE TO BRICKYARD

Exodus 1:1-22

The plans of wicked people cannot thwart the plan of God. While Israel suffered under Egyptian oppression, they were not forgotten by God. In Exodus 1 we see how He preserved His people both supernaturally and through those who feared Him.

We arrive today at the book of Exodus, written by Moses under the guidance of the Holy Spirit nearly 3,500 years ago. But let me tell you, this book is filled with wisdom for today just as much as it was back then.

The title, Exodus, comes from a Greek word that gives us our English word *exit*—and that’s exactly what Exodus is about—it’s going to tell us about Israel’s *exit* from Egypt. Now Genesis told us how the Israelites got into Egypt; the book of Exodus tells us how they get out. This is the sequel to the book of Genesis—it tells us what happened next.

As the Exodus begins, we read in verse 7 that “the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.” In Genesis, Jacob moved to Egypt with around seventy members of his little family; but over the years this little family has grown into a vast nation of several million people. And that’s when the problem begins.

Look at verse 8:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people,

“Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them [literally, ‘let’s outsmart them’].”

In other words, “We’d better do something to suppress them and keep them from ruling over *us*.”

So, Pharaoh puts into motion what we will call Plan A, which forces the Israelites into slave labor. Verse 11 tells us they “set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens [literally, ‘with hard labor’].



Ramesses II



They built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.” These ancient cities have been excavated, and archeologists have discovered large storage facilities, just like the Bible says. The archaeologist’s shovel just keeps on affirming the record of Scripture.

One mural was excavated that showed laborers making bricks. That’s exactly what verse 14 describes here. The taskmasters “made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick.”

So, Plan A was to work these Israelites so hard that the last thing they would want to do is bring more children into the world. But it doesn’t work. Verse 12 says, “The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad.”

Several years later, another pharaoh comes along and implements Plan B:

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other Puah. “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.”

(verses 15-16)

We’re not absolutely certain what the name of this pharaoh was, though we’re pretty sure it was Thutmose I. But we do know the names of these two women, which have gone down in history. Shiphrah means “beautiful,” and Puah means “splendid”—and they certainly were.

So, what exactly did Miss Beautiful and Miss Splendid do here? Verse 17 says, “But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.”

This isn’t the first time, and it won’t be the last time, that Satan tries to eliminate the people of Israel and nullify God’s covenant of a promised land and a

promised Messiah. But Satan fails every single time, and he’s going to fail here in Egypt.

Now this phrase here—“*let the male children live*”—is a strong expression that literally means the midwives redoubled their efforts to keep these babies alive. Eventually the news gets back to Pharaoh that baby clothes for boys are flying off the shelves, and he wants an explanation.

He calls in the midwives and asks why they have let the male children live. And in verse 19 the midwives tell him, “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” In other words, they are saying, “Hebrew mothers are so physically strong that their baby boys are born before we can pedal our bicycles over to help.”

Now it’s true that the Hebrew women were involved in manual labor and stronger than the pampered Egyptian women of the day. But the other part of their answer surely isn’t true. So, what they are telling is a half-truth, and a half-truth is a whole lie.

The Bible doesn’t commend their lie, and it never suggests that we lie to stay out of hot water. In fact, had they told the truth, God could have supernaturally protected them in some manner.

In fact, had they told the truth, God could have supernaturally protected them in some manner.

But what we do know is that these women courageously defied the command of Pharaoh. Plan B isn’t working either.

So, Pharaoh institutes Plan C. Now there’s no hiding



his intentions. He just comes out in the open and calls for genocide:

Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.” (verse 22)

He wants his people to spy on the Israelites and literally throw baby boys into the Nile River.

By the way, one of the chief gods of Egypt was the Nile River. It was infested with crocodiles, and the Egyptians believed these crocodiles were the servants of the Nile god. So, Pharaoh is essentially turning murder into a religious act: “Let’s offer their children to our god as a sacrifice.”

Keep in mind that this command, while probably not widely and consistently carried out by the Egyptian people, will continue for the next eighty years, until the people follow Moses out of the land of Egypt. In the meantime, Israel must have been wondering, “Where is God? Doesn’t God see what’s happening? Does God even care?”

Yes, God sees—and He has a plan. There’s a newborn by the name of Moses who will lead the people to freedom.

Even when God seems absent, He is active. Even when He seems distant—as perhaps He does in your life right now—God is always present. Even when the world has its plans, God has His plans.

Later, over in Exodus 3:7, God says to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people . . . and have heard their cry . . . I know their sufferings.”

I read recently about a little boy in the grocery store with his daddy. He was carrying one of those grocery baskets, and as he walked down the aisle, his daddy would take an item off the shelf and put it in his basket. As his basket began to fill up, one of the cus-

tomers felt sympathetic and said to him, “Isn’t your basket getting kind of heavy for you, son?” The little boy looked up and said, “Oh, don’t worry. My daddy knows how much I can carry.”

And so does your Heavenly Father. He knows where you are right now; He knows how heavy the burden is that you’re carrying. He has strength for you today and plans for you today—and tomorrow.

Pharaohs of Exodus

Thutmose I (1525–1512 BC) practiced genocide on Hebrew male babies (Exodus 1:15-22).

Hatshepsut (1503–1482 BC) was the daughter of Pharaoh Thutmose I who drew Moses out of the Nile and later ruled as Queen (Exodus 2:5).

Thutmose III (1504–1450 BC) was the pharaoh of the oppression who tried to kill Moses and from whom Moses fled into Midian (Exodus 2:15).

Amenhotep II (1450–1425 BC) was the pharaoh of the plagues and the Exodus (Exodus 3:10—15:19)

Adapted from Thomas Constable, *Notes on Exodus*, 2020 edition (Sonic Light, 2020), 18, planobiblechapel.org.

The Israelites were saved from a famine by their move to Egypt, and they were severely oppressed by the Egyptians. God worked through both extremes. What does this tell you about the will and plan of God?

How does the fear of God and fear of people enter into your decisions? What changes do you need to make in your decision-making process?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org



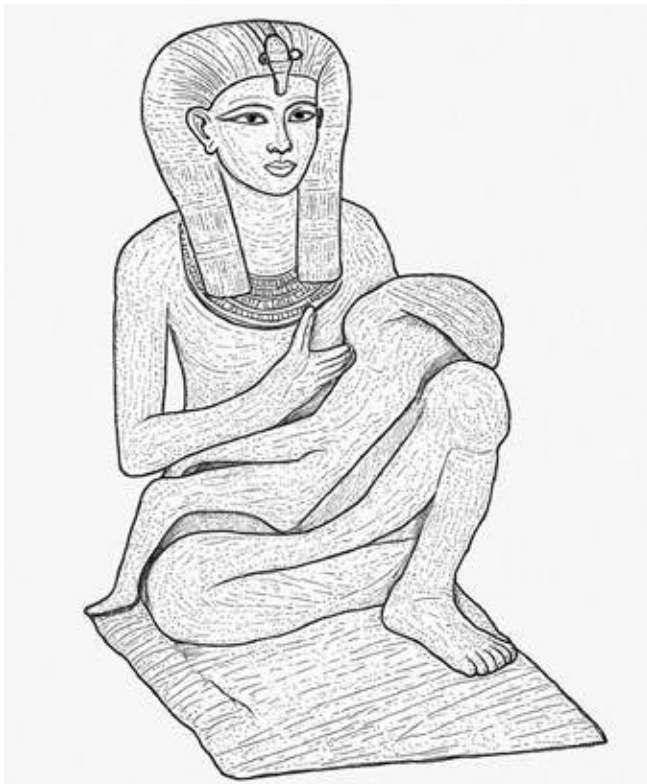


FAITH AND A WICKER BASKET

Exodus 2:1-10

As God began working out His plan for His oppressed people, He used the faith of a humble Hebrew couple, the wise strategy of a loving mother, and His own providential work in the heart of an Egyptian princess to preserve the life of the one who would lead Israel to freedom.

The dark clouds of suffering and persecution for the people of Israel are beginning to gather. Pharaoh has just commanded that Hebrew baby boys are to be thrown into the river, essentially sacrificed to the Nile River god and his servants, the crocodiles.



Statue of a nursing mother or wet nurse

Exodus chapter 2 begins, “Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son” (verses 1-2). We will later learn that the names of these parents are Amram and Jochebed. We will also learn later that this couple already have a daughter named Miriam and a three-year-old son, named Aaron.

Now verse 2 tells us that when Moses was born, his mother saw that he was a “fine child,” or as many versions translate it, a “beautiful child.” That’s an interesting expression.

I’ve seen a lot of newborn babies over the years of my ministry, and frankly I wouldn’t call them beautiful—not even my own children. And that could get me into a lot of trouble with some new mother in church bringing her baby up to me and waiting for me to comment. What do I say? Well, years ago I adopted the practice of J. Vernon McGee, who would look at the baby and then say, “Well now, *that’s* a baby.” I’ve been saying that now for many years, and it’s kept me out of trouble.

Now was it the baby Moses’ physical beauty that so impressed his mother? No. In fact, Stephen’s sermon in Acts chapter 7 adds the phrase that Moses was beautiful “in God’s sight” (Verse 20).



In other words, God provided some information about this little boy's future role in Israel. This is why in Hebrews 11:23, we're told that Moses' parents hid him in *faith*, believing what God evidently had told them about the future role of Moses.

Exodus 2:2 reports that Jochebed hid Moses for three months. Now how do you hide a baby boy for three months—or three hours for that matter? It's possible that she passed him off as a baby girl, but we're not told that. We *are* told in verse 3 that after three months, “she could hide him no longer.”

Amram may have been off building one of the storage cities for Pharaoh and unavailable to help her; so, Jochebed comes up with a plan of her own, no doubt impressed on her by the Spirit of God. We read in verse 3, “She took for him a basket made of bulrushes [papyrus reeds] and daubed it with bitumen and pitch.” Bitumen was a natural petroleum, and pitch was tar. They were used to not only make things waterproof, but also to repel the crocodiles. She's not just throwing a little basket together.

Verse 3 continues, “She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.” The Hebrew could read, “She *stationed* it among the reeds.” Miriam, the child's sister, also is stationed nearby, watching.

None of this was random; Jochebed knew this was where Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe. There was a royal bathhouse built down by the river.

It's very possible, given what happens next, that this particular daughter of Pharaoh is unable to have children. And everybody in that region knew exactly where

she went to bathe and the rituals she went through in hopes of having a child of her own. The Egyptians believed the Nile River was the source of fertility.

And isn't it interesting that one of the few people in Egypt who could override the command of Pharaoh and spare Moses' life is *the daughter* of Pharaoh? And don't think for a moment that Jochebed doesn't know that.

Now verses 5-6 tell us what happened next:

She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her [maid], and she took it. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews' children.”

Now I don't think Moses is crying at the top of his lungs here—she might have put the lid back on the basket if that were the case. I think this was one of those pitiful cries—whimpering and sniffing—that moves you to sympathy. My two daughters had this technique mastered. It didn't seem to affect their mother, but it sure got to me. When that basket was opened, at that moment, God brought together a baby's cry and a woman's heart.¹

Ancient Jewish sources add that Pharaoh's daughter stood there with her maidens wondering how she would be able to feed this baby if she kept him. That's probably true. And right about then—no doubt according to the plan—little Miriam, who's been watching all this, runs up and says to Pharaoh's daughter in verse 7, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”

Now, I don't think Pharaoh's daughter is surprised at all by Miriam; this Egyptian princess is no dummy. She probably knows immediately what's going on here. But again, God is the one turning this woman's heart so that instead of feeling manipulated, she's moved with compassion for this baby boy.

*Faith doesn't mean
you stop thinking
or planning. Faith
is making plans but
giving God the
final say.*



And Pharaoh's daughter said to her "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." (verses 8-9)

So, Jochebed gets her baby boy back, and she is actually paid to nurse him. How great is that!

Moses will eventually grow up in the palace of Pharaoh, educated and "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22) and prepared to one day lead the enslaved Israelites out of Egypt.

By the way, do we know what happened to this daughter of Pharaoh? God evidently wasn't finished with her. In fact, many Bible scholars, following rabbinic tradition, believe her common name was later changed to Bithiah, which means "daughter of Jehovah."²

If you take the time to read through all those names in 1 Chronicles, you'll find this particular gem in chapter 4, verse 17:

These are the sons of Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered married; and she conceived and bore Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah.

I believe this is the same daughter of Pharaoh who ended up not only raising a Hebrew boy but marrying a Hebrew man from the tribe of Judah. And we're also told here that they had several sons as well

as a daughter. And what did the daughter of Pharaoh name her daughter? She named her Miriam, no doubt in honor of that little girl who was the first person to introduce her to the people of God.

The Bible doesn't give us the details about her conversion to the God of Abraham. Perhaps it was the testimony of Jochebed, or perhaps it was long conversations with her adopted son Moses; but eventually she no longer wanted to be known as the daughter of Pharaoh but the daughter of the true and living God.

You never know, beloved, how God will use your testimony in the life of someone who seems absolutely unreachable. Just keep living for Him and telling others about Him. And leave the rest to Him.

The LORD worked through the life of a child, Miriam, to accomplish His will for a whole nation, even the Messiah's coming. How does that truth impact your thinking about the young ones in your life and their spiritual potential? What is your role in that potential?

Pharaoh's daughter became Bithiah the daughter of Jehovah. How does that transformation encourage you about your own life or the life of someone you love that seems so far away from God? What spiritual ways can you invest in that "yet-to-be daughter or son of Jehovah?"

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, vol. 1 (Nelson, 1981), 206.

² See Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (Westminster Press, 1993), 114.





FROM SOMEBODY TO NOBODY

Exodus 2:11–3:22

God uniquely prepares each one of us to serve Him where He places us. Forty years in Egypt's royal household was only part of Moses' preparation for his greatest work. The Lord had to take him into the desert to teach him further lessons from serving as a humble shepherd.

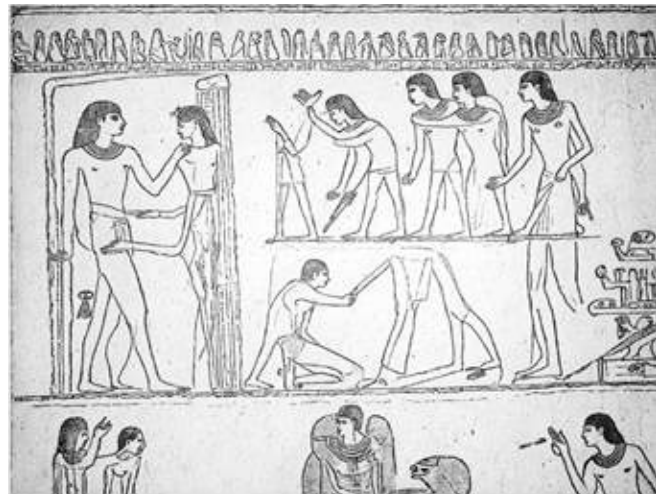
“Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody; forty years learning he was nobody; and forty years discovering what God can do with a nobody.” That oft-repeated quote from D. L. Moody pretty much sums up Moses' life.

Now over these next two study sessions, we're going to observe several different attitudes that are going to *hinder* Moses from serving the Lord. Along the way, like me, you just might recognize yourself in some of these attitudes.

The first attitude hindering Moses' availability to serve God's purposes is an attitude that effectively announces, “I am *invincible*.”

We are told in Exodus chapter 2 and verse 10 that Moses grew up as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Over in Acts 7:22 we are informed that “Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”

Now Egypt was no primitive, backwater place; in fact, it was the Oxford University of the ancient world. Archaeologists have discovered that instruction in the “wisdom of the Egyptians” included training in everything from mathematics and chemistry to engineering, science, and the art of war. And as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses would have been educated at the highest levels.



Drawing of a taskmaster about to beat slave

With such training, Moses had every reason to believe that he could, in fact, deliver his people, the children of Israel. And we know that Moses never lost the sense of who he really was. Here in verse 11 we read:

One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people.



Moses knew he truly belonged to the nation of Israel—these were *his people*. And now, at age forty, Moses evidently thinks it's time to fight for a little freedom, because we are told here in verse 12, “He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”

*Moses thought he
was invincible,
but God isn't going
to use him until
he is humble and
ready to be a
servant-leader.*

The problem is that Moses has run ahead of God. It isn't time for God to free Israel, and frankly, Moses isn't ready to lead them. In fact, he's forty years ahead of the will of God.

Well, Pharaoh discovers what Moses has done and immediately seeks to kill him. Verse 15 tells us Moses has to run for his life, and he doesn't stop running until he reaches the land of Midian, several hundred miles away. Moses thought he was invincible, but God isn't going to use him until he is humble and ready to be a servant-leader.

So, Moses settles in Midian and marries a shepherd girl named Zipporah. What a drastic change for Moses—he's come from the palaces of Egypt to the plains of Midian. Here he will live the simple life of a shepherd for the next forty years.

In chapter 3 now, Moses is shepherding his flock at the foot of Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai. He suddenly sees a little bush on fire, but the bush isn't being consumed. Verse 4 says, “God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’”

God tells him to take off his sandals because this is holy ground. In other words, this is God's ground—this is God's earth.

God then speaks to Moses in verses 7-8:

*“I have surely seen the affliction
of my people who are in Egypt
. . . I have come down to deliver
them out of the hand of the
Egyptians and to bring them up
out of that land to a good and
broad land, a land flowing with
milk and honey.”*

“Flowing with milk” refers to rich pastureland where the herds will produce milk like a gushing fountain. The land will flow with milk, as well as honey. This is not bees' honey; this is a reference to the sweet nectar of dates from the date palm tree. This tree, even today, stands as a symbol of Israel's fertile lands.

Then God gives a surprising commission to Moses in verse 10: “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, so that *you* may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” I can imagine Moses catching his breath and saying, “Lord, I thought You said *You* were going to deliver *Your* people! How did that turn into *me* delivering them?”

Moses says in verse 11, “Who am I . . . that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” Earlier, Moses thought he was *invincible*, but now he thinks he's *insignificant*—too insignificant for God to use.

God doesn't tell him to build up his self-image and just believe in himself. No, none of that kind of nonsense.

What God *does* say here in verse 12 is this: “I will be with you.” The truth is, nobody is insignificant. God can use any of us but only as we remember what Jesus told His disciples: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The promise God gave to Moses is the same promise



He has given to us in Hebrews 13:5: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” That’s a promise you and I are going to need today as we lean on, and learn from, the Lord.

Now there’s a third attitude that gets in the way of Moses serving the Lord, and it basically says, “Lord, I’m ignorant.”

In Exodus 3:13, Moses says to God:

“If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

In other words, he says, “I tried to help my people forty years ago, and they didn’t appreciate it. All it got me was exiled. Now I’m supposed to show up and tell them, ‘God sent me’? They’re not going to believe that! And what if they ask me the simplest question, like, “What is God’s name?”

Moses is saying, “I’m not smart enough for this job!” The Lord responds by teaching him:

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (verse 14).

“I AM,” comes from the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which gives us God’s name—Yahweh, or as it’s often written in English, Jehovah. God says, “Tell them my name is the Ever-present One. I don’t just exist in the past or in the future—I am the God of the present.”

Beloved, let me tell you that Satan loves to trap us somewhere in the past or keep us worried about the future so he can distract us from the peace of trusting God in the present. God is the great I AM. He says, “I am with you right now.”

God essentially tells Moses, “Look, you don’t have to know all the answers. I just want you to know *Me*. I want you to follow Me. Forget about yesterday; don’t worry about tomorrow; follow Me today.”

What’s your hope as a mom or dad in parenting? What are you trusting in to help you in that career or ministry? Are you demanding answers from God or trusting in the presence of God today?

Remember, Moses spent forty years convinced he was somebody and then forty years thinking he was a nobody; but now, as the next forty years of his life begin to unfold, God will begin making somebody out of nobody. He can do the same for you and me as we walk with Him today.

Moses still has more objections. We’ll cover those in our next study together.

Why was the training Moses received in Egypt not enough for what God had planned for him? What warning does this send to you about reliance on any worldly influence on your spiritual life?

What questions or concerns that you have would be answered by fully trusting the promise of God’s continual presence? What hinders you from embracing that promise?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





EMPOWERED AND EQUIPPED BY GOD

Exodus 4:1-20

Our power and abilities will never make us adequate to serve the Lord. Rather, it is when we humbly rely upon Him and are consistently obedient to Him that we are most useful in His service. This is a truth Moses needed to learn, and so do we.

Since running for his life after killing an Egyptian taskmaster, Moses has spent the last forty years tending the flocks and herds of his father-in-law in Midian.

God appears to Moses at a burning bush and commands him to return to Egypt as the Lord's chosen deliverer and lead the enslaved Israelites to freedom. But Moses begins giving excuses. As we've seen, he claims he's too insignificant for God to use him and he's ignorant. In response, the Lord promises to be with him and to teach him.

Now Moses offers another excuse, essentially saying,

"I'm not credible." Here in Exodus 4:1 Moses says, "They will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" I can imagine Moses reminding the Lord that he's spent the past forty years leading sheep and avoiding people: "Lord, I don't have the credentials to lead people—especially the difficult ones!"

Basically, God's response is, "Well then, I will equip you." He tells Moses in verse 3 to throw his shepherd's staff to the ground. "So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it," which is exactly what I would have done.

But it gets worse: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Put out your hand and catch it by the tail'" (verse 4). Now, here's God telling Moses, who has just run to safety, to come back and pick the serpent up by its tail—which is the wrong end to pick up if you're trying not to get bit. Now what?

This reminds me of Gary Richmond, who worked for several years at the Los Angeles Zoo before entering the ministry. He writes about the day when the curator of the reptile section of the zoo informed him that they needed to perform surgery on their king cobra and they wanted Gary to help out.

A king cobra will grow to around twelve feet long. It's



Papyrus with remedies for stopping bleeding of circumcision



extremely dangerous, and when it bites, it tends to hold on. Before striking, it can rear up as high as four feet. And it doesn't hiss, like other snakes; it growls.

As he walked toward the reptile enclosure, Gary was informed that he would help the surgeon as he performed a rather quick operation. Gary writes that they walked into the cobra's large, elaborately designed enclosure, which mimicked a rainforest. It wasn't long before this king cobra slithered around the corner to face them.

It immediately reared up, spread its cape, and then looked back and forth at each of the men, standing some ten feet away, as if deciding which one to bite. Sure enough, it lunged at one of the men.

Anticipating the attack, the man leapt out of the way, and soon the men had the snake pinned to the ground. The surgeon told Gary to get some paper towels and wad them up and stick them in the snake's mouth for it to bite down on.

All the while the king cobra was growling, its mouth wide open, long needle-sharp fangs exposed. Gary had been warned that it had enough venom to kill an elephant, and this one had not been milked of its venom. So, Gary stuck the paper towels into its mouth. It bit down, and the venom literally dripped from those paper towels to the ground. The curator said, "A man could never survive a bite with a full load of venom. That's why I'm having you drain his venom sacs."

As the surgeon performed the minor operation, he warned Gary that the greatest danger isn't in catching the snake. "More people are bitten trying to let go of snakes than when they grab them," he said. They finished their task, released the snake, and all of them safely got out of the cobra's cage.¹

We kind of gloss over this little incident here with Moses. In essence, God is telling Moses to catch a king cobra by the tail, literally risking his life. And did you notice that God doesn't tell Moses what to do with it once he's caught it?

The amazing thing to me is that Moses actually obeys the Lord. And when he does—and to his relief—the snake turns back into a wooden rod.

Next, God has Moses put his hand inside his cloak, and when he removes it, it's white with leprosy. When he repeats the act, he's healed.

The greatest credential for serving God in the role He's assigned you isn't knowledge, education, strength, or experience; it's obedience to God.

What is God doing? He's giving Moses all the credentials he will need. And all Moses has to do—which will require great courage at times—is obey God.

As Moses obeys God, God equips him with power over creation—the serpent, leprosy. And in verse 9 He even promises to give Moses control over the water of the Nile River, considered a god by the Egyptian people.

Let me say here that to this day, the greatest credential for serving God in the role He's assigned you—whether as a mother or father, missionary, pastor, businessperson, or something else—isn't knowledge, education, strength, or experience; it's obedience to God.

Now you would think that after catching a serpent by the tail and being healed of leprosy, Moses would be more than ready to obey. Instead, he comes up with a fifth excuse: "Lord, I'm still not capable."

Verse 10 reads:

"But Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent,



either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

The Lord responds in verse 11:

“Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

God’s saying, “I know your handicaps; I know your disabilities; I know all about your weaknesses; I know you’re missing some tools for the job. Just follow Me, and I’ll equip you; I will empower you; I will be with you.”

And with that, Moses realizes there’s no excuse the Lord can’t overcome. So, he basically just says to God, “Lord, I’m not available.” His actual words are recorded in verse 13: “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

God’s response instantly alerts Moses that he has stepped over the line. Verse 14 says, “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.”

But beloved, I want you to see that while the Lord is furious with Moses, He isn’t finished with Moses—and I’m so glad that was true for Moses and it’s true for you and me. The Lord responds:

“Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can

speak well . . . I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people.” (verses 14-16)

So, instead of tossing Moses aside and starting over, the Lord graciously gives Moses a partner in this terrifying endeavor. Don’t overlook that. He provides Aaron to stand with Moses against the empire of Egypt as he challenges that empire to release millions of slaves; He gives Moses someone to accompany him as he leads that nation of slaves—the people Israel—to the promised land.

With that, Moses finally agrees. And by the way, it isn’t because Moses suddenly feels capable but because he understands that God *is* capable—and all Moses needs is to be available. And that’s how it works even to this day—for you and for me.

Do you find yourself offering excuses for not serving God more consistently? Do they mirror Moses’ excuses? Why are such excuses illegitimate?

How has God graciously dealt with your foolish attitudes and excuses? Has He given you an “Aaron”?

¹ Gary Richmond, *A View from the Zoo* (W Publishing Group, 1987), 43-45.





BACK TO EGYPT

Exodus 4:21–7:2

God does not always lead us into easy paths. As he returned to Egypt, Moses faced opposition on various fronts. Like him, we must learn to walk by faith, trusting and obeying the Lord even when circumstances offer us little encouragement.

Here at Exodus chapter 4 and through the opening of chapter 7, we get a front-row seat to watch what happens next in the life of Moses.

Moses is finally going to Egypt! But Moses knows that Pharaoh isn't going to be throwing him a welcome-home party, especially when Moses shows up with an ultimatum from God. And for several days now, as Moses travels from Midian toward Egypt, he's had a lot of time to think it over.

He has spent forty years in safety in the land of Midian. He has married one of the seven daughters of a priest named Jethro. Her name is Zipporah, and they have a son named Gershom. Now Jethro and Zipporah are Midianites; but even though they're not a part of the nation of Israel, they are followers of God.

We know from history the Midianites practiced circumcision but only on grown males prior to marriage.¹ But God had ordained circumcision as a sign of the covenant through Abraham, and the Israelite males were to be circumcised as infants to show the faith and obedience of their parents to this special covenant sign. Circumcision symbolized the cutting away of sin and separation unto God.

Moses evidently hadn't followed through on this with his own son, and we read here in chapter 4 and verse

24 about a rather surprising event that takes place: "At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him [Moses] and sought to put him to death." This may have been a life-threatening illness, but it is obviously God's discipline. And it becomes known that it has to do with Moses' not circumcising his son in obedience to God.

So here in verse 25, Moses' wife, Zipporah, takes a flint and performs circumcision on their son. Then she says to Moses, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!"

She doesn't seem to be very happy with the bloodshed of this ceremony; and even though she knows it has saved the life of her husband, she seems rather disgusted with the whole thing. In fact, Exodus chapter 18 indicates that she evidently returned home for some period of time.

*Moses had
compromised by
not taking the word
of God seriously.*



Moses had compromised by not taking the word of God seriously. And let me tell you, this is going to be a great reminder for Moses as he heads to Egypt that above everything else, he needs to obey—and deliver—the word of God.

Now here in chapter 5, Moses and Aaron arrive in Egypt and announce to Pharaoh in verse 1: “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go.’” “Thus says the Lord” is a clear declaration that this isn’t the word of Moses but the word of God.

And Pharaoh responds just as clearly by basically saying, “Not in a million years.” And with that, Pharaoh makes the lives of the Israelites even more difficult. As we read in verses 7 and 8, he orders that the straw the Egyptians have been providing for the making of bricks be withheld from them. Now they will have to find their own straw, but the quota for bricks they are being forced to make remains the same.

As you can imagine, the Israelites turn on Moses and Aaron, saying in verse 21, “You have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” Their attitude is, “Life was hard enough before you came along; now we’re all going to die.”

Moses is absolutely stunned by what’s just happened. He goes to God and says, in verse 22, “O LORD, why have you done [allowed this] evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?”

I would be asking the same thing. Maybe you’re doing your best to follow God. Perhaps you’re even a ministry leader, but everything has been turned upside down, and everybody is mad at you—and all

you’re trying to do is obey God.

I read somewhere that a good leader is someone who is able to keep people who hate him away from all the other people who are still undecided. Well, everybody hates Moses now.

Chapter 6 opens with God reassuring Moses. In fact, five times here in Exodus 6, you’re going to hear God tell Moses, “I am the LORD . . . I am the LORD.”²

He’s encouraging Moses, saying in effect, “Even though you want to throw in the towel and quit, I want you and all Israel to remember that I am the Lord.” He doesn’t say, “I was” or “I used to be,” but “I am the Lord of Lords.”

Indeed, five times in this chapter, God reminds Moses of who He *is*. But the Lord also goes on to say, *seven* different times in this chapter what He will *do*. God isn’t just the “I *am*”; He’s also the “I *will*.”

Beginning in verse 6, God makes this incredible promise:

“I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.” (verses 6-8)



Workers village at valley of kings



Wow!

Moses goes back to the people of Israel with this message from God, but unfortunately the people respond to God's declaration of "I am" and "I will" by effectively saying, "Yeah, but we won't."

Verse 9 says, "They did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit." Let's not be too hard on them. You could translate this phrase "broken spirit" as "gasping for breath."³ God is patient with them; He knows they have experienced incredibly difficult and painful lives, and they are convinced there is no way out.

Maybe you can identify with them; you see no evidence that God is at work on your behalf. You look around, and there's nothing to celebrate. But God keeps pressing you in the work He's given you to do.

God tells Moses to go back again into the court of Pharaoh and repeat the demand to let His people go.

But here in chapter 7 the conversation between God and Moses might seem a bit odd to you. Note what the Lord says to Moses in verse 1: "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."

You need to understand that in Egypt Pharaoh was considered the divine offspring of the sun god—a physical representation of the deity on earth. So, God is telling Moses, "I'm putting you on equal terms with Pharaoh. You're going to be my physical representation on earth." And when Pharaoh loses, everybody will know that the false god was defeated by the true and living God.

You might be serving the Lord right now under difficult and painful conditions; maybe there isn't much evidence God is at work in and through your life. Don't quit. Don't respond to His "I am" and "I will"

with disobedience. Cling to Him, serve Him, in spite of how you feel or what it looks like around you.

In fact, what you have to cling to is the same thing Moses clung to—the Word of God, which declares who He is and what He has promised to do.

Can you identify areas of compromise in your walk with the Lord? What steps do you need to take to deal with these?

How do you respond when people ignore or reject your efforts to minister to them? What biblical truths can encourage you at such times?



¹ Thomas Constable, *Notes on Exodus*, 2020 edition (Sonic Light, 2020), 55, planobiblechapel.org.

² Exodus 6:2, 6, 7, 8, 28.

³ Walter Kaiser, "Exodus," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, revised edition, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Zondervan, 2008), 396.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE BATTLE OF THE GODS

Exodus 7:3–8:32

The Pharaoh of Egypt was afflicted by a hardened heart and an impotent religion. Though at the height of human power and prestige, he was spiritually and morally weak and a perfect illustration of the truth that no one can defy God without suffering devastating consequences.

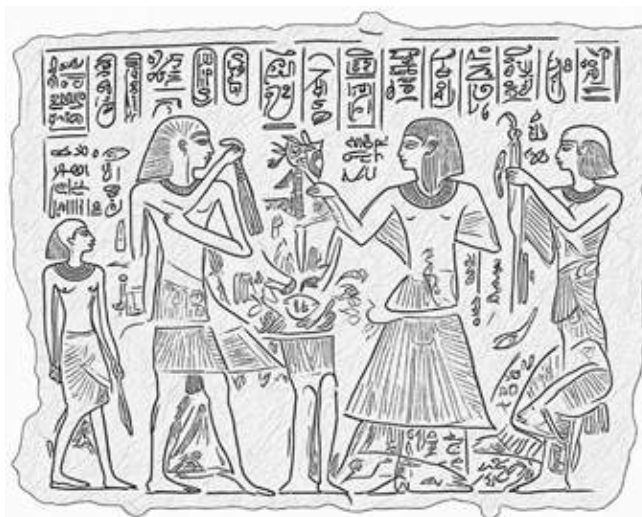
A church leader centuries ago made this observation: “The sun moistens the wax and dries the clay; softening one but hardening the other.” Well, the “sun” of God’s power is about to shine on the land of Egypt, and while many hearts will melt in submission, Pharaoh’s heart will harden in defiance.

Now let me address something that bothers many Christians. Here in Exodus chapter 7 and verse 3, God says to Moses, “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.”

People have asked me about this because they assume Pharaoh had no choice in the matter—he didn’t stand a chance. Repeatedly in these chapters we read that Pharaoh’s heart was *hardened*. Sometimes it says *God* hardened his heart, and several times it says Pharaoh hardened his *own* heart.

Here in verse 3, the Hebrew word used for hardening refers to pressure, or even twisting. We might picture the twisting of a mop to wring the water out of it. In other words, you wring that mop, and the water that’s already inside it comes out.

That seems to be the idea here. Pharaoh has already hardened his heart against God. God is now going to wring out Pharaoh’s heart, so that all the rebellion



Seti I is portrayed here with his son, Ramesses II

that is on the inside comes out into the open. ¹

Pharaoh is going to be held responsible for choosing to defy and deny the creator God, just as Romans chapter 1 tells us every human being will one day be held accountable for rejecting the evidence of God in creation. Since God knows the future, He can tell Moses before any of this happens that when Pharaoh’s heart is wrung out, it will reveal nothing but stubborn defiance.

Now with that, let’s move to the royal palace in Egypt, where we’re told here in verse 7 that “Moses



was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.” Just try to imagine this encounter. This is going to become nothing less than an epic battle between the gods of Egypt and the God of Israel. And it starts off with a battle in the palace of Pharaoh. God says to Moses here in verse 9:

“When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”

Now the word translated “serpent” here isn’t the same Hebrew word used back in Exodus chapter 4 at the burning bush, when Moses’ staff became a serpent. The Hebrew word there is *nahash*, and it’s the common word for serpent, used more than thirty times in the Old Testament.

But the word used here, in the court of Pharaoh, is *tannin*, a word that is most naturally translated, “crocodile.” Over in Ezekiel 29:3, this same word is used in reference to the crocodile that lived in the Nile River. And remember, the crocodile was considered the servant of the Egyptian Nile god.

I think translators must have thought this was a little too crazy to translate it normally, and so most translations use the word *serpent*. But that’s not what happens here.

Suddenly on the palace floor is a crocodile. And Pharaoh calls on his magicians, and they throw their rods down, and they also become crocodiles. By the way, Satan doesn’t have any power to create or manipulate anything without the permission of God. God allows them to imitate the miracle of Aaron’s rod—and there’s a good reason for it, by the way.

What’s taking place on the palace floor is a battle between these crocodiles. We don’t know how long it lasted, but verse 12 tells us Aaron’s staff (crocodile) swallowed up those of the Egyptian’s. In other words, Aaron’s crocodile killed all the others.

Pharaoh can’t miss the significance of this battle; he is effectively defeated before the battle even gets started. The sun of God’s power should have melted Pharaoh’s heart right then and there. Instead, verse 13 reads, “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them.”

Satan doesn’t have any power to create or manipulate anything without the permission of God.

With that, God begins sending a series of plagues upon Egypt. And it’s important to understand that each plague will confront one of Egypt’s false gods (see Exodus 12:12).

Here in verses 14-25, the first plague attacks the Nile River, which the Egyptians considered the source of life. We read in verses 20-21:

Aaron . . . lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile.

The Egyptian sorcerers again are able to imitate this miracle, but what they cannot do is turn the Nile back into clean water – they can only add *more blood* – and more death. God is essentially saying, “Your false god is not the source of life.”

Pharaoh refuses to surrender, and after seven days, the second plague demonstrates God’s supremacy



over the Egyptian goddess Heqet, the goddess of fertility. This goddess had the body of a woman and the head of a frog—not exactly Cinderella.

It's as if God says, "You want to worship a frog? I'll send you some frogs." And so, frogs swarm the land of Egypt.

Again, the Egyptian sorcerers are allowed by God to produce more frogs, but they can't get rid of them. It's almost comical that these sorcerers do their little magic tricks, but instead of frogs disappearing, they're multiplying.

Now in chapter 8 and verse 16, the Egyptian god Geb, the god of earth, is going to be defeated. God tells Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'"

Suddenly the top layer of dust on every square inch of Egyptian soil becomes a swarm of insects stretching for hundreds of miles in every direction. The land is supposedly under the power of Geb, but now it's obviously under the control of Israel's God.

Pharaoh's magicians can't replicate the miracle this time. In fact, they tell Pharaoh, in verse 19, "This is the finger of God." But instead of his heart melting, we're told in verse 19, Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

And now the fourth plague begins. This one is directed by God against the Egyptian god Khepara, represented by the beetle, or scarab, to which the "flies" refer. This god was supposed to represent blessings in life. Gold and silver scarabs have been found in the tombs of Egypt.

This was their lucky charm. The God of Israel says, "Well, I'll send you swarms of them, and see just how blessed you feel."

By the way, neither this plague nor any of the remaining plagues will affect the Israelites. They apparently had suffered through the first three plagues, which no doubt served to remind them that their God was the true and living God.

And this particular plague seems to get Pharaoh's attention—finally. He tells Moses the people can take some time off work and sacrifice to Yahweh.

So, God removes these beetles, and immediately after, we read in verse 32, "Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and did not let the people go."

Four miraculous plagues, four Egyptian gods defeated, and Pharaoh's heart is repeatedly wrung out. And each time, nothing but the dirty water of stubborn defiance spills out.

And with that, we're out of time; when we meet again, Lord willing, we'll return to this epic battle of the gods.

What have the challenges you've faced in life revealed about you? How has this been, or how should it be, helpful to you?

What are some of the "gods" that people today cling to? How can you effectively show them the supremacy of the true God?

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, volume 1 (Thru the Bible Radio, 1981), 223.





THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Exodus 9:1–10:29

Egypt's pharaoh was like so many people today. When everything he believed about religion, life, and the meaning of life was shattered by reality, he chose to cling to his prideful defiance of God rather than turn to God's Word, acknowledge His work, and seek His will.

If you're keeping score in this epic battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt, the score is four to zero, in favor of God. God is sending one plague after another, literally targeting the Egyptian gods in the process.

Now the fifth plague takes place, and it's aimed at the Egyptian god Apis. Apis is depicted as a black bull. The Egyptians believed that by worshipping him, their flocks and herds of cattle would be protected. One of the largest temples discovered in ancient Egypt was dedicated to the worship of Apis.

Here in Exodus chapter 9, God tells Moses to give Pharaoh this warning:

"If you refuse to let [my people] go and still hold them . . . the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field."

(verses 2-3)

Then verse 4:

"But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of

Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing of all that belongs to the people of Israel shall die."

In other words, He's saying, "Your god Apis doesn't protect your cattle; the God of Israel does."

And the next day, verse 6 says, "All the livestock [in the fields] of the Egyptians died." But just as God had promised, none of the livestock that belong to Israel, here in the land of Goshen, dies. And the Israelites are firing up their barbecue pits because Egyptian beef has just gone on sale.

We're told here in verse 7 that Pharaoh's heart is still



Depiction of Apis, the sacred bull



hardened. Remember, the word for “hardened” refers to twisting—like when you wring out a mop, what’s on the inside will come out. And Pharaoh’s inner defiance against God keeps spilling out.

Now God sends the sixth plague. And this one is going to reach into Egypt’s priesthood:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.” (verses 8-9)

Then notice verse 11: “And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians.”

Now these magicians were priests. And Egyptian priests often would scatter ashes from their altars into the sky, believing this would bring blessing. So, this plague reveals the power of God over their superstition.

Also here in chapter 9, the seventh plague occurs, and it effectively targets the Egyptian sky goddess named Isis. The Egyptians believed that Isis placed a canopy of protection over them to guard their land against storms.

Well, look at verses 23-25

The LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.

The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field.

I’ve been in some severe thunder and lightning storms but nothing like this. You could have gone bowling with these hailstones; they were large enough to shatter a forest of trees.

No wonder Pharaoh calls an emergency meeting with Moses and Aaron and says to them:

“This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go.” (verses 27-28)

In other words, “I’ve seen enough; our goddess Isis is nothing compared to the God of Israel.”

But wouldn’t you know it, as soon as the storm clouds clear up, Pharaoh changes his mind, and his heart is hardened. Like wringing out a dirty mop, filthy, defiant, sinful water again comes spilling out.

Now the eighth plague is described in chapter 10, as God destroys the remaining crops that are left standing. But you need to understand that what God is really doing is showing His power over the false gods of Egypt.

Let me tell you what is true to this day: without the God of Israel, you live in the darkness of unbelief.



The Egyptians worshiped a host of minor gods: the god of flax, the god of grain, a god that guarded the fields, and even a god that protected their crops from insects. In fact, they held an annual festival, where they exalted these gods. Some Bible scholars believe it was during this annual festival that God sent this eighth plague.¹ I wouldn't be surprised at all.

In verses 3-6 Moses warns Pharaoh that if he won't let the Israelites go, locusts will sweep in and consume the remaining vegetation. And now, even Pharaoh's wise men are telling him to let the Israelites go. They have had enough. They even tell him in verse 7, "Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?" He is so defiant that he refuses to recognize that his country is now bankrupt.

As promised, the next morning a swarm of locusts sweeps into Egypt. Verse 15 reads:

They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh turns on the crocodile tears again here in verse 16, but he has no intention of changing his mind. His emotions are affected, but his heart remains unrepentant.

Now with the ninth plague, God doesn't send Moses to warn Pharaoh. God simply sends a plague of darkness. And this plague strikes at Egypt's highest and most exalted god—the sun god Ra.

Verse 21 tells us God sends complete darkness—what we could call pitch-black darkness—three days without light. Beloved, this totally *destroys* the foundation

of Egyptian idolatry; it destroys any credibility Pharaoh has as offspring of the sun god. The sun god—Egypt's chief god—is turned out like a lightbulb, by the power of Israel's God.

Let me tell you what is true to this day: without the God of Israel, you live in the darkness of unbelief. The apostle Paul writes that without Christ we were at one time in darkness, but now, through Christ, we are in the light of the Lord (Ephesians 5:8).

Well, here is Pharaoh, a man who leads a bankrupt nation and a defeated host of false gods, and he says to Moses, "Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die" (verse 28).

And Moses responds prophetically, saying, "As you say! I will not see your face again!" And that's exactly what will happen.

To this day, Pharaoh represents all who defy the true and living God. Pharaoh illustrates here in living color someone who refuses to see the hand of God, refuses to listen to the word of God, and refuses to obey the will of God.

What about you today? Let me urge you to take a good look around and see, and relish, and savor the work of your creator God. Let me encourage you to listen to the Word of God and then obey the will of God. He is your life-giving, light-giving, gracious, faithful Lord.

What aspects of God's character do you see revealed in the plagues on Egypt?

Why do people resist the testimony and appeals of God even when the truth is evident? Do you see this tendency in your own life at times?

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Crossway, 2016), 299.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





LIFE OR DEATH . . . AT MIDNIGHT

Exodus 11–12

God's final plague on Egypt humiliated Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt, delivered His chosen people from oppression, and vindicated Himself as the true and only God. The death of the firstborn still stands as a powerful statement of God's power, sovereignty, and glory.

In our study so far, God has brought plagues into the land of Egypt that effectively destroyed the reputations of Egypt's false gods—including the god who protected their crops and the Nile River god, who provided water. And did you know that throughout Egypt, the people believed that the sun god Ra—their chief god, represented by Pharaoh himself—was supposed to be the protector of life?

Now the God of Israel is about to deliver one final blow to Egypt and its gods. But before we get to that event, let me pick up the narrative here in chapter 11 and verse 1:



Man bringing lamb for sacrifice

The LORD said to Moses, “Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely. Speak now in the hearing of the people, that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, for silver and gold jewelry.”

Now some have argued that asking the Egyptians here for silver and gold was unkind and manipulative; but if you understand that this is nothing more than a token of back wages for four hundred years of slavery, it's about time they got paid. And the Egyptians handed it over without any complaint, because God was actually motivating the Egyptians' hearts to give.

Now, verse 4 reads:

Moses said [to Pharaoh], “Thus says the LORD: ‘About mid-



night I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 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 handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. (verses 4-5)

After Moses explains this last plague to Pharaoh, Moses leaves the royal palace and will never return.

The Lord then speaks to Moses at the beginning of chapter 12:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.” (verses 1-2)

There’s going to be a change in the Hebrew calendar. Why? Because they are about to be redeemed as a nation. This is the beginning of their freedom, so God tells them to revise their calendars to reflect this historic date of redemption.

The Lord then gives instructions for His people in preparation for the final plague on Egypt. He also gives instructions regarding a special event that is to be held annually to celebrate and remember this moment as a nation. Let me give you four key words that describe the elements of God’s “Passover plan.”

The first word is *substitution*. God tells Moses in verse 3 to instruct every Israelite household to take into their home on the tenth day of this new first month an unblemished, one-year-old lamb—sharing a lamb is allowed for smaller households. And then on the fourteenth day, each family is to kill that lamb at twilight.

This lamb’s life will be a substitutionary offering for their lives. Now we must realize that they did not understand the meaning of all this like you and I understand it today. We see it as the marvelous picture it is of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, the final, unblemished Lamb who died for you and me.

Now the second word is *symbolism*. Verse 7 says, “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.”

The lintel is the crossbeam that is directly over the door. The Israelites are to dab a little blood from the lamb on that entire doorframe. Then verse 8 tells us that the Israelites are to “eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

Fire is the symbolic picture in the Old Testament of judgment. So, in other words, this lamb goes through the judgment of God so that each person will not have to experience it. This is also another picture of Christ, who faced the wrath of God the Father’s judgment for our sin and guilt.

The third word here is *security*. Verse 23 explains why the blood of the lamb is to be painted on the doorposts:

For the LORD will pass through to strike 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 enter your houses to strike you.

God is going to shield that home that is marked by the blood of the lamb. The Lord will spread His wings, so to speak, over that house so that its firstborn is protected from the judgment of the death angel.

So here in this first Passover, as well as in the annual celebration that flows from it, we see substitution, symbolism, security, and now, fourthly, we see the



element of *submission*. We read in verse 24, “You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever.” And beloved, the nation of Israel is celebrating Passover to this very day.

Now with that, God moves into Egypt to keep His terrifying promise of death to those not covered, as it were, by the blood of the lamb. We read in verse 29:

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.

It is fascinating, but not surprising, that archaeologists have discovered convincing evidence that the oldest son of Amenhotep II, the pharaoh at this time, never reigned in Egypt as would be customary; a younger son, Thutmose IV, took the throne instead. No reason for this is given in Egyptian history, but we have the answer here in God’s Word—he died in the tenth and final plague.

The final devastating plague taking the lives of the firstborn of Egypt has its intended effect—the humbled pharaoh releases the Hebrew slaves. In fact, the Egyptian people are anxious to see the Israelites leave after all they have suffered through the plagues as a result of their presence. So, in verse 41, we read, “At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.”

Try for a moment, my friend, to think of the logic behind the Passover. Humanly speaking, there doesn’t seem to be any. Take a lamb, and kill it and eat it, and apply its blood to the doorframes of your homes.

Why not just put a lamb on the front porch? Why not imitate a lamb by becoming meek and mild?

The Lord was presenting a picture of salvation. Jesus shed His blood and died as a substitute in our place.

But you see, in His perfect plan, the Lord was presenting a picture of salvation. Jesus shed His blood and died as a substitute in our place. And when we believe in Him and in faith apply His shed blood to our hearts, we are saved from the guilt of sin and the wrath of God.

What was the Lord communicating to Egypt through the final plague? What was He teaching Israel? How do these truths apply to your life?

Why was it important for the work of Christ to be pictured in the Old Testament era even though the people probably did not fully understand the portrait? Why are these pictures important for you today?

¹ gospel = the good news of Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





ON THE BANKS OF THE DEEP RED SEA

Exodus 13–15

God's final plague on Egypt humiliated Pharaoh and the false gods of Egypt, delivered His chosen people from oppression, and vindicated Himself as the true and only God. The death of the firstborn still stands as a powerful statement of God's power, sovereignty, and glory.

Have you ever found yourself in a tight spot—boxed in, without any way out? Well, today, we're going to learn how to respond in such situations as we watch the Israelites pinned down at the banks of the deep Red Sea.

As Exodus chapter 13 opens, Israel has just left Egypt. The first thing Moses is told to do here in verse 2 is to consecrate, or set apart, to the Lord the firstborn "both of man and of beast." God is saying, "They belong to Me." Now this is going to be a timeless reminder of the cost of their freedom, for remember an innocent lamb died so that the firstborn of each Israelite family could live.

In verse 3, the Lord institutes the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This will remind them of how quickly they left Egypt—they didn't even have time to bake bread as they packed up to leave Egypt.

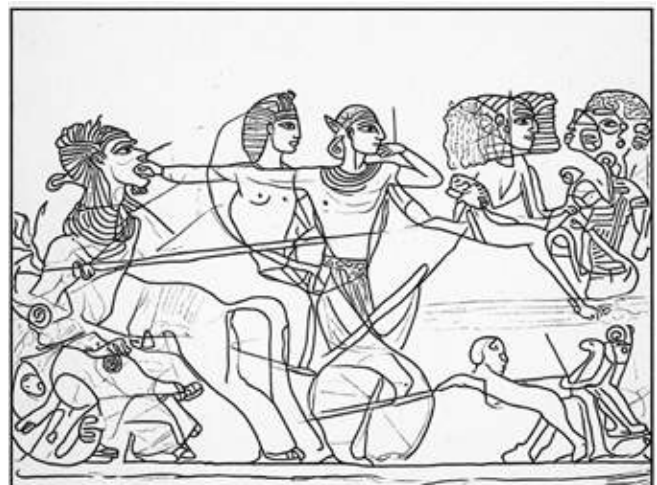
Now, in verse 17 we learn that the Lord doesn't lead the people on the normal route that would have taken them to the promised land in a matter of two weeks. God wants them to avoid the Egyptian forts we know from history had been built along that route and would have discouraged them along the way. So, God is taking them another way, which leads toward the Red Sea.

Verse 19 tells us Moses "took the bones of Joseph

with him." You remember from Genesis 50:25 that Joseph made his brothers swear to take his bones to the promised land because he knew by faith the Lord was going to keep His covenant promise.

Here in Exodus 14, the Israelites arrive at the Red Sea. Critics will argue that the Red Sea here is not really a sea at all but a shallow marsh, and no miracle is needed to wade across ankle-deep water. But if that's true, how is Pharaoh's army going to drown in ankle-deep water?

In fact, Pharaoh knows that the Israelites are trapped with no way to cross this sea, and here he comes after them.



Man bringing lamb for sacrifice



The Israelites start blaming Moses for leading them into this fix. They are naturally terrified, and they cry out, “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (verse 12).

But wait a second. They’re really blaming God, for *God* is the one who has led them here. Beloved, whenever you start blaming God for the tight spot you’re in, you are only going to go deeper into despair.

So, Moses preaches a sermon to them here, and what a sermon it is. Maybe it’s the sermon you need to hear today.

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see to-day, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

(verses 13-14)

God tells Moses in verse 16:

“Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.”

Continuing now in verses 17-18, the Lord says:

“I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.”

And with that, God moves that pillar of cloud and fire between them and the army of Egypt so they can’t see the Israelites crossing over.

Now keep in mind that this Red Sea has to part a good mile or two wide in order for two million people to walk through. This isn’t a little path through the sea.

Once Israel has crossed over, that pillar of cloud is removed, and the Egyptians see what’s happening and make a run through the dry seabed after them. We read in verses 24-25:

The LORD... threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD fights for them.”

But it’s too late to flee. The waters return, completely destroying the Egyptian army. My friend, this is a terrifying picture of the coming judgment of God against all who reject Him and one day stand before Him.

“It’s because God doesn’t just want to deliver us; He wants to develop us. We want to be happy; God wants us to be holy.”

Now let me point out some practical truths for us today in this Wisdom Journey.

First, difficulties are designed by God to develop trust. Verse 31 says:

“Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared



the LORD, and they believed in the LORD.”

So often today we hear, “Hey, if you’re following God, you’re going to be happy, wealthy, healthy; everything is going to work out and smooth out.” Isn’t it interesting that here God leads the Israelites out of Egypt and into difficulty? He walks the Israelites right into a dead end. Why? As one of my seminary professors used to say, “It’s because God doesn’t just want to deliver us; He wants to develop us. We want to be happy; God wants us to be holy.”

Oh, there’s happiness in Jesus Christ—don’t misunderstand me. But He has designed some predicaments along the way to deepen your faith in His power; and sometimes it takes a Red Sea to do that.

Second, those who are willing to trust God have a greater appreciation for His deliverance. The problem is we rarely give God the chance. We have plan A, plan B, and plan C, and maybe, when those fail, we say, “Okay, Lord, what’s *Your* plan?” Sometimes God wants us to run out of options, until He becomes our only option and we simply wait and trust in Him.

Third, when God’s power is revealed, our response ought to be praise. The Israelites are on the other side of the Red Sea and ready to sing! Note these first two verses in chapter 15:

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”

When you’re boxed in and there seems to be no way out, what are you thinking? “Is God here? Is God aware? Is God powerful enough?” Oh, but when He

pulls you through and you’re on the other side, it’s time to sing, “This is my God, and I will praise Him.”

Here’s another stanza:

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.” (verses 11-13)

When we see God move—when we allow Him the opportunity to work, and He does—our response should be praise to Him.

Maybe today you’re facing some great challenge, some difficult decision or painful experience; I want you to remember that this God of Israel is your God too. If you belong to Him, if you know His Son as your Savior, you can wait and watch and pray for His answer, His deliverance, His development of you, and His plan for you in the days ahead!

What was the Lord communicating to Egypt through the final plague? What was He teaching Israel? How do these truths apply to your life?

Why was it important for the work of Christ to be pictured in the Old Testament era even though the people probably did not fully understand the portrait? Why are these pictures important for you today?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





GRUMBLING AT GOD

Exodus 15:22–17:7

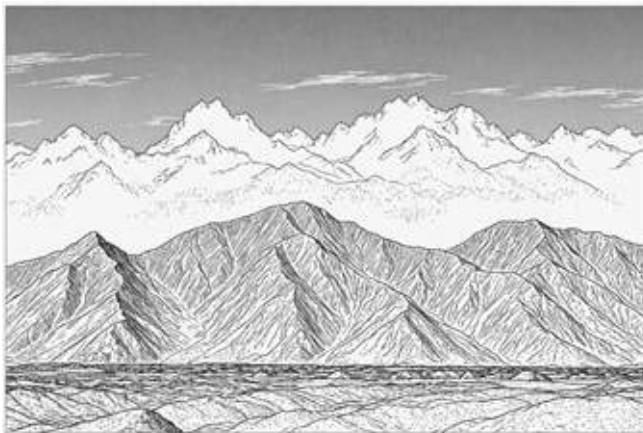
Trials reveal what is in our hearts. Israel's tests in the wilderness brought out dissatisfaction, bitterness, ingratitude, and a complaining spirit. When we learn to be thankful and trust the Lord in all things, our trials will not produce grumbling but peace and assurance.

I remember learning a little song when I was a child; the lyrics go like this:

*"Oh, they grumble on Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday, grumble on Thursday too;
grumble on Friday, Saturday, Sunday,
grumble the whole week through."*

The title of that song is "Grumblers." That had become the national anthem of the Israelites here in Exodus chapter 15, and it sets the tone of this passage. It says here in verse 22:

*Then Moses made Israel set out
from the Red Sea, and they went*



Sinai Desert area

*into the wilderness of Shur. They
went three days in the wilderness
and found no water.*

Now let's not be too hard on them here. Just imagine hiking through the wilderness with some two million other people. The first day, you feel the heat of the sun and the sand, and the wind whips at your body. The little water you have is getting warm and starting to run out. The second day you start getting anxious for a supply of fresh water; and on the third day, you hear the good news that there's water up ahead. But then there's shattering disappointment. Verse 23 says: "They could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter."

The Israelites arrive at what we would call a small lake of water, but they discover the water is contaminated—it's stagnant and bitter. So now what do they do? Verse 24 tells us, "The people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'"

You're going to find the word *grumble* nine times in this passage we're studying. The people began grumbling on Monday and grumbled all the week through.

Moses responds in verse 25 by crying out to the Lord, and we read, "The LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet."



What's God teaching the Israelites here? He's teaching them to trust Him. Throwing a log into the water isn't going to purify it at all, but when Moses obeyed the Lord and threw that log in, the Lord made the water "sweet."

By the way, the only solution to your grumbling—and mine too—is realizing that God is in control and capable of providing what we need. Verse 27 offers even more proof of that: "Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palm trees, and they encamped there by the water."

They reach an oasis here, following a very difficult time. Think about it: God took the Israelites to the bitter water where their faith was tested and they grumbled and failed the test. Then He gave them water when Moses obeyed His instruction. And now, the Lord leads them to an oasis where they have more than enough. That, my friend, is the grace of God, who lavishes His grace upon us (Ephesians 1:7-8).

Now we come to another stopover in Exodus, at chapter 16. It's been a month since the Lord delivered them from Egypt, and we read here in verse 2, "The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness."

Here they go again; so what's the problem now? Well, they've run out of food. Someone calculated it would take four thousand tons of food every day to feed these two million Israelites. If you boxed all that food onto a train, the train would stretch two miles. That's just for one day!

The Lord hears the grumbling and again responds with incredible grace. He says to Moses, "Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.'" (verse 12). And what happens?

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like

thing, fine as frost on the ground.

(verses 13-14)

God in his grace, sends over a huge flock of quail, and then He sends down a special kind of "bread," which the people call "manna" (verse 31), meaning "what is it?"

Now the critics of the Bible say that these quail just happened to be migrating from Africa and became exhausted and were unable to fly more than three feet above the ground. They also claim that the manna was the excretion of little insects. Listen, there's no way Moses is going to talk two million people into eating bug droppings—frankly, that would have been a miracle!

Let me tell you something. The critics have no explanation for verse 35, which reads: "The people of Israel ate the manna forty years . . . till they came to the border of the land of Canaan." God miraculously provided literally *tons* of manna—train-car loads of provision—every morning for forty years!

God miraculously provided literally tons of manna—train-car loads of provision—every morning for forty years!

Now let's go to chapter 17 of Exodus, where we see the people grumbling a third time. They're out of water again, and so we read in verse 2:

The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to



*drink.” And Moses said to them,
“Why do you quarrel with me?
Why do you test the LORD?”*

The Lord is obviously listening in, and He speaks to Moses:

“Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. (verses 5-6)

Beloved, God is bringing these people to the question of the ages here, and verse 7 spells it out for us: “Is the LORD among us or not?”

That’s the bottom line in life, isn’t it? Is God really alive and powerful or not? Is He really involved in your life or somewhere off in the universe? You see, how you answer that question will determine whether you grumble or you become grateful as you trust in the sovereign timing and provision and power of God.

What are some ways to stop grumbling and start becoming grateful? How do you develop that kind of attitude? Well, let me give you two key action steps.

The first action step is to *remember*. It’s a very important word that occurs more than two hundred times in Scripture. You will cultivate a grateful spirit when you remember what God has done for you—big and small.

Grumblers have very short memories; they can’t seem

¹ Thoro Harris, “Grumblers,” 1925. Public domain.

to remember anything good. Grumblers dwell on what they don’t have and seem to forget what they do have.

The second action step is *practice*. Colossians 3:15 commands us to practice being thankful. And the verb indicates it’s to be continual. It’s not something you do at Thanksgiving and then you’re done giving thanks.

Like anything in life worth doing well, being thankful is going to take practice. How about starting today by thanking God for the gospel—for the salvation that was given to you as a gift when you believed in God’s Son as your Savior. You are saved and forgiven and heading for heaven.

Start there. Practice thanking God for that. Say it out loud when the devil says, “It ain’t so.” When things get rough, begin there. Say, “I’m part of God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ. God Himself says I am. And because of that, I can always be thankful.”

Listen, let’s change our tune. Let’s sing, “Giving thanks on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, giving thanks on Thursday too; giving thanks on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, giving thanks the whole week through.”

Why do you think the Israelites reacted as they did to their trials?
What is at the heart of your own complaining?

What do God’s responses to Israel’s trials tell you about them? How should this help shape your own response to hardships?

What causes you to be less thankful than you should? What are some practical steps you can take to combat ingratitude?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





BURNOUT

Exodus 17:8–18:27

The mark of a great leader is having the humility to listen to good advice. Indeed, that's the mark of a wise person. Moses' example as both a great leader and wise person reminds us to appreciate those people God brings our way with godly counsel.

In this Wisdom Journey, we're going to see the Lord take Moses to school and teach him how to lead the Israelite nation more effectively. And as you probably know from experience, school isn't necessarily an easy time. Moses here is going to be enrolled by God in two challenging courses that will teach him some valuable lessons in leadership.

The first course involves conflict. It's recorded here in chapter 17 of Exodus. Now apparently, word gets out that the Israelites are encamped at Rephidim, where they have plenty of water, thanks to the Lord bringing water from the rock when Moses struck it.

The Amalekites were cousins of the Israelites. They had descended from Esau, Jacob's brother; and just as God prophesied, they were nomads who roamed the desert. They are probably eager to defeat and plunder the Israelites, and they no doubt want this supply of fresh water; so, they initiate an attack.

Moses tells Joshua to form an army, and the next day Moses goes to the top of a hill with his staff. Aaron and Hur join Moses. It's possible that Hur is the husband of Miriam, Moses and Aaron's sister.¹

Verse 11 describes the battle as Moses watches from the hilltop. We read here: "Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered

*Share leadership,
develop godly
leaders, develop a
team of committed
believers to share the
load—this is great
advice to this very
day.*

his hand, Amalek prevailed."

The raising of the staff represents the miraculous work of God. The problem is, Moses can't hold his hands up continuously without getting tired.

Now remember, since leaving Egypt, Moses has been pretty much a one-man band. He has led the people all by himself by God's power. But now Aaron *and* Hur have to support Moses' arms and hold them up until, as verse 13 tells us, "Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."



It took all three of these men, praying as it were, for God's power to be revealed on that battlefield. So, think about this: "Joshua couldn't have succeeded down there without Moses, but Moses couldn't have succeeded without Aaron and Hur." ² This same lesson—that leaders need the help and support of others—is about to be expanded even more as we sail into chapter 18.

So, the first course God puts Moses through in school could be called "Conflict." The second course here in chapter 18 of Exodus can be called "Change." Conflict and change are difficult courses of instruction, aren't they?

Well, to bring change, the Lord chooses a man Moses greatly respects. His name is Jethro; he's a priest of Midian, and he happens to be Moses' father-in-law. Moses' wife and two boys have been staying with him back at the family farm in Midian. But now Jethro sends word to Moses:

"I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her." Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. (verses 6-7)

That night over a long dinnertime, Moses tells Jethro all the Lord has done—and does he ever have some stories to tell!

We're told here in verse 9, "Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians."

The next day, Moses is back to work, and Jethro observes a long line of people coming to Moses all day long with disputes they want him to resolve. Jethro finally asks Moses in verse 14:

"What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?"

He can see very clearly that if this continues Moses is going to burn out from exhaustion.

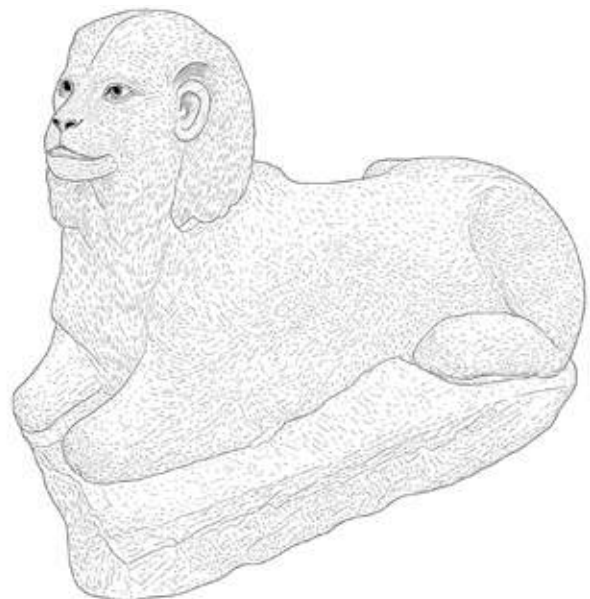
Moses explains in the next verse:

"The people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws."

In other words, he's saying, "I'm the only guy who can handle this responsibility. I'm the one representing God and bringing their cases to God. That's the way I've been doing it since we left Egypt."

Jethro is quick to respond, saying, "What you are doing is not good . . . You are not able to do it alone" (verses 17-18). He then offers wise counsel in verses 21-22:

Look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times.



Sphinx with proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, from Serabit el-Khadim



In other words, delegate and organize. “Moses, you need to delegate leadership to other men.”

And by the way, Moses is not to look for men who have leadership experience or know all the programs or are successful in business, but for those who *know and fear* God. Obeying God is *already* their highest priority.

And notice, Moses is to make sure these men love the truth. They are to be men of integrity, men who say no to what’s wrong and yes to what’s right.

Jethro emphasizes that they must be men who hate taking a bribe. In other words, Moses is to find men who cannot be bought—their character doesn’t have a price tag.

What will result from the selection of such men? Jethro tells Moses in verses 22-23, “It will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure.”

Burnout is not part of God’s plan for Moses, or any other leader for that matter. In fact, Jethro’s solution here implies that new leaders are going to be developed when this model of organization and delegation is implemented. Moses will actually bring onto his leadership team several thousand godly men. Imagine that potential.

Finally, the people are going to be well led. In verse 23 Jethro says, “All this people also will go to their place in peace.”

That word “also”—“all this people *also*”—means that not only are the people going to be satisfied, but “Moses, you will have some peace in your life as well.”

Share leadership, develop godly leaders, develop a team of committed believers to share the load—this is great advice to this very day.

Now, Moses could have said, “No! I’m the leader here. This is my ministry; it’s what God called me to, so

I’m going to make all the decisions around here.” That might sound like commitment, but Moses would have failed his schooling; he would have flunked these two courses had he tried to do it all alone. Instead of digging in his heels, verse 24 reveals a great character trait of Moses—humility: “So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.”

Are you willing to share your authority? Are you willing to change the way you do things? Are you willing to listen to someone God has brought into your life to show where you can lead and live more effectively for Christ?

Whatever your leadership style might be, make sure you listen to the Jethro’s God brings into your life at just the right time; and respond in humility so that you can ultimately lead and serve more effectively for God’s glory—not yours, not mine, but God’s.

What did the victory over the Amalekites teach Israel and Israel’s leaders, including Moses? What does it say to you about how God works?

Why do you think some people are willing to risk burnout by refusing to delegate some of their responsibilities to others?

What are the primary qualities we should look for in those we choose to lead us in the church? Are you personally striving to develop these characteristics in your life?

¹ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1958), 151.

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Delivered* (Chariot Victor, 1998), 92.





THE SINAI SUMMIT

Exodus 19

God graciously chose Israel to be His special people, His treasured possession. This unique status obligated them to humbly obey and honor the Lord as His special representatives in the world. We who follow Christ today have the same responsibility.

In this study, we are going back to the basic foundation, not only for the Israelite nation, but also for us as believers today. In Exodus 19, we are given principles for how to walk with God and told why it's important to walk with God, and we are going to be shown how it all began near the mountain we call Mount Sinai.

There are two primary reasons God holds this meeting at Sinai. And the first reason is to *communicate significant revelation* to God's people in light of His own character.

We read here in verses 1-3:

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the



In Egypt, the vulture goddess was thought to protect the people

land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They . . . encamped in the wilderness. . . . before the mountain, while Moses went up to God.

The text goes on in verse 3 to tell us, “The LORD called to him out of the mountain,” giving Moses what he is to say to the people of Israel.

Now there are several aspects of this revelation from God I want to point out. First, it begins with a *review* in verse 4:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

I have read that the eagle will fly beneath her young eaglets to catch them on her wings if they falter. God says that His care is like that of an eagle. Although Israel has failed, He has faithfully cared for them and brought them from Egypt to this place and into a special relationship with Him.



Now verse 5 makes it clear that God's revelation demands a *response*:

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.”

Did you notice the word “covenant” here? A covenant in the Bible refers to a solemn treaty, or agreement, binding two parties in a contract that spells out the obligations of each party. It also spells out the consequences for breaking the covenant.

This covenant, which we call the Mosaic covenant, is conditional. In other words, God says, “If you do all of these things, you will enjoy the benefits of being My people.” Now understand this: Israel will always be God's covenant people, but because of disobedience, they might not experience all the benefits of this covenant.

And that brings us to a third aspect of this revelation: Obedience to God's revelation results in *rewards*. Verse 5 names the first of three rewards: “You shall be my treasured possession.”

This is a very tender expression. God wants the people of Israel to understand that they are highly valued in His eyes. And what God treasures, He protects and nurtures.

Verse 6 promises another reward for the people if they obey the Lord's covenant. He says, “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests.” The apostle Peter uses this expression in reference to New Testament believers. He says, “You [Christians] are . . . a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9).

A priest was one who stood between God and mankind. A priest spoke to God on behalf of people and spoke to people in response to what he learned from God. Peter says that in the same way God intended Israel to be a kingdom of priests, you and I, as followers of Christ, are also priests. As His priests, we are to speak to our neighbors, coworkers, and fellow students as representatives of the Lord Jesus. We are

As His priests, we are to speak to our neighbors, coworkers, and fellow students as representatives of the Lord Jesus.

also able to go directly to God and intercede for people all around the world.

The third reward for obeying God's covenant commands is also stated here in verse 6: “You shall be . . . a holy nation.” To be holy doesn't mean to be perfect. The word *holy* means to be set apart to God as a distinct people separated from sin, and that's exactly what God's people should be.

Before we move on, let me tell you that God is preparing His people to receive the Ten Commandments—this is where we're headed next. And God wants Israel to know that by God's grace, they have been chosen to be God's treasured possession, set apart from the rest of the nations as priests to represent God to a fallen world.

Now I pointed out that one purpose of God in the Sinai Summit is to communicate significant revelation to Israel. But He has another purpose for it: to *create in the people a deep and genuine respect* for who He is.

Let me give you three ingredients of genuine respect for God. The first one we find in verses 7-8—a *willingness to obey*:

Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him [in verses 1-6]. All the people answered together and said, “All that the



*LORD has spoken we will do.”
And Moses reported the words of
the people to the LORD.*

They’re saying here, “God, whatever You have to say, we want You to know that we will obey.” Their words are sincere, even if they are naïve about their own sinful hearts.

The second ingredient of genuine respect for God is an *openness to listen*. Look at verse 9:

The LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.”

This “hearing” is not like some of us husbands when our wives ask us to empty the garbage, and we have to confess, “I heard my wife, but I wasn’t really listening, so I never did anything.” The Lord is talking here about “hearing” that results in doing.

A third ingredient of genuine respect for God is a *recognition of His superiority*. Listen as God warns Moses here in verse 12:

“You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.’”

God is impressing on the people that there is a separation between the holy Creator and the creature; He’s not a good buddy or the man upstairs. God is awesome and glorious, and recognizing this causes us

to revere and respect Him. If God were to show up in a church service today, most Christians think they would run up and give him a hug or have Him sign their Bible; no, we would all fall down like Isaiah and recognize His awesome and infinite superiority. PQ

God is revealing these truths about His character before He ever delivers the Ten Commandments. And let me tell you, beloved, when God shows up, Moses says, “I tremble with fear” (Hebrews 12:21).

How do we approach God boldly and without fear, while at the same time coming before Him with genuine respect and awe and worship? We approach God the Father through Jesus Christ, who made a way by His sacrifice on the cross.

So, you can have that summit meeting with the Lord every single day. But you come humbly and in awe of His greatness and glory. You don’t come to tell Him what He’s doing wrong or what He needs to get busy doing, and you don’t demand that *your* will be done; you pray, “Oh God, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven; for Yours is the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

Why is it important to review what
God has done for you in the past?
What does this reveal about Him and
you?

What rewards do you see in your own
life for obedience to God?

How do you recognize and
communicate the holiness of God in
your life?

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE TEN COMMANDMENTS—PART 1

Exodus 20:1-11

God's laws for Israel were necessary to restrain sin, maintain order, and make the new nation a light to the world. The laws tell us much about God and how we today should relate to Him. This is particularly true of the first four of the Ten Commandments.

In our Wisdom Journey, we are now going to begin looking at the constitution for the nation Israel—that is, the law—and particularly the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's holy standards for His people Israel, given at Mount Sinai. Now keep in mind that these commandments are only a small portion of what we call the Mosaic law, which will be detailed later in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

The Mosaic law contains regulations for all of Israel's life—morally, socially, and religiously. And frankly, if you have your thinking cap on, you quickly recognize that the law of Moses does not apply to believers today. After all, we're not sacrificing animals or executing people for cursing their parents or skipping the Sabbath.

So, the question naturally arises as to how Christians today relate to the law. The New Testament makes it clear in Romans 6:14 that we are not “under law but under grace.” The law was given to Israel to regulate national life and restrain sin. It was not given to the church. It was temporary and designed primarily to make the people aware of their sin and ultimately direct them to the only one who could save them: Jesus the Messiah.

But does this mean the Ten Commandments and the law as a whole have no application to us today? No. All Scripture is profitable for us, the apostle Paul wrote (2 Timothy 3:16).

In some cases, the Mosaic law includes unchangeable



Instruction of Shuruppak



moral absolutes that are just as true both before and after the law. Other laws, including the Sabbath law and the dietary laws, were given uniquely to Israel for a temporary period of time. As we will see, nine of the Ten Commandments express eternal moral absolutes and are repeated in New Testament Scripture. The Sabbath observance is a law that clearly is not repeated for the New Testament Christian.

But here's the point: the law was given to show Israel they were lawbreakers, sinners in need of a Savior. The same principle holds true for us. We have all fallen short of God's holy standards and therefore need the Savior to deliver us.

Now here in verse 2 of Exodus 20, we hear God saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of . . . Egypt, out of the house of slavery." That is a statement of God's grace. And immediately after saying this, the Lord delivers the Ten Commandments to all His people.

The commandments, then, are given in the context of God's grace. It was by His grace He freed the people from slavery. And while the commandments will reveal to Israel their sin, they will also point the people to God's grace, which frees them from sin. So, as we begin to look at the Ten Commandments, I'm actually going to focus on the grace of God—even as it's expressed in the law.

*In other words,
you can actually
take God's name in
vain by living the
life of a hypocrite.*

The first commandment is recorded in verse 3, which says, "You shall have no other gods before me." This law makes it plain that the human race has a built-in tendency to worship idols. It has often been said that

the human heart is a factory that produces idols. And this universal law forbids the existence of any idol, whether it's parked in your driveway or something you're wanting in your heart that has taken the place of obeying and worshipping God alone.

This law tells us not to devalue the one and only God and become enslaved to a false god. This is God's gracious protection from elevating anyone or anything above Him in our lives.

The second commandment is given in verse 4: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or . . . in the earth beneath, or . . . in the water under the earth." This follows naturally from the first commandment and prohibits the making and worshipping of idols.

Man-made gods can never rise above physical, temporal human concepts. That's why the gods of the pagans were portrayed by carved images in the form of people or animals. And by the way, much of the world today worships idols. I've been to temples where gods and goddesses are worshiped today. They're represented by elephants and trees and rivers and the constellations in space.

The Bible tells us in Colossians 1:15 that God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the only true representation of deity. So, if you want to know what God is like, study the life of Jesus as revealed in God's Word.

Now verse 7 gives us the third commandment: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

Typically, we think this means we are not to use God's name in cursing or profanity. It certainly includes that kind of irreverence, and it makes me shudder every time I hear someone use *God* or *Jesus Christ* in a profane manner. But the word "vain" here means "empty" or "insincere." Taking God's name in vain includes anything we do that brings disrespect upon the name of the Lord and all it represents.

In other words, you can actually take God's name in vain by living the life of a hypocrite. To say you are a Christian, a follower of Christ, and then live



your life in such a way that unsaved people see you as no different from them is to disrespect His name. So, our lives, as well as our lips—our words—should demonstrate a genuine respect for our Creator God.

The grace of God built into this law is that it not only protects the Lord's reputation but also graciously preserves our own integrity and testimony for the Lord.

Now let's move on to the fourth commandment:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.” (verses 8-10)

The Old Testament makes it crystal clear that this is a very important commandment for Israel, but it's not repeated in the New Testament teaching for the church. Frankly, the Sabbath was a prophetic picture—a shadow—of the reality of the coming Messiah, described for us in the New Testament as our Sabbath rest. In other words, Jesus Christ doesn't just give us rest; He is our rest.

So, believers today are not required to observe the Sabbath, which of course was Saturday. It's never commanded of Christians in the New Testament; in fact, by the time you reach Acts chapter 20, the believers are setting aside Sunday for rest and worship. That does not mean there isn't an important principle here in the Sabbath commandment—there is. God's own creation-week pattern of six days of work and one day of rest indicates the need for weekly rest and time devoted to worship.

This fourth commandment, by the way, flows perfectly out of the first three commandments. If you go about your days laboring without giving any thought to God, without worshiping God, then your work and the money your work provides can easily become idols.

The grace of God embedded in these commandments clearly reveal that God wants to keep us focused on what matters most. We begin with worshiping Him; we keep from being enslaved to money and work; we make room for the principles of rest and worship. And that's all bound up in just the first four commandments of God

Why were the Ten Commandments so important to Israel? What importance do they have for you?

What do the first three commandments teach you about God's character?

What should be your attitude toward work in light of God's Sabbath command?



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE TEN COMMANDMENTS—PART 2

Exodus 20:12-21

The last six of the Ten Commandments give us vital instruction on how to get along with one another in our families and in society. They offer restraints on wickedness and reveal the heart of a gracious God.

In our Wisdom Journey, we return now to the Ten Commandments as given in Exodus 20. We could call the Mosaic law the constitution and bylaws of the nation of Israel; it forms the moral basis for law and order in this young nation.

As followers of Christ, we are not Israel. The church has not replaced Israel; in fact, the nation of Israel will be reconstituted, and all twelve tribes will be represented in the coming millennial kingdom. But there's much we can learn from the Mosaic law, and particularly from the Ten Commandments. In fact, nine of them express timeless, universal, moral absolutes that are based on the character of God and are not confined to Israel's law.

Now we've already looked at the first four commandments. They are often called the first table of the law, and they concern a person's relationship with God. The final six commandments are considered the second table of the law, and they deal with a person's relationship with other people.

So, let's begin with the fifth commandment here in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

Right away you notice the transition from our rela-

tionship to God to our relationship to others. And there's a clear connection between our vertical love for God and our horizontal love for our parents—or anyone else for that matter.

One author wrote, "When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my [earthly] dearest better than I do now."¹ In other words, a love for God will produce a genuine love for others.

Each of these commandments actually includes a principle of grace. The commandment here protects the honor of the family. And when parents are honored, it brings stability and order to society—and that's a gracious gift from God.



Jebel Musa, the traditional Mount Sinai



Now did you notice that God adds a promise that is clearly limited to Israel? He says here, “If you honor your parents, you’ll live on in the promised land.” Right now, I don’t own any land in Israel—and I don’t plan to move there. But I can certainly obey this command to honor my parents and know that I’m pleasing God in the process.

Some of you reading this will find that it’s not easy to honor parents who mistreated you or even abused you or just didn’t love you like they should have. Let me tell you that one way you can honor your parents is by praying for them. Pray God will open their eyes to their sin and convict them and bring them to repentance. There is no more loving act than praying for your parents, who in many ways might not deserve your time and attention.

The sixth commandment, which we find in verse 13, is one everybody knows: “You shall not murder.” The reason for this prohibition against murder is found in Genesis 9:6: “for God made man in his own image.” Murder is not only robbing a person of the precious gift of life; it’s also profaning God’s image. And let me tell you, this commandment certainly includes the image of God in the life of an innocent, unborn child!

This law is also infused with grace. It’s a reminder that life—your life, my life, everyone’s life—is a sacred creation of God, the Giver of life. Every life is worth protecting. And built into this command is the warning that anybody who murders another person will one day answer to God.

Now in verse 14, we’re given the seventh commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.” We’re living in a day when adultery is excused in any number of ways—it was a passing affair, or it gave someone the attention that person needed. Well, beloved, this universal commandment doesn’t make any excuses for it; in fact, it lets you know exactly what God thinks of it. Adultery is a direct attack upon the institution of marriage and family, which God Himself established.

But like any sin against God’s moral law, God can still forgive. He can forgive murder, He can forgive idolatry, and He can forgive adultery. In fact, he can *restore* marriages damaged by adultery, whenever there is genuine confession and genuine repentance from this sin.

I’ve seen that take place; in fact, I’ve seen God bring healing to the heart of a spouse who suffered through the adultery of a husband or wife. I’ve seen the adulterer repent and the offended spouse offer incredible—nothing less than supernatural—grace in forgiving his or her spouse and restoring their marriage.

*A love for God will
produce a genuine
love for others.*

In verse 15 we read, “You shall not steal,” the eighth commandment. The principle behind this law is that God owns everything. As humans we simply take care of the stuff God graciously gives us to manage.

Stealing, therefore, is an attack on God. Stealing is really saying, “God didn’t give this to me, but He should have” or “God doesn’t know what’s best for me or He would let me have this; so I’m going to take it myself.” This law is God’s gracious way of saying we can trust Him to give us the things we really need.

Now verse 16 reads, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This ninth commandment specifically has a courtroom setting in view. This is where a lie can have the most devastating effect on someone’s life—even to the point of bringing about a person’s incarceration and perhaps even execution.

This command, then, is God’s gracious protection over someone’s reputation, and even life itself. At the heart of this command, though, is the demand for honesty—speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Jesus said, “I am . . . the truth” (John 14:6). When we tell the truth, especially in difficult situations, we can be sure the one who is truth *is* standing with us.

The last of the Ten Commandments is recorded in verse 17:



“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 is your neighbor’s.”

This law is designed to stop a sinful act where it starts—in the heart. To covet simply means to desire. When desire is misplaced so that it becomes a craving for what someone else has, it becomes sinful covetousness. To covet is to say in your heart, “I’ve got to have that!” Covetousness is the central motivation behind sins such as stealing and adultery.

This law is God’s gracious reminder to desire Him. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, “and all these things [that God wants us to have] will be added to you.”

After the people of Israel heard God deliver these commandments, we’re told here that thunder, lightning, smoke, and the sound of a trumpet came from the mountain. And verse 18 says, “The people were afraid and trembled.” They could have spared themselves centuries of misery had they maintained that kind of awe and respect for God, and the law He had given them.

Well, we’ve raced through these commandments in our Wisdom Journey here in Exodus chapter 20. I hope you have seen that these laws are not just a bunch of rules imposed by an uncaring God. No, they are

gracious protections for His people. And because He is a gracious God, even when we fail to obey Him, there is forgiveness and hope

What does Matthew 22:37-40 contribute to your understanding of the law? In what ways do these verses in Matthew “simplify” the Christian life?

Why do you think many of the Ten Commandments are ignored or rationalized as not relevant today? What can you do to help restore respect for God’s moral absolutes in your sphere of influence?

What does Matthew 22:37-40 contribute to your understanding of the law? In what ways do these verses in Matthew “simplify” the Christian life?

¹ W. H. Lewis, ed., *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 248.



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

Exodus 20:22–24:11

Israel was called into a unique relationship with God as His chosen people. As such, they were to reflect the character of God in every minute aspect of their lives. Like Israel, we who are followers of Jesus Christ also are to be living testimonies to God and His grace.

I don't know about you, but legal documents make me wonder if there's some small print somewhere that I had better read. We call it the fine print of the law.

Well, in this study we're going to explore a legal arrangement into which God and Israel entered—a covenant arrangement with real terms and consequences. And God isn't hiding anything in the fine print. It will be very clear to the nation of Israel.



Bull palette from Pre-dynastic Egypt

This section of Exodus, from chapter 20, verse 22 through verse 11 of chapter 24, is referred to as the “Book of the Covenant.” It follows the style of a legal agreement, beginning with an opening statement that sets the tone and basis for the agreement. God says to Moses in Exodus 20:22:

“Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.’”

The tone the Lord is setting here is one of authoritative grace. He sets all the terms because He's God. And the fact that God is talking to them at all communicates that His grace is the basis for Israel to obey these legal terms.

Now verse 23 gives the context of the covenant. God says, “You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold,” He's saying in effect, “Worshiping Me on my terms is the heart of this covenant.”

Verse 24 then begins a long section, listing the stipulations, or requirements, specified by the covenant. Here God lays down a series of laws that directs Israel's worship and civil and moral life as a nation.



Prominent in this section is what is called case law. Specific laws are spelled out, along with the prescribed judgments for violating them. These laws are included to help the judges appointed by Moses make just decisions. So, this section gives examples or precedents to follow.

For instance, we read in Exodus 21:33:

“When a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its owner, and the dead beast shall be his.”

This law is representative of something that *can* happen and explains what to do *if* it happens.

I’m thankful for the case law in chapter 21 that addresses slavery. Let’s anchor here for a moment. That there are laws at all in God’s Word about slavery is proof that God is concerned about cruelty against people. But some clarity might help a terribly misunderstood biblical topic.

There are two kinds of life situations that are described by the term *slavery* in our Bible translations. The first is the forced service of one person to another—like Joseph, who was sold into slavery, and like the Israelites, who were slaves in Egypt for 430 years! You will find that Scripture describes this kind of slavery but never condones it.

The second situation was when people could no longer support themselves, usually because of debt. They hired themselves out to work, becoming *bond servants*, though your translation may use the word *slaves*.

Bond servants were given room and board, and they were given a paycheck that allowed them to eventually repay the debt that landed them in this predicament in the first place. But even if the bond servant can’t pay off his debt, Exodus 21:2 limits his service to only six years.

And when the bond servant is serving his master—

essentially his employer—and they treat each other according to God’s law and character, something interesting can happen. We read in verses 5-6:

“But if the slave [bond servant] plainly says, ‘I love my master . . . I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.”

Beloved, this kind of arrangement that is anchored in the love of God is what the apostles Paul, Peter, James, and Jude all have in mind when they describe themselves as bond servants of Christ.

Another feature of the Book of the Covenant is what we can call the sanctions. These are blessings and curses that serve as incentives for fulfilling the demands of the covenant.

For instance, in chapter 23, The Lord promises His presence, saying in verses 20-21, “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way . . . obey his voice . . . for my name is in him.” This is *the* Angel of the Lord, a mysterious manifestation of God the Son.

The people are to obey this Angel, and there’s plenty of positive incentive for doing so. The Lord promises in verse 22, “But if you carefully obey his voice . . . I will be an enemy to your enemies.” Notice here that their obedience preceded His protection.

Now there is negative incentive too. The Lord warns in verse 21 that if they rebel against Him, “he will not pardon [their] transgression”; if they follow the gods of the surrounding nations, God says down in verse 33, “It will surely be a snare to you.”

In other words, Israel is to worship, obey, and serve God in faith and depend entirely on His grace to keep their side of this legal, covenant agreement.



So, we have the terms here in these chapters, including the sanctions—both positive and negative incentives. Now we've reached the ratification. This is the legal ceremony binding the two parties together—this is where they sign on the dotted line. And it involves a formal process.

First, Moses communicates the terms of the covenant to the people of Israel here in Exodus 24:3:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do."

Now *no one* can say, "I didn't see the fine print—I didn't know about that" or "I didn't agree to that!" No, they're saying, "We agree with *all* the terms of the covenant."

Second, there is documentation. Verse 4 records that "Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD." By the way, think about the fact that you and I are studying today what the Lord preserved from the very day Moses wrote the words down! Here's the documentation. How reliable is God's word!

Third, the legal agreement must be ratified. So, Moses sets up an altar at the base of the mountain, along with twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel, who are entering this covenant agreement.

The covenant is ratified, or sealed, by blood. Oxen are sacrificed on the altar. Moses collects the blood of the sacrifices and throws half of it on the altar, which represents the presence of God. Then in verse 7, the other half of the blood is ceremonially sprinkled on the people; and that seals the deal.

By the way, have you noticed how God works through

Think about the fact that you and I are studying today what the Lord preserved from the very day Moses wrote the words down!

a mediator as He relates to His people? Moses, the mediator, is a picture of the coming, final Mediator between God and mankind, Jesus Christ, who seals the deal between us and our Heavenly Father—a covenant relationship that will never end, through faith in the shed blood of our Savior

Being a bond-servant to Jesus isn't automatic - you choose it by faith. Describe the ways your life with Jesus reflects the bondservant-master bond. What typically hinders or enhances this relationship for you?

The Israelites were quick to commit themselves to obeying the LORD - only to quickly fall short. Read and then apply Luke 14:25-33 to your life as you commit yourself to living faithfully by God's word.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE

Exodus 24:12–26:37

The tabernacle was constructed according to a very detailed plan the Lord gave Moses. The whole system of worship that centered on the tabernacle seems very foreign to us, yet upon closer inspection it helps us grasp important truths about our own relationship to God.

After the 1986 space shuttle disaster that took the lives of seven American astronauts, the president of the United States quoted words from an old poem from a World War II pilot as he attempted to bring comfort to the nation. “The crew of the space shuttle,” the president said, “slipped the surly bonds of earth” to “touch the face of God.”¹

That longing, to touch the face of God, is a God-created desire in all our hearts. In fact, that desire to connect with the presence of God becomes a very real possibility for the Israelites as we open to Exodus chapters 24–26.

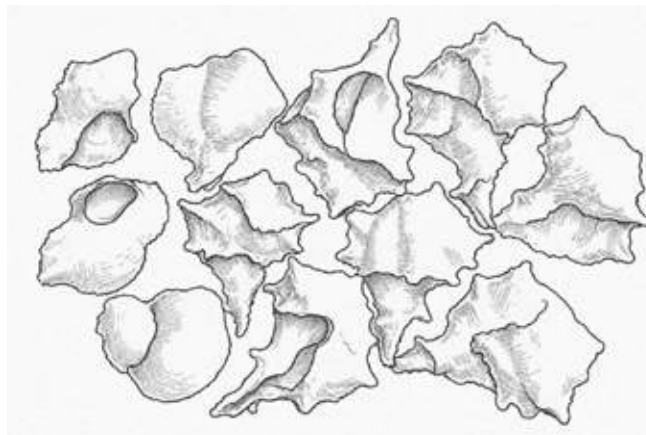
In Exodus 24, the Lord calls Moses up on the mountain again. And we read here in verse 12 that the Lord says He’s going to give Moses tablets of stone on which God Himself has written out the law for Israel’s instruction. The tablets will be engraved with the Ten Commandments God spoke to Israel, the same commandments they had agreed to live by just a short time earlier.

Verse 18 tells us that Moses is with the Lord on the mountain forty days and nights. We will revisit these same forty days when we study the golden calf fiasco recorded in chapter 32. But for now, the Lord speaks to Moses in Exodus chapter 25 and verse 2:

“Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me.”

The Lord is asking, not demanding, that every head of household with a willing heart give financially. We’re told here in verse 8 the reason why: “Let them make me a sanctuary [literally, a holy place], that I may dwell in their midst.”

The Lord goes on to tell Moses in verse 9, “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle,



Mollusks from which purple dye was extracted



and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”

Then verse 10 explains that the very heart of this tabernacle is the ark and the mercy seat that covers it. God says:

“They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height.”

A cubit in Moses’ time was around eighteen inches, so this ark is going to be a wooden chest about three and a half feet long, almost two and a half feet wide and two and a half feet tall. And in verse 11 Moses is told to cover it with gold.

The Lord gives Moses the purpose of the ark in verse 16: “You shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.” This “testimony” is the stone tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments. Moses is told to put a cover, or a “mercy seat” as verse 17 calls it, on top of this golden box. This mercy seat is to be made of pure gold with two gold cherubim, one on each end of the mercy seat, facing each other and looking down toward the cover. Cherubim is the plural form of *cherub*. These are angels known in Scripture to “stand closest to God in heaven.”² This makes sense because in verse 22, God informs us that this will be the place where God’s presence will effectively hover.

Here in the tabernacle, on the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest will sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on this mercy seat. God in essence looks down on the tablets of the law inside the golden box—the law that His people have broken during the past year. But He’s looking down, as it were, through the blood of this sacrifice. And with that, the people have their sins *temporarily* covered by the blood of this animal, which points to the coming, final, and permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who will finally and completely pay for the sins of the whole world.

Now in verses 23–30 we’re introduced to the table for

Points to the coming, final, and permanent sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who will finally and completely pay for the sins of the whole world.

the bread of the Presence. The Lord instructs Moses to build a table using acacia wood overlaid with gold. This is a low, small table, around three feet long and one and a half feet wide and about two and a half feet tall.

In verse 30, the Lord tells Moses, “You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.”

The priests are going to place twelve loaves of bread on this table, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. These loaves represent fellowship between Israel and the Lord, and they will be changed out with fresh loaves of bread every Sabbath day.

Now beginning in verse 31, Moses is told about a piece of furniture inside the Holy Place called the lampstand. The Lord tells Moses:

“You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it.”



We are told that the seven branches of the lampstand will hold seven oil lamps. Verse 37 gives us the function of the lampstand: “The lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.” Keep in mind that the tabernacle is basically a large tent, and it doesn’t have any windows. It’s going to be pitch dark in there and impossible to approach the presence of God. So, this will light up the Holy Place.

Next, Moses turns our attention to the structure of the tabernacle itself in chapter 26. We will study this more later when we arrive at the book of Leviticus. But for now, when you read the description of the tabernacle, you need to picture it as a rectangular structure supported by gold-plated wooden beams. Over these beams are several layers of coverings.

When this tent is set up, it’s about forty-five feet long by fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet high; and let me tell you, to someone looking on it from the outside, the tabernacle would appear to be a rather drab, unimpressive tent. What makes it impressive is the same thing that makes you impressive—God dwells there, just as He indwells you today, as a believer. Your body is the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

In verses 31 to 37, Moses is instructed to make a curtain, embroidered with cherubim—these warrior angels. This veil serves as a divider, separating the tabernacle into two rooms. The outer room, called the Holy Place, is where the table and the bread and the lampstand will be placed. The inner room, the Most Holy Place, will house that golden box, the ark, with the mercy seat on top, effectively acting as God’s throne on earth.

So, we see described in these chapters a tent where God dwells in a special way on earth. Therein is bread, which represents life and the fellowship God

desires with His people. And there’s a large lampstand illuminating the darkness.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Beloved, all of it illustrates and points to Jesus, who came to earth and dwelt with us—literally tabernacled among us, John 1:14 says. He announced that He is the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, and the final atoning sacrifice for sin.

We might not be able to touch the face of God today, but we can do this, as the old chorus sings:

*Turn [our] eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.³*

If the tabernacle was required by God for Israel’s worship, why were contributions toward its construction voluntary? How does 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 help you understand this?

God went to great lengths to point His people to the Savior they needed. What does this reveal about God’s heart to relieve you of the burden of sin? How does this add to your confidence in explaining to your yet to be saved neighbors who God really wants to be towards them?

¹ NASA, “President Reagan’s Remarks Following the Loss of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* and Her Crew,” January 26, 1986, nasa.gov. archive.

² Stephen Davey, *Angels, Demons, and Other Flying Creatures* (Wisdom for the Heart, 2012), 55.

³ Helen Howarth Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus.”

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





TEACHING TOOLS IN THE TABERNACLE

Exodus 27–28

When we meet with fellow believers for corporate worship, our forms and practices should reflect and reinforce truths God has revealed in the Bible. This is why God was so careful to give Moses such specific instructions regarding worship in the tabernacle.

God is now going to instruct Moses on the construction project known as the tabernacle. It's going to be built in the wilderness, and it will be the place where the Lord uniquely dwells among His people. The tabernacle will be the centerpiece of their worship.

But this tabernacle is also going to be filled with teaching tools for the Israelites to learn about forgiveness and redemption.

The outer courtyard is described for us here in Exodus chapter 27 as a rectangular plot of land about 150 feet long by 75 feet wide; it's enclosed by a fence of white linen curtains seven and a half feet tall. By the way, this courtyard has only one gate—one en-

trance—on the east side. This will teach every Israelite that the Lord God has made only one way in to worship Him: You can't climb over the fence or tunnel under ground; you enter by faith through the one door the Lord provides.

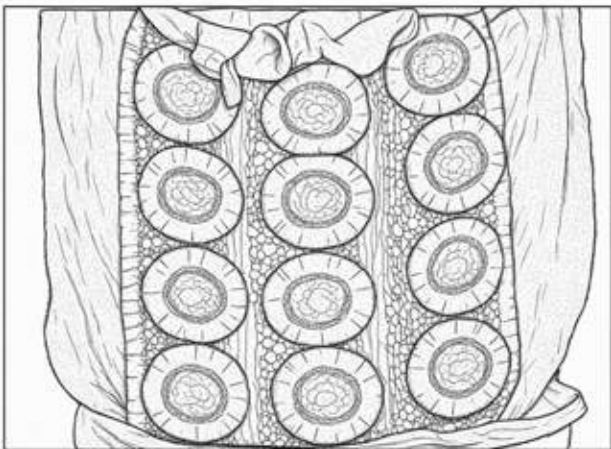
This reminds us of Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved" (John 10:9). There's no other way in but through Christ.

Now here in this courtyard is where a great bronze altar, nearly eight feet square, will stand. God instructs Moses to make it of wood and overlay it with bronze. Each corner on the top of the altar will have a pointed extension called a "horn." Horns typically represented power, and this altar represented the power of God's redemption.

This altar will be the busiest place in the courtyard because it's where animal sacrifices will be made. It's where every faithful Israelite father can teach his children, and be reminded himself, that God demands a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins.

Here in verse 20 of Exodus 27, God says to Moses:

"You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you



Replica of priest's breastplate



*pure beaten olive oil for the light,
that a lamp may regularly be set
up to burn.”*

Just like that altar and the outer court with one doorway, this perpetual supply of oil the people provide to keep the lamps inside the tabernacle burning is instructive. It teaches that God’s people are responsible to not let the light of God’s presence among them go out. If there’s no oil, there’s no worship.

A steady supply of oil means the people *want* to worship the Lord and *want* to confess their sins and offer sacrifice for their sin. But if the oil runs out, they are obviously choosing to walk in the darkness of sin and rebellion against the Lord.

And let me tell you, while the church is not pictured here in the tabernacle, it’s still true that many churches today have effectively run out of oil. They are no longer worshiping the true and living God and no longer trusting in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for salvation. They are in darkness and unbelief. Jesus warned the Ephesian church in Revelation 2 that if they strayed from the truth of the gospel, He would remove their lampstand. In other words, they might be meeting, they might have beautiful buildings, but if they no longer followed the truth, they had no testimony and were as much in the darkness as the world around them.

Chapter 28 focuses on God’s instructions concerning the garments for the high priest. In verse 1, the Lord assigns Aaron and his sons to serve as the priests.

And Moses writes in verse 3 that the Lord is going to appoint some seamstresses whom He has filled with “a spirit of skill.” And they’re going to make beautiful, awe-inspiring clothing for Aaron, the high priest, to wear. Later, we will learn that Aaron’s sons are also given special clothing to wear as they serve under him.

Now these gifted people are going to make six different articles of clothing for just the high priest to wear. Verse 6 describes his outer garment, called an ephod. It looks like an apron that hangs from his shoulders front and back, down below his waist. On each

shoulder a large stone is attached, and the Lord says to Moses in verse 9, “Engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel,” six names on each stone in their birth order.

Verse 15 describes the “breast-piece of judgment.” This was a square piece of fabric, folded in half. The breast-piece had twelve precious gems secured to it in four rows of three—each stone engraved with the name of one of Israel’s twelve tribes. So, the high priest essentially represents all twelve tribes as he goes into the presence of the Lord inside the tabernacle.

The breast-piece was folded in such a way that it created a pouch in which something very special was kept. We read in verse 30:

*In the breastpiece of judgment
you shall put the Urim and the
Thummim, and they shall be on
Aaron’s heart, when he goes in
before the LORD.*

Now the Urim and Thummim were stones of some type, although we’re not told what kind. Moses isn’t even told here how to use them; he’s just told to put them inside the pouch of the breast-piece.

Later, in the Old Testament we will see that through the Urim and Thummim the Lord communicated a yes or no answer to a direct question. I believe these stones actually lit up, or began to glow, as the Lord communicated His answer.¹

The Hebrew words *Urim* and *Thummim* mean

*What a great picture
this is of our High
Priest, the Lord Jesus,
carrying our guilt
before a holy God.*



“lights” and “perfections,” and you can imagine a yes answer causing one of the stones to begin glowing or a no answer causing the other stone to light up. Imagine how significant this was as God communicated through the high priest.

Next, God begins describing another part of the high priestly outfit:

“You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening.” (verses 31-32)

This is a long, solid blue, one-piece, sleeveless robe to be worn under the ephod. We’re told in verse 34 that bells are to be attached to the bottom of his robe. These bells will be heard as a reminder to everybody outside the Holy Place that the high priest in there ministering before the Lord on their behalf.

The final pieces of the high priest’s garments are described next. They include a checkered coat, a sash to tie everything together, and a turban. And the crowning touch is detailed in verses 36-38:

“You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it ... ‘Holy to the LORD.’ And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue...it shall be on Aaron’s forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that

the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.”

So, think about this fearful responsibility; the high priest is all dressed up, but what’s he doing? He’s representing the people, effectively carrying their guilt into the presence of a holy God. The high priest will be making an offering on their behalf—and his own—through the blood of the sacrifice.

What a great picture this is of our High Priest, the Lord Jesus, carrying our guilt before a holy God. Indeed, He is both our High Priest *and* the sacrificial Lamb; and through His own sacrifice on the altar of that wooden cross, we can be cleansed from our sins and saved forevermore.

Measure your heart for worship. Is it more like “want to” or “have to?” What heart attitudes or beliefs influence each of these choices? How does John 4:23-24 impact your thinking on this important truth about worship?

Israel’s high priest and other priests were distinguished by their unique garments. Read 1 Peter 2:9 and then consider what uniqueness you as a believer and priest of God can show to your yet to be saved family and friends that they too would trust Jesus as Savior.

¹ Adapted from Douglas Dale Bookman, “The Urim and Thummim in Relation to the Old Testament Theocracy” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001).





TRUTHS FROM OLD TESTAMENT PRIESTS

Exodus 29

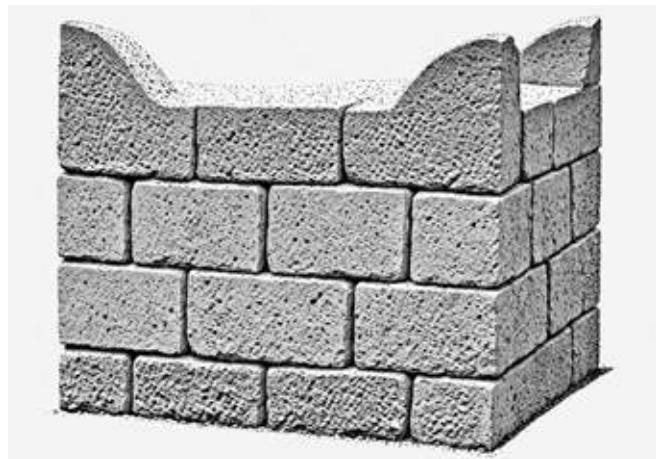
The priests were to direct Israel's worship and teach the people about God and what He requires. Faithfully fulfilling their duties also would establish a longing for a perfect priest and a once-for-all sacrifice that would come only in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Today we open our Wisdom Journey with the Lord's instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai to consecrate and ordain Israel's priests. These instructions will be obeyed following the building of the tabernacle (Leviticus 8).

Now the details given here highlight the importance of Israel's worship. These priests are going to represent the people before God, and they're going to represent God before the people.

Now let me remind you that the tabernacle itself was constructed after the pattern the Lord showed Moses back in Exodus 25. The tabernacle and its furnishings were designed to teach people about the holiness of God and how sinful people could approach Him—namely through blood sacrifice. The priests serving in the tabernacle modeled these truths and pointed ahead to Christ's work. The high priest especially was pointing people to the work of Jesus Christ, the one the New Testament calls our “great high priest” in Hebrews 4:14.

Rather than comment on all the details of the consecration ceremony here, I want to emphasize the role of the priests and the pattern they provide for the Great High Priest to come. Let me give you seven important truths about Israel's priesthood and what they mean for us even today.



Horned altar at Beersheba

First, the priests are chosen by God for a unique service. The Lord says to Moses in Exodus 29:1, “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them.” To consecrate them means to set them apart for special duties no one else can perform.

No one simply chose to be a priest. God specifically chose Aaron and his descendants to serve Him as priests. Aaron's ministry is going to be a pattern that points to the Chosen One—the Son of God—who will be the final and great High Priest who offers one final, all-sufficient sacrifice for sins.

Now the second truth about Israel's priests is that they must be holy. The Lord says here in verses 10-12:



“You shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar.”

By laying their hands on the bull’s head, the priests are identifying with the animal about to be sacrificed. And what kind of sacrifice is this? Verse 14 calls it a “sin offering”; this is a sacrifice for *unintentional sins* a person commits.

After this, an unblemished ram is to be sacrificed, and the process is repeated with laying on of hands and sprinkling blood at the altar. Verse 18 here refers to this as a “burnt offering to the Lord,” which is a sacrifice for *intentional sins*.

Here’s the point: Aaron and all his sons might be priests, but they are still sinners. They need God’s forgiveness. They need to have their sins—even the ones they don’t know about—covered by the blood of an animal *before* they can serve a holy God!

This whole ceremony emphasizes the need for a holy priesthood and therefore points ahead to Jesus, our sinless Great High Priest. The apostle Peter writes that New Testament believers also are priests unto God (1 Peter 2:9):

But you are a . . . royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness

into his marvelous light.

Beloved, you serve God today—you represent Him today. But if you ever hope to serve Him as you should, you need to walk in holiness, consistently confessing your sins and asking the Lord’s forgiveness.

Third, Israel’s priests are to fulfill their duties faithfully. The second ram that is offered is called in verse 22 the “ram of ordination.” This word for “ordination” comes from a Hebrew verb meaning “to fill the hands.” To ordain someone is to entrust to their hands—to put into their hands—certain duties. And in this case, it’s the duties of the priesthood.

Blood from this ram is to be placed on the right ear, the right thumb, and the big toe on the right foot of each priest. This is the Lord’s way of symbolically “filling the hands” of Aaron and his sons with all the work to be accomplished in the tabernacle. What they handled, what they heard, and where they walked was to be committed to the work of God.

And so it was for Jesus, our Great High Priest. He fully executed his duties on earth; and even today, He is faithfully carrying out His priestly work, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 7:25).

Now, fourth, we see that the Lord makes full provision for the priests. Portions of the offerings are for the priests to eat. We are told in verse 28 that the breast of the ram “shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual due from the people of Israel.”

But if you ever hope to serve Him as you should, you need to walk in holiness, consistently confessing your sins and asking the Lord’s forgiveness.



In other words, those serving the Lord need to eat. They ought to be provided for; their needs should be met.

The fifth principle or truth concerning the priests of Israel we see here is that they must complete their ordination. In verse 35, the Lord tells Moses, “Through seven days shall you ordain them.” This means they cannot be ordained priests unless they complete this seven-day ceremony.

The number seven communicated the idea of completion—a concept that no doubt had its origin in the creation week and God’s resting on the seventh day. I think this principle implies the idea of following God’s timing. Even to this day, as royal priests on earth, representing the true and living God, we should demonstrate our trust in the timing of God for everything in life.

The sixth truth about Israel’s priests is that they will communicate God’s remedy for sin. The Lord says here in verses 38-39:

“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs . . . One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight.”

So, twice a day, every day, the priests effectively demonstrate the need for a substitutionary sacrifice to pay for people’s sin.

This is a wonderful picture of Jesus Christ. Hebrews 2:17 tells us, He became a “faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for the sins of the people.”

What parallels do you see between Israel’s priesthood, the priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9), and Jesus, our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14)? What do these parallels teach you?

Now one more important truth is indicated here, and it’s that priests are to help people come to know God. We read in verses 44-46:

“Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God . . . that I might dwell among them.”

You can see why Israel’s priests played such a critical role in Israel’s life and worship. They reminded the people of God’s holiness, the need for forgiveness, and the principle of an innocent substitute sacrificed for sinners. And all this pointed to the coming Redeemer, the great and holy High Priest who would offer *Himself* as the final, unblemished, permanent, all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Why? So that you and I can know the true and living God and one day dwell with Him forever.

What are the primary differences between the priesthood and worship of Israel and the leadership and worship of the church today? What can Israel’s priesthood contribute to our understanding and practice of worship?

What parallels do you see between Israel’s priesthood, the priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9), and Jesus, our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14)? What do these parallels teach you?

¹ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Old Testament* (AMG, 2003), 227.

Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





TABERNACLE FURNITURE

Exodus 30-31

Everything from the place of worship to the specifics of how to worship is spelled out in detail in the Old Testament. That worship system is not for the church, but the bedrock principles found in it provide a useful measure of our worship practices and attitudes today.

In Exodus chapters 30 and 31 the focus is on the forty days Moses spent with the Lord there on Mount Sinai. We're going to learn more details about the tabernacle and its construction. But more than that, we're going to uncover several timeless principles for life and worship.

The first principle is that *prayer must be a priority in life*. Here in chapter 30 the Lord describes in detail how Moses is to build the incense altar for the tabernacle. This altar is to be placed inside the tabernacle building, in that section called the Holy Place, where the priests minister daily. In verse 6 the Lord says to Moses:

"You shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy

seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you."

In other words, the altar is placed near the ark of the covenant. In fact, the only thing separating the ark and this altar of incense is the veil. And you may remember that inside the Holy of Holies on top of that ark is the mercy seat, where God's presence is manifested.

On the hot coals of this ornate altar, the high priest is to sprinkle fresh incense before the Lord twice a day. The incense rises as a sweet-smelling offering to the Lord.

Throughout Scripture incense is a symbol of prayer. Revelation 5:8 takes us before the throne of God in heaven, where there are "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." ¹ The Israelites saw this altar of incense as symbolizing their prayers continually ascending to God.

This perpetual offering of prayer is an illustration of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, where the believer is told to "pray without ceasing." In other words, all through the day, we should offer praise, thanksgiving, personal requests, and intercession for others.



Hittite relief from Boghazkoy with altar before bull image



Listen, the best way to get someone back on his or her feet might be for you to get down on your knees. That's what this altar of incense is doing—it's keeping the nation of Israel on its feet, by effectively representing the nation perpetually on its knees before God.

*Listen, the best way
to get someone back
on his or her feet
might be for you to
get down on your
knees.*

In verse 13 the Lord refers to taking a census. "Each one who is numbered" is literally, "each one who crosses over." This is military terminology, referring to all those who voluntarily allow themselves to be counted for military duty.

And in verse 11, The Lord tells Moses that each one counted "shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD." Then in verses 14-15 we read, "Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord's offering . . . to make atonement for your lives."

This "ransom/offering" was a symbolic act that basically recognized their lives were accountable to God. And imagine every twenty-year-old beginning to recognize the gravity of this truth—that their lives belonged to God.

Then in verse 18 the Lord instructs Moses to build a basin of bronze, which is to be filled with water. It's placed out in the courtyard for the priests to wash their hands and feet throughout the day. It represents more than clean hands and feet by the way; it symbolizes a pure heart.

In fact, verse 20 says, "They shall [must] wash with water, so that they may not die." So, imagine the

people of Israel, day after day, watching their priests going continually to that washbasin, representing the need for cleansing throughout the day.

You don't worship God with an unclean heart. The timeless principle illustrated here is that *if you want to live in fellowship with God, you're going to need to cleanse your heart throughout the day.* This means confessing your sins and asking God's forgiveness whenever you fall short. My friend, that isn't once a day; that's throughout the day. In fact, the mark of a maturing believer isn't necessarily sinning less but confessing quicker. How long does it take you when you have a sinful thought before you confess it to the Lord?

Now this last portion of Exodus chapter 30 gives us the recipe for making the anointing oil used to consecrate the priests and the tabernacle and its furnishings. We're also given here the recipe for the incense burned on the altar of incense.

Why be so specific? Is it because there's something mystical about these spices? Not at all. The Lord is teaching a timeless truth for us all here; namely, that *God is the one who determines what is acceptable to Him.* We don't come to Him on our terms but on His. We don't set the agenda; He does. We don't decide what's right and then demand God bless our decision. We submit to God's revealed Word, and we live our lives according to His design—even when we don't fully understand.

Chapter 31 begins with a note about the men God chose to head up the construction project on the tabernacle. The Lord declares in verses 2-3:

"I have called by name Bezalel . . . of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship."

Then down in verse 6 the Lord adds:



“And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab . . . I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you.”

In other words, the Lord has gifted these individuals and all who work with them in crafting this tabernacle, all its furnishings, the embroidered curtains, the gold work, the woodwork, the garments, the anointing oil, and the incense.

So, here’s another timeless principle: *God’s work is to be done in God’s power according to God’s designs in order to experience God’s good pleasure.*

Yes, we use the resources and gifts and gifted people God has given us, but we depend upon His power. We don’t bank everything on our skill or knowledge or experience. Jesus repeated this principle to every disciple in the New Testament when He said, “Apart from me you can do—something?” No, He said, “Apart from me you can do *nothing*” (John 15:5).

Well, Exodus 31 wraps up with a warning to Israel to keep their Sabbath rest. In verse 13 the Lord says:

“Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.”

The Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic covenant, so it had unique significance to Israel. But as we’ve already learned with other signs, this sign pointed to

something of permanent substance that would arrive in the person of the Messiah.

And what did Jesus say? “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This is spiritual, permanent, rest. This comes not through the Sabbath, not through a sacrifice given to a priest, not in the cleansing from a laver in the courtyard, and not in a tabernacle made of wood—these were all just signs that pointed us to our Savior. He is our Sabbath rest; He is the sacrificial altar; He is the mercy seat; He is the cleansing basin of water; He is the candlelight of truth.

You don’t have to go to a priest today—you can confess your sins immediately and directly to God. You don’t have to wait until Saturday to worship—you can worship Him every day. You don’t have to visit a tabernacle where the Spirit of God resides—you, beloved, are the temple of the Holy Spirit today (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Do you look at your daily work as service to the Lord? Read Colossians 3:23-24 and then consider how does, or would, this truth affect your attitude towards serving? And towards those you serve with?

¹ See also Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:8-10; and Revelation 8:3-4.





REBELLION AND RENEWAL

Exodus 32–34

The people of Israel had declared their faith in the Lord, but for many their faith was more in the man Moses. With his extended absence, their professed faith in the invisible God was abandoned in favor of a man-made idol. Here is a reminder that our faith must be in God alone.

A well-known nineteenth-century pastor wrote, “To be a true minister . . . is to accept new happiness and new distress.” You’re going to have both. Warren Wiersbe wrote that this “principle is vividly illustrated in the life of Moses. His delight in God on the mountaintop was interrupted by deep disappointment with his people.”¹

Exodus chapter 32 gives us that account. Moses is up on the mountain with God, and the people down below are rebelling against God. In fact, here in verse 1 they’re demanding of Aaron, the high priest:

“Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

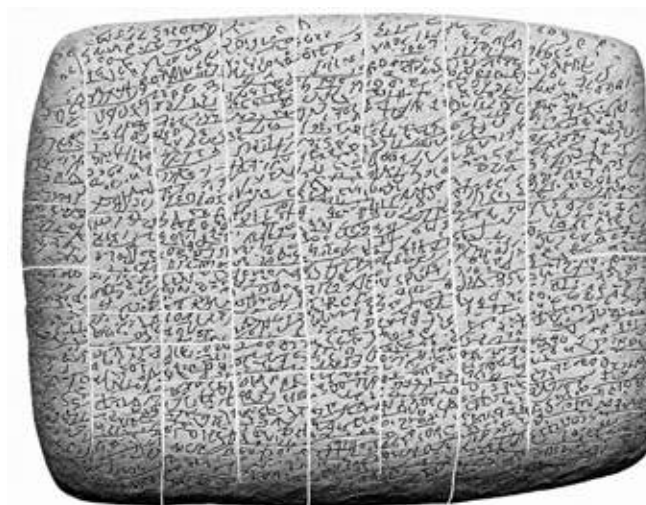
Remember, these are the same people who had declared their allegiance to the Lord little more than forty days earlier. Now with Moses out of sight, they’re impatient. They don’t want an invisible God; they want visible gods to lead them.

Sadly, instead of responding with righteous indigna-

tion, Aaron responds with an unrighteous *solution*. In verse 2, he tells them to hand over their gold jewelry. And from it he fashions a golden idol in the form of a calf. The ringleaders of this rebellion announce, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (verse 4).

Aaron makes a rather feeble attempt to direct them to the Lord in verse 5 by calling for a feast “to the LORD” the next day. But they’re not interested in the Lord. In fact, they engage in nothing less than a drunken orgy the following day.

The Lord says to Moses up there on the mountain,



Hittite relief from Boghazkoy with altar before bull image



“Go down, for your people . . . have corrupted themselves” (verse 7). He goes on to tell Moses that they are worshiping and sacrificing to a golden calf. Verse 10 tells us that the wrath of God is burning hot against them! In fact, God proposes that He just might consume this nation and start all over with Moses.

Now don’t misunderstand. This isn’t a moment of indecision from the Lord—it’s actually a moment of *decision* for Moses. God is inviting Moses to intercede for Israel. And that’s exactly what Moses does in verse 12, as he prays to the Lord, “Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.” And the Lord responds by withdrawing His threat.

When Moses comes down the mountain, he sees the golden calf and throws down the stone tablets on which the commandments are engraved, smashing them to pieces. Then we read in verse 20:

He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

This is Moses’ way of defiling this idol and making sure it will never be remade. And drinking this impure water pictures the truth that the people are going to suffer the consequences of their idolatry.

Now I need to mention Aaron’s ridiculous response when Moses confronts him. First, Aaron blames the people. Then in verse 24 he says, “I threw it [the gold] into the fire, and out came this calf.” How ridiculous is that? Imagine your child saying, “Well, I was walking past the cookie jar, and a cookie jumped out of the jar and landed in my mouth!”

No, this idol didn’t just jump out of the fire. I think it’s because this response is so ridiculous that Moses doesn’t even respond to it!

Instead, Moses shouts, in verse 26, “Who is on the LORD’S side? Come to me.” “The sons of Levi,” Mo-

ses’ tribe, step up with their swords, and in obedience to the Lord’s command, they go through the camp and put to death three thousand men who were the ringleaders in this idolatry.

Remember, this nation had just entered a covenant that required the death penalty for idolaters (Exodus 22:20). And because they defended the Lord’s honor, the tribe of Levi is given a permanent place of service alongside the priests from this point on.

So, here we are. Three thousand people are dead. The tablets of the law are shattered. And we’re left wondering if this grand plan of God for His chosen nation has come to an end.

But there’s hope. In verse 30 Moses says to Israel, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

Moses goes back up the mountain and pleads with the Lord to forgive them. He even offers to die himself if it will gain God’s forgiveness for the people.

His offer is declined. Verse 35 relates that God sends judgment in the form of a plague, yet mercifully, He doesn’t destroy the entire nation.

Now as we come to chapter 33, God tells the people that He will lead them to the promised land, but He says in verse 3, “I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked

This is actually a loving push toward repentance.

people.” What’s the Lord doing here? He’s reaffirming His covenant promise to give Israel the land but withholding personal communion and fellowship with them.

This is actually a loving push toward repentance. You see, the ringleaders had been put to death, but the nation had allowed it, and they haven’t yet repented.



So, the Lord's refusal forces them to see their silence for what it was. We read in verse 4, "When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments."

Their repentance is genuine, and we read in verse 14 that in response to Moses' intercession, the Lord says, "My presence will go with you." How gracious and forgiving is the Lord!

In verse 11 we read that the Lord would "speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." You might wonder how that squares with John's Gospel, where it says that no man has seen God at any time (John 1:18).

Well, Moses says to the Lord here in Exodus 33:18, "Please show me your glory." And that's what Moses is actually seeing when he speaks to the Lord—the glory of God's presence.

Now in chapter 34, God tells Moses to cut two new tablets of stone and bring them up the mountain. The next day the Lord descends in the cloud and passes by Moses in a glorious appearance, proclaiming His name and describing His nature. Moses sees just a sliver, as it were, of God's glory, and he then falls on his face and worships.

Then Moses records the words of God as he meets in the presence of God's glory for these forty days on the mountain. And something happens to Moses. We're told here in verse 30 that after Moses was in God's presence, "all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him."

So, Moses now has to wear a veil for some time whenever he goes out in public. You can imagine how this elevated the credibility of Moses and solidified his position as Israel's divinely chosen leader.

By the way, you will experience exactly what Moses did when you live with God in heaven: your entire countenance is going to shine like the sun. That's what Jesus said in Matthew 13:43: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

What are some common hinderances to praying for others? What does Isaiah 62:6-7 teach about intercessory prayer itself, the one who prays and the one to whom we pray?

How does doubt about God or discouragement with people impact your heart to pray for others? What role does relating to God through His word have in building up and overcoming hinderances to your prayer life?

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Delivered* (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1998), 164.



Help someone start their own Wisdom Journey:
www.wisdomonline.org





BECOMING THE RIGHT KIND OF PEOPLE

Exodus 35–40

Genuine service for and fellowship with the Lord is characterized by obedience, generosity, and the pursuit of excellence and a focus on His holy character and glory. Who would think such truths could be found in a description of a building project?

A business journal listed fifteen kinds of people you should have in your life if you want to be happy and successful. They include the strategist, the mentor, and the coach. I would add the guy who drives the ice-cream truck, but that's just me.

Well, the article does raise an important question: What kind of people do you want in your life? But here's a more important question to think about: What kind of people does God want *us* to be? Well, as we come to the final chapters in the book of Exodus, we're given some insights into the kind of people God wants us to become.

It seems, for now at least, the Israelites have learned

their lesson. After their sinful choice to build a golden calf and experiencing God's discipline and then forgiveness, the children of Israel are now ready to build the tabernacle.

In describing the building of the tabernacle, a lot of details are repeated from the earlier instructions, and we don't need to cover that again. But what I want to highlight here is how the Israelites are challenged to become the right kind of people. And the first characteristic of the right kind of people is *obedience to God's word*.

Notice that Moses doesn't go out here and immediately assign hammers and saws and nails to the builders. He begins by reminding the people that obeying God in one area of life doesn't mean they can disobey Him in another area of life. Here in the first two verses of Exodus 35, Moses challenges them:

"These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death."



Ramesses III being carried in a shrine on poles by his sons



Obedience cannot be compartmentalized. I read about a couple who returned some money to a fast-food restaurant that had made a mistake. They drove back after they realized they had been handed a bag of cash instead of food. When the manager wanted to take their picture and give it to the local newspaper, the man sort of turned red and said, “Well, this woman here isn’t my wife. And if you take our picture, my wife might see it.” And they drove away.

God is stressing here how important it is for His people to live in obedience to all of His declared will. The Sabbath was the sign of God’s covenant with Israel. It’s how God was going to measure Israel’s heart attitude toward Him. Working on the Sabbath would reveal contempt for God’s will, and just because they were building the tabernacle in obedience to God didn’t mean they could disregard another of God’s commands.

Now, Christians today are not bound by the Sabbath law. That was a unique sign between Israel and God. But the timeless truth for us here is that **obedience to the Lord’s will is still a great way to measure our true love for Christ.**

Second, God desires His people to not only be obedient to His word but also *generous in their giving*. Beginning here in verse 5, Moses calls for contributions for this building project:

“Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD’s contribution.”

This contribution includes all the materials necessary to build the tabernacle, where God Himself will live with Israel.

Over in verse 5 of chapter 36, Moses announces that they have exceeded their financial goal—they needed to stop passing the plates. He says, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.”

Don’t ever think God *needs* your money or mine to do His work, but He does give us the joy of being a

part of advancing His gospel through our generous giving. We don’t have to give—we *get* to give. We are allowed to invest in the Lord’s work—and what a privilege that is.

Third, God desires His people to *pursue excellence in their work*. The overriding emphasis in these construction details in chapters 36 and following is that the tabernacle was to be built *precisely* as God instructed.

The workers didn’t just throw together a few bricks and some paint on the project. They weren’t hoping that their work would be adequate; they wanted it to be *excellent*. So, they followed God’s exact specifications.

We see the same pattern in chapter 39, as we read again about the priestly garments that were made “as the LORD commanded Moses.” Every detail mattered.

Now, we might not get everything perfectly buttoned down—only God is perfect. But our goal is to represent Him well. We’re not trying to do the least; we’re trying to do our best, for the reputation and glory of our Father, to whom we belong as His redeemed children.

*Obedience to the
Lord’s will is still a
great way to
measure our true
love for Christ.*

Fourth, God wants us to become people who *revere His holy presence*. When the work on the tabernacle is finally completed, God instructs Moses here in chapter 40 to set it all up. Then the Lord tells him in verse 9:

*“You shall take the anointing oil
and anoint the tabernacle and
all that is in it, and consecrate*



it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy.”

Aaron and his sons are anointed as well—essentially consecrated to serve the Lord as priests. Everything about this tabernacle—everything about the presence of God who is about to dwell among them—is treated with the utmost respect as holy.

Now, comes the big moment. We read in verses 34-35:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle, and Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Can you imagine this awesome sight of nothing less than God’s presence?

Well, it gets even better. We’re told here that God would—and did—graciously lead His people on their journey. Look at verses 36-38:

Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out . . . For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

So, God essentially comes down to dwell with Israel. He will lead them in this awesome pillar of cloud by day, and at night it will become a pillar of fire.

The nation of Israel is now walking with God. They are becoming the *right* kind of people—people who will experience genuine fellowship with God and worship Him alone in truth.

How about us today? Are we the kind of people who magnify the reputation of God? How can we tell?

- Are we obedient to God’s Word?
- Are we generous in giving to His work?
- Are we pursuing excellence in what we accomplish?
- Do we reverence the character and glory of God?

Let’s become the kind of people who can answer yes to those questions.

And with that, our wisdom journey through this wonderful book of Exodus comes to an end.

Why is it so important for the world to see the qualities of obedience, generosity and excellence in God’s people today? Which of these qualities do you find easiest, and which the hardest to live out? Why?

How is an appreciation for God’s holiness evidenced in your life? What can you do to make His holiness a greater focus for you, your family, at work, among your friends and with your church?

¹ Maxie McCoy and Levo League, “The Fifteen Types of People You Should Have in Your Life,” *Business Insider*, June 27, 2017, businessinsider.com.

