

# Exodus Commentary

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#### Exodus 1:1-7

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 And all the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was *already* in Egypt. 6 And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. 7 But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

The book of Genesis ends with Jacob and his family coming to Egypt and being reunited with Joseph. The last words of Genesis tell us of the death of Joseph, and that before he died he told Israel that God would take care of them and would bring them up out of Egypt and take them back to the land He had promised them. God had made this promise to Abram in Genesis 15:13-14, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions." Joseph then made the sons of Israel swear that they would bring his bones up from Egypt when they left. The book of Exodus tells us of the fulfillment of Joseph's prophecy.

The first thing in Exodus is to set the scene and to show that the time was ripe for God's people to be redeemed. Moses lists for us the eleven brothers of Joseph who came down with their father to Egypt. In all, 70 people who composed Jacob's family came down to Egypt. Joseph and his brothers all died. All those of their generation died. But the sons of Israel (the sons of Jacob) were fruitful, increased and multiplied greatly. God had promised Abraham that He would greatly multiply his descendants (Genesis 17:2), and so God kept His promise. God's blessing was seen in their growth as a people. In Egypt Israel became a mighty nation. In fact, the text says that they "became exceedingly mighty." Egypt was filled with Israelites. In those days, strength came from numbers, and the Israelites multiplied so rapidly that they outnumbered the Egyptians.

#### Exodus 1:8-14

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. 10 "Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and in the event of war, they also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us, and depart from the land." 11 So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. 13 And the Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; 14 and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all *kinds* of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.

It is about 400 years since the Israelites came to Egypt, and when they first arrived they were highly favored by Pharaoh because of Joseph. They were given the best of the land. Pharaoh had said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in

charge of my livestock.” (Genesis 47:5-6) The new king, however, did not know about Joseph. He had not studied his history and did not appreciate the contributions of Joseph or the blessings that had come to Egypt because of the Israelites. He saw that they had grown to outnumber the Egyptians and was afraid of their strength. Oppression often comes from fear. One national or ethnic group will oppress another because they fear them and do not understand them.

Since Pharaoh felt that the Israelites had become more numerous and more powerful than the Egyptians, he decided that they needed to “deal wisely” with them. He expressed fear that they would continue to multiply, and that in a time of war would join with their enemies to fight against Egypt and then would leave to go back to Canaan. Evidently this Pharaoh knew something about the history of Israel. Perhaps he knew that they were counting on God's promise to bring them back to the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Clearly he valued the Israelites as servants and did not want them to leave. He saw them as a labor force that benefited the nation of Egypt. It appears that Pharaoh's goals were to reduce the multiplication of Israel and to weaken them so that they could not fight and flee the land.

The first thing Pharaoh did was to appoint “taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor.” His plan was to oppress them rather than to favor them. Through enforced hard labor, he hoped to weaken them and suppress their growth. His plan seems to be counterproductive. Oppression produces resentment and a desire to overthrow the oppressors and escape from their oppression. If Pharaoh wanted Israel to continue to be loyal subjects he should have treated them with favor rather than oppression. When he afflicted them they started to turn to the Lord and cry out to Him (Ex. 2:23-24). The fruit of the hard labor of Israel was that two storage cities were built, Pithom and Raamses.

Pharaoh's plan backfired. Instead of slowing the growth of the Israelites, his oppression caused them to grow more. The more he afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread out (verse 12). Instead of solving the problem, the problem got worse. The dread the Egyptians felt toward Israel grew. Persecution has a way of making God's people stronger. The more we are persecuted and afflicted, the more God blesses so that we grow. This is why the godly face trouble, because it makes us stronger. The church tends to thrive and spread where it is oppressed. This has happened in China in recent decades. Persecution also purifies God's people and solidifies them as a community and as a distinct people.

Instead of trying a different approach, the Egyptians poured on more affliction and more hard labor. They thought that the solution was to redouble their efforts to oppress Israel.

They forced the Israelites to work very hard and “made their lives bitter.” They had to make mortar and bricks and had to labor in the fields. The rigorous labor imposed on them made them resentful and bitter. They were no longer free people, but slaves. They no longer enjoyed their lives, but just endured them. They no longer decided what they were going to do, but it was prescribed for them every day by those over them. Forcing someone to work hard and being unreasonable in your demands will never endear you to them.

#### Exodus 1:15-22

Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other was named Puah; *16* and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see *them* upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." *17* But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. *18* So the king of Egypt called

for the midwives, and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" 19 And the midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them." 20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. 21 And it came about because the midwives feared God, that He established households for them. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive."

The next measure Pharaoh tried was infanticide. He required the midwives to kill any boys who were born to the Israelite women as soon as they were born. The two midwives were Shiprah and Puah, who were Israelites themselves. The midwives, however, feared God and therefore disobeyed Pharaoh. They allowed the boys to live. They would not disobey God in order to obey Pharaoh. The fear of God and His judgment will help us resist unjust and sinful requirements that men may try to impose on us. When the Jewish Sanhedrin ordered Peter and John to stop speaking and teaching about Jesus, Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). In Acts 5 Peter and the apostles had another run-in with the Sanhedrin and were reminded that they had been ordered not to continue teaching about Jesus. Peter replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28-29). When those in authority tell us to do something that God has commanded not be done, or tell us to stop doing something that God has commanded, we must obey God rather than men. If we fear God we will follow the example of the Hebrew midwives and the apostles.

Pharaoh heard that the midwives were letting the boys live, so he called Shiprah and Puah to himself and asked them why. They explained that it was due to the vigor of the Hebrew women. They said that the Hebrew women gave birth to their children before the midwife could get there. This is one of a number of examples in scripture of people telling lies for the sake of saving lives. The midwives did not say, "Well, Pharaoh, we fear God and have decided to disobey you. We are not going to follow your order to kill the boys." To tell the truth would have been courageous and they probably would have forfeited their own lives if they had told the truth, but it also would have opened the door for Pharaoh to take other more drastic measures to do away with the Hebrew boys. Because the midwives feared God, He was good to them and blessed them and established households for them. He did not punish them for lying and deceiving Pharaoh.

Next, Pharaoh simply issued a command to the Israelites that they were to throw any boy born to them into the Nile, but the girls would be allowed to live. He required the people themselves to eliminate their male children. No doubt this law would be enforced. There was probably more to this decree than what we read of in verse 22. Probably there were dire consequences for failing to obey this command.

#### Exodus 2:1-10

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. 2 And the woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it, and set *it* among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. 4 And his sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. 5 Then

the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it *to her*. 6 When she opened *it*, she saw the child, and behold, *the* boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?" 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go *ahead*." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me and I shall give *you* your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, "Because I drew him out of the water."

Chapter 1 has set the scene for the need for deliverance and the birth of Moses. Moses' parents were from the tribe of Levi. According to Exodus 6:20 Moses' father was Amram, and his mother was Jochebed. We are told there that Jochebed was the sister of Amram's father – Amram's aunt. Moses had an older brother, Aaron, and sister, Miriam.

When Jochebed saw that Moses was a beautiful child, she could not throw him into the Nile. They hid him from the Egyptians for three months. The author of Hebrews comments, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict" (Hebrews 11:23). Hiding Moses was an act of faith, believing that God would save him and save them from the consequences of disobeying the king. They hid him because they saw he was beautiful and because they weren't afraid of the edict of the king.

After three months Jochebed could not hide her son any longer. Perhaps he was making too much noise and people were getting suspicious. Perhaps she had work to do and could not stay at home to make sure he was quiet and hidden. We don't know why it became impossible to hide him.

Pharaoh's requirement was that the baby boys be cast into the Nile. Jochebed got a wicker basket and made it into a boat, covering it with tar and pitch, put Moses into it and put him in the water among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. The reeds held him in place so he wouldn't drift down the Nile. Technically, I suppose you could say that Jochebed obeyed Pharaoh's orders. She had put her son into the Nile. Miriam, Moses' older sister, watched from a distance to see what would happen to him. We don't know if she was prompted to do this or if she did it on her own. It's possible that this was a plan that Jochebed had, knowing the habits of Pharaoh's daughter, or it may have completely been the providence of God. Likely it was a combination of both.

With Miriam watching, Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the Nile and saw the basket among the reeds. She sent her maid to fetch it and found the boy crying inside. Instantly she knew that he was one of the Hebrew children and she had pity on him. She could also see that he was a beautiful child and could see by the measures that had been taken that his parents were trying to preserve his life. Miriam came up and offered to go find a nurse from among the Hebrew women to nurse Moses for the princess, and Pharaoh's daughter gave her permission to do so. Of course, Miriam went and retrieved her mother. So Jochebed was employed by Pharaoh's daughter to nurse her own son, and she was paid for it. Moses was restored to his family for a time. It was the custom of the Hebrews at this time

to nurse their children until they were about 3 years old. <sup>1</sup> Moses was probably not brought to Pharaoh's daughter until he was about 3, weaned and probably potty trained as well. During this time he was able to learn who he was and who his family was. He gained his identity as a Hebrew and retained that identity.

Pharaoh's daughter gave Moses his name, and he became her adopted son. His name means "to draw out." She explained that she named him this because she "drew him out of the water." We often read in the Old Testament of people explaining the names of their children. One example is when Rachel was giving birth to Benjamin. She named him Ben-oni, "son of my sorrow" because she was dying as he was born. Jacob changed his name to Benjamin, "son of my right hand." Names were often associated with the circumstances of the child's birth. Since Pharaoh's daughter had drawn him out of the Nile, she named him Moses.

#### Exodus 2:11-15

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. <sup>12</sup> So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one *around*, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. <sup>13</sup> And he went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" <sup>14</sup> But he said, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and said, "Surely the matter has become known." <sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

The author of Hebrews tells us that when he had grown up, Moses refused by faith to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to endure ill-treatment with God's people instead of enjoying the passing pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:24-25). Moses refused to identify himself as an Egyptian or as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He knew he was a Hebrew and decided to identify himself as such. He had learned enough in his infancy to know that he was not an Egyptian. There comes a time in our lives when we must choose whether we are going to identify with God's people or with the people of the world. The pleasures of sin are powerful enticements, but the real lasting rewards come from being one of God's people.

As we think about this paragraph it is helpful to bring in the words of Stephen from Acts 7:20-29:

"And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. <sup>21</sup> "And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son. <sup>22</sup> "And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. <sup>23</sup> "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. <sup>24</sup> "And when he saw one *of them* being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup> "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand. <sup>26</sup> "And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' <sup>27</sup> "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? <sup>28</sup> 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO

<sup>1</sup> Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'WEAN'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". <<http://www.studydrive.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?number=T9150>>. 1915.

KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' 29 "And at this remark MOSES FLED, AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons.

Moses was raised and educated as an Egyptian, and became powerful in word and deed. He was not some young man when he went out to see his Hebrew brethren. Stephen tells us he was almost 40 years old, which probably means in his late 30s. Moses went out as a prince of Egypt to see his Hebrew brethren and observed their "hard labors." He saw that they were being oppressed by the Egyptians. Specifically he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew worker. The Hebrew man was being "treated unjustly" according to Stephen, and Moses defended the man and took vengeance on the Egyptian. Clearly Moses saw the risk of what he was doing. He "looked this way and that" before he struck down the Egyptian. When he saw that no one else was around, he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. I presume that the man who was being beaten was there, and perhaps other Hebrew laborers were there also. What is probably meant is that there were no other Egyptians around to observe what Moses had done. What Moses assumed was that the Hebrews would understand that he was intending to deliver them, but they did not understand. Moses felt that God had put him in the place of being a prince in Egypt in order to bring deliverance to the Hebrews. He saw the providence behind what had happened to him.

We need to learn to see God at work behind the scenes. We need to learn to see that happenstance isn't always random, that coincidences are sometimes God's means of setting something up that will serve His purpose. Moses saw that God put him in a position to help his people, but he jumped the gun. He tried to do God's work in the power of his flesh using his own strength and impulsiveness, and it got him into trouble, as it will usually get us into trouble.

The day after he killed the Egyptian, Moses again went out and came upon two Hebrews who were fighting. He confronted the offender and asked him why he was assaulting his companion. Moses could see that one man was the aggressor and one was the victim, and he intended to intervene. The man did not answer Moses' question, but instead replied with a question of his own, "Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?" He implied that he was not answerable to Moses, that Moses had no jurisdiction in this conflict and no right or authority to intervene. To this man, Moses was a meddler who had overstepped his boundaries and not a deliverer. Often others do not perceive us as we perceive ourselves, they do not see the nobility of our intentions. Moses thought his people would be grateful for his efforts, but they saw him as an unauthorized self-appointed authority. Rather than respecting and appreciating him, they despised him. They probably knew he was a Hebrew, but saw him as a sell-out.

Moses was exposed. His act of murder had become known. The man he confronted knew he had killed the Egyptian, and others knew as well. In time Pharaoh also heard about what Moses had done. Our secret crimes have a way of surfacing. I think it's especially hard to kill someone and then cover it up. God said to Cain that the blood of his brother was calling to Him from the ground (Genesis 4:10). His act was impulsive. Though his intention was to defend the man being beaten, he acted rashly and as a result had to flee for his life from Pharaoh.

A difficulty here is how to interpret this passage in light of Hebrews 11:27. It is apparent from Exodus 2:14 and 15 that Moses fled from Egypt because Pharaoh was seeking to kill him. Moses became afraid when he saw that what he had done had become known and he fled for his life to Midian. But in Hebrews 11:27 it says, "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the

wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.” Exodus has him fearing the king's wrath, but Hebrews asserts that he did not fear the king's wrath. The explanation in Hebrews 11:27 is important, that he “endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.” I think it implies that Moses was following God's leading when he fled from Egypt. He could not fulfill his role as the deliverer of Israel if he were killed by Pharaoh. Already at this stage he believed that God had called him to deliver Israel, but in order to continue he had to flee Egypt. Sometimes God wants us to flee. Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium because of hostile crowds and continued their ministry in other cities nearby (Acts 14:1-7). In fact, Jesus instructed His disciples to flee when they faced persecution in Matthew 10:23, "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish *going through* the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes." There is wisdom in fleeing murderous mobs because then we can continue our ministry elsewhere. We should not seek martyrdom if we can avoid it by fleeing.

#### Exodus 2:16-22

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17 Then the shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock. 18 When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "Why have you come *back* so soon today?" 19 So they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds; and what is more, he even drew the water for us and watered the flock." 20 And he said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." 21 And Moses was willing to dwell with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. 22 Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

Briefly the focus shifts from Egypt to Midian. Midian is in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia. Moses fled there and sat down by a well. It sounds like Reuel, the priest of Midian had no sons, just the seven daughters. His daughters were in charge of their flocks. The trouble was that they were bullied by the male shepherds of the area who drove them away when they came to draw water. It appears that there was a good deal of competition for the water among those who kept their flocks in this area. When the daughters of Reuel came and filled the troughs to allow their sheep to drink, then the shepherds came and drove them off. These shepherds were taking advantage of the women, letting them do the work of filling the troughs and then driving them away and using the water for their own flocks. The men probably thought it was very funny and a great joke. The women probably had to wait until the bullies moved off to go back and water their flocks.

This time when the women came with their flocks, Moses was there at the well. When the other shepherds came to drive off the women, he stood up for them and helped them. I don't know if this encounter was a violent one or not, but at least Moses intimidated the shepherds and made them back off. Probably Moses was armed and perhaps even looked like an Egyptian soldier. He was not a man to mess with. Reuel was surprised that his daughters had come home so soon from watering the flocks and asked how this had happened. He was used to them having trouble at the well and being delayed in this task by the hostile shepherds. The women explained that an Egyptian had delivered them from the hand of the shepherds. Moses not only had delivered them, but had also drawn the water and watered the flock. He had saved them and served them. In this, Moses is a picture of Christ, who



saves and serves us.

It's worth noting that the women perceived Moses as an Egyptian. They did not say, "A Hebrew delivered us." Moses had been Egyptianized. He looked and acted and probably even spoke like an Egyptian. God had prepared him to deal with the Egyptians.

Reuel was surprised that they hadn't invited Moses to come home with them. He asked, "Where is he then? Why is it that you have left the man behind? Invite him to have something to eat." His daughters had broken protocol. They should have shown hospitality to Moses. Obviously they went back and retrieved Moses and Moses consented to live with Reuel and became his Son-in-Law. Reuel gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as a wife.

Moses' firstborn son he named Gershom, meaning a refugee or stranger. His explanation for this name was, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." Moses felt out of place in Midian. He was an Egyptianized Hebrew in Midian working for a priest of Midian. He did not belong to this land or to this people.

#### Exodus 2:23-25

Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. 24 So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 25 And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them*.

Many days passed as Moses lived with Reuel and his family, tending sheep in Midian. After many days the Pharaoh who had threatened the life of Moses died, but still the oppression of Israel continued. The king who followed continued the policies of the previous king. Perhaps he even made their burdens greater. When the sons of Israel saw that the new king was continuing to oppress them they cried out for help. Whatever hope they had of relief and a new policy under a new king was set aside. Four emotional words are used here, "sighed," "cried," "cry," and "groaning." Israel sighed, they groaned and mourned inwardly because of the bondage they experienced. They cried out. They cried or shrieked audibly. The internal groaning and mourning produced an external cry. Their cry came up to God and he heard them. What God heard was their groaning. These are the things we do when we are suffering, we groan and mourn inwardly, and we cry outwardly. It is proper that emotional distress have an outlet. It is not necessarily virtuous or praiseworthy to be silent when you are suffering greatly. An honest expression of how you're feeling is sometimes appropriate and important. We must particularly tell the Lord how we are feeling. He is a God who listens.

Verses 24 and 25 make it clear that God listened to the groaning of His people. It says, "God heard...God remembered...God saw...and God took notice." God paid attention to the crying and groaning of Israel. God is not deaf to our cries and He is not blind to our suffering. We must not think when we are suffering that God has abandoned us or that He is ignoring us. He is paying attention; He is listening; He does care. In His time He will take action.

When it says that "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" it doesn't mean that God had forgotten. It means that God called the covenant to mind, that He was mindful of the covenant. God had promised Abraham that He would bless him and make him a great nation, make his name great, and bless the entire world through his descendants (Genesis 12:2-3). Part of making Israel a great nation was the time they spent in Egypt. God said to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14, "Know for certain that your descendants will be

strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions." Having Israel spend 400 years in Egypt was part of His plan. He knew when He told Abraham about it that they would be "enslaved and oppressed." The suffering of Israel was part of the process, and God was not unaware of it.

#### Exodus 3:1-12

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 And the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 "So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 "And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

As he was doing his job, Moses led his sheep to the place where he would later lead his human flock, to Horeb, the mountain of God. This is apparently also known as Mount Sinai. This would later be the place where God would meet with Moses and give him the ten commandments, but at this time it was just another mountain. It became the "mountain of God" because of what happened there.

The Lord got Moses' attention by causing a bush to burn without being consumed. The bush was not the fuel for the fire, but something else was, the presence of the angel of the Lord. The bush was an ordinary bush, not some sort of miracle bush specially created by God. The difference about this bush compared to similar bushes was that God was in it. God inhabited the bush and made it holy. God uses ordinary things, and His presence makes them extraordinary. Moses said, "I've got to check this out!" He was curious to investigate the bush and observe why it was not consumed. Naturally when you come across a bush that is burning you expect it to burn to a peak, then gradually decline as all the fuel is consumed, then eventually die down completely as nothing is left of the bush except ashes. This was not happening with this bush. The bush kept burning and burning without being consumed in the

least. Moses turned aside from the path he was following to examine the bush more closely. The Lord waited for Moses to turn aside and give his attention to the bush to call out to him from the midst of the bush. The voice of the Lord came from the center of the bush, and God called his name twice. God knew Moses by name. He did not say, "Halt! Who goes there?" He did not say, "Who are you?" The Lord knew Moses and had taken the initiative to speak to Moses. God knows us and calls us by name. He is familiar with us. The Lord warned Moses not to come any closer and to remove his sandals because the place was holy. The thing that makes a place holy is the presence of the Lord, because He is the Holy One. There is no intrinsic holiness in any particular place. A place becomes holy when God is there. A place is not hallowed by the presence of people, but just the opposite. Since we are sinful we defile the places we occupy. A place is not holy because the dead are buried there or because a battle or conflict or something heroic or noteworthy happened there. Only the presence of God makes a place or a bush or a person holy. God warned Moses to respect the holiness of His presence. When we approach God we must respect His holiness; we must realize that He is pure and perfect and we are not. When we are in His presence His goodness will expose our evil, His light will expose our darkness.

In verse 6 God introduces Himself to Moses. He says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God was the God of Moses' father Abraham, his father Isaac and his father Jacob. In Old Testament parlance my father is my father, my grandfather is also my "father" and my great-grandfather is my "father" as well. Each of us can be said to have many "fathers" stretching back to Adam himself. God is now the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus used this saying to prove to the Sadducees that there is a resurrection of the dead, that there is life beyond the grave. In Matthew 22:31-32 He says, "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." His interpretation of this saying tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive in the presence of God. They are not dead and gone. They have not been annihilated, but still live.

When men encounter the presence of God we almost always see fear. Moses was afraid to look at God, and hid his face. When Isaiah encountered the Lord he said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). When Peter realized who Jesus really was he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). In the presence of the holy God we will see that we are in great peril as sinners. As it says in Hebrews 10:31, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

In verses 8-11 God gives Moses the scoop about what He is going to do and why. First God gives the background. He speaks in the past tense and says that He has seen the affliction of His people. He says He has given heed to their cry. He says He is aware of their sufferings. He adds in verse 9 that the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Him, that He has seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Clearly Moses had lost touch with his people in Egypt, but God was still thinking of them. Moses probably thought that he had done his bit to try to deliver Israel and had failed, and now was getting on with his life in Midian. Moses had no plans to make any more attempts to help Israel. God sets things up by letting Moses know that His people were still suffering in Egypt and that He was mindful of them. Though Moses had given up, God had not. The time had come for Him to do something about their suffering.

Because he had seen the suffering of Israel and had paid attention to their cries, God says that He has come down to deliver them. He had come down personally to do two things; first,

to snatch His people out of the hand of the Egyptians, and second, to bring them up to their own land, the land of the Canaanite, Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Hivite and Jebusite. God will bring them out of Egypt and then bring them up to the land He had promised them. God does not just save us out of something, but He also brings us up to the place that He intends for us. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." God has done for us spiritually what He did for Israel physically. He has delivered us from one domain, the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of light, the kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ. He saves from something to something. He brings us out of evil into good, out of oppression into freedom, out of darkness into light.

The Lord has just said that He has come down to deliver his people, and then He says to Moses, "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." God says, "I came down to do this, now you go do it." God is going to use Moses to do what He intends to do. It will still be God's work, but Moses is going to be the human instrument that God uses. Moses will have the privilege and the dignity of being the man that God has chosen to deliver His people. Men are God's means. When God wants to do something in this world, he uses a man or a woman. Very seldom does God just do something without involving a human agent. Moses didn't realize it, but God had positioned him and equipped him for this very thing. He had been raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and trained as a royal Egyptian. He had identified with the Israelites and knew his true heritage and had demonstrated that he had compassion for his people and a desire to try to help them. He had learned humility by having to flee and become a shepherd in Midian. He had learned to deal with flocks of sheep and keep them safe and in line. Now he was ready for God to send him back to Egypt.

Moses did not at all feel that he was equipped or qualified. He said, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" He understood the mission and he understood the magnitude of the mission. But he had no confidence in his own ability. He had tried and failed to deliver Israel. His attempt had been weak and inadequate. The truth was that he was inadequate; we all are inadequate for the tasks to which God calls us. That is why we must trust Him and walk with Him in order to do His will. God does not want us to trust in our own ability and power but in His. Moses had finally gotten to a place where he knew that he was inadequate. Before God can use us in great ways He must humble our pride. We must come to a place where we know that we cannot do it, but at the same time we know that God can do it through us if we yield to Him.

The solution to the inadequacy of Moses is that God will be with him. This whole thing was God's idea in the first place. God had said that He had come down to deliver His people, and He would accompany Moses and empower Moses and work in and through Moses to accomplish His purpose. God's presence is the solution to our weakness and inability. When we yield to Him and commit ourselves to His purpose and obediently move forward trusting in His leading and power, we will then see Him work in ways we never imagined. God gave Moses a promise that he would know that it was the Lord who sent him when he brought the people out of Egypt they would worship Him at this very place, at this mountain. God was saying, "I will send you from here and bring you back to this spot with the sons of Israel." That would be a great "sign" to Moses. He would indeed succeed in bringing Israel out of Egypt and would bring them to the holy mountain, to the presence of God.

God's purpose was to bring Israel out of Egypt and make them a distinct nation who would worship Him. They would be separated from the Egyptians and their pagan religion, and be

brought out to worship the one true and holy God. They were to become a holy nation, set apart to worship the living God.

Exodus 3:13-22

13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. 16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 "So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" 18 "And they will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt, and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' 19 "But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. 20 "So I will stretch out My hand, and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. 21 "And I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. 22 "But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians."

When we are called to do something extraordinary that stretches us beyond what we think we can do, we often do just what Moses does, we ask some “what if” questions. Moses asks two “what if” questions and offers one excuse as to why he can't do what God is calling him to do. His first “what if” is here in verse 13. He asks, “What if the Israelites ask me about your name?” Basically the question he was anticipating was, “What God is this? Who is He?” The Israelites had been living in a polytheistic nation, and were used to hearing about many gods, Isis, Ra, Aten, etc. Moses anticipated that when he came to them they would ask which God had sent him. Who was this “God of our fathers”? Moses needed to have an answer. He thought they would be skeptical of his claim and would challenge him.

God was direct in His answer to Moses. He said, “I Am Who I Am.” His name is Yahweh, “I Am.” God had revealed this name to Abraham in Genesis 15:7, “And He said to him, 'I am the LORD [YHWH] who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.'" The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary notes that God had, “designated Himself by this name as the absolute God of the fathers, acting with unfettered liberty and self-dependence. This name precluded any comparison between the God of the Israelites and the deities of the Egyptians and other nations, and furnished Moses and his people with strong consolation in their affliction, and a powerful support to their confidence in the realization of His purposes of salvation as made known to the fathers.” Yahweh is the self-existent God, the Living One, the God who always is. He is not temporary or regional or limited, but simply is who He is.

Yahweh is His eternal name, His memorial-name for all generations. His name does not change from place to place or from people to people.

Moses was to tell the Israelites that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, had sent him to them. Their God was not an Egyptian god, but the real God, the God of their Hebrew fathers. Moses was acting in His name as His representative. Moses was, as Jesus was, a man sent by the Father. This is what gave Moses his authority. He was a man sent by God. His mission was not his own, but was God's. He was authorized by Yahweh, the true God, to lead them out of Egypt.

The first thing that Moses was to do when he arrived in Egypt was to gather the elders of Israel together and tell them what was going on. He needed to enlist the leaders of the nation in this effort first. As a distinct nation within Egypt Israel had its own leadership structure. Moses was to go to them and explain that God had sent him, that God was concerned about them and was going to bring them up out of Egypt to the land He had promised them. Moses was to tell them that God had observed their suffering and had determined to do something about it. He had heard their cries and listened to their pleas, and the coming of Moses was proof of it. Moses was to lead the people by leading the leaders. When we want to lead a large group of people in an endeavor, we need to get other leaders on board with us. We need to communicate the vision and purpose we have in such a way that they will get on board with us. Deliverance from their suffering in Egypt and guidance to the land of promise was certainly something all the Israelites wanted, and Moses provided leadership and hope that this promise was about to be fulfilled.

The Lord assured Moses that the elders would listen to him. They would hear him. Perhaps they would remember him as the one who had killed one of the Egyptian oppressors. His family still lived among them, including his brother Aaron and sister Miriam. It is possible that they would recall that he had been their advocate. The plan was that Moses was to go to Pharaoh along with the elders of Israel and request that they be allowed to travel three days journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Yahweh. They were to invoke His name before Pharaoh, and tell him that Yahweh had met with them and required this of them. This meeting was to be respectful, and they were to request this from Pharaoh. Initially they would not issue demands or threats or ultimatums. They were to be respectful, yet firm. But God tells Moses that Pharaoh will not let them go, except under compulsion.

One question we encounter here is this issue of the "three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice." God had said that He was going to lead Israel out of Egypt into the land of promise, not out into the wilderness to offer sacrifices. Yet God told Moses to say this to Pharaoh. Was this a ruse? Did God direct Moses to deceive Pharaoh about their intentions? Numbers 23:19 tells us, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" It is against God's nature to lie. He is always truthful. Pastor Robert Roe, teaching at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, had this explanation:

He begins with a typical Semitic bargaining offer, a typical eastern custom. In any bargaining situation always give your opponent the easiest possible way to agree with you and still save face. This is not some wild deceit. It was just part of mid-eastern bargaining in that day. It still is today, as a matter of fact. So God says, "Just ask for three days to go out and worship your God." Now, Moses is not lying. Both Pharaoh and Moses know the Hebrews are going to leave forever, but this is the way they

bargained in the mid-east. Face meant everything. So Moses gives Pharaoh the easiest way to agree with him without losing face, and only asks for three days. Pharaoh knows what he means. Pharaoh is an ancient easterner too. You can see him giving in a little more and a little more each time Moses asks, but he knows Moses wants to leave permanently.<sup>2</sup>

If pastor Roe is correct, then God and Moses were giving Pharaoh a way to save face with his people when the Israelites left. He could say, "I only agreed to allow them to go a three days journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to their God." This seems a plausible explanation.

God tells Moses that He will have to compel Pharaoh to release the nation of Israel. It will take a "mighty hand" (KJV) to force Pharaoh to allow Israel to leave. The Lord, of course, has a mighty hand. God says that He will strike Egypt with all of His miracles and then Pharaoh will let them go. His might and power would be seen by the Egyptians in the miracles He would perform. In the plagues He would send upon Egypt they would see and experience His mighty hand at work. Sometimes God forces the issue. He will get His way in this world, even if He has to get rough to do it. He made Pharaoh release Israel and He made Jonah go preach in Ninevah. Sometimes God will compel men to do what they do not want to do. I don't think He does it very often, but when His purpose calls for it, He will force the issue.

Even though God would strike the Egyptians with His mighty hand, still He would also grant Israel favor in the sight of the Egyptian people. The Egyptians would not be angry or despise Israel, but would respect them and favor them. As a result, all the Israelites would have to do was to ask their Egyptian neighbors, and they would willingly surrender their wealth. The Egyptians would give them their silver, gold and clothing. Just by asking they would plunder the Egyptians because the Lord had given them favor in the sight of the Egyptians. This would fulfill the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15:14, "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions." The Lord is able, in the midst of forcing the hand of a nation, to make its citizens favorable to His people. God can give us favor with people where we might assume we will have none.

#### Exodus 4:1-9

Then Moses answered and said, "What if they will not believe me, or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'" 2 And the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff." 3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail"-- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand-- 5 "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." 6 And the LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again; and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of his* flesh. 8 "And it shall come about that if they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. 9 "But it shall be that if they will not believe

<sup>2</sup> From notes at [http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/14739/14739\\_moses04.pdf](http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/14739/14739_moses04.pdf)

even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

Here is the second "what if" scenario that Moses is concerned about. What if the Israelites will not believe him or listen to him? What if they are skeptical of his claims? What if they say, "The Lord has not appeared to you." It had been around 400 years since anyone in Israel had heard from the Lord, so naturally there would be skepticism. Any time we hear someone speak who claims to have heard directly from God, we tend to be skeptical. We often think such people may be mentally unstable, and indeed they often are. This is something we all know, and frankly it keeps us from speaking up for the Lord. Our fear of the skepticism of others can keep us from sharing God's truth with them. This fear of the rejection of others is a powerful tool in Satan's toolbox. When we think of sharing the gospel of Christ with people, Satan whispers into our ears, "They will not believe you. They will not listen to what you say." He tries to convince us that it is a waste of time to try to share God's truth with a skeptical world. But there are always some who will listen and will believe. Jesus said the fields are white for harvest (John 4:35). Many are ready to listen and be "harvested" for the Lord, because He has made them ready.

God gave Moses three miraculous signs that he could use to convince the Israelites that God had sent him. The first sign was that Moses could throw his staff on the ground and it would become a snake. When he grabbed it by the tail it would become his staff again. God asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" Moses said that it was a staff, just a stick. It was his shepherd's staff, a vital tool in caring for his sheep. He did not say it was a snake, yet when he threw it on the ground it became a snake. God instantly changed a staff into a snake. God can do this if He pleases, and it's no trouble to Him. Jesus could change water into wine (John 2:1-10). Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread because he knew Jesus had this power, the power to take one thing and change into something entirely different. This sign was given to Moses so that they might believe that the Lord had really appeared to Moses.

The second sign given to Moses was that when he put his hand into his bosom it became white with leprosy. When he put it in the second time it would be restored and healed. God explained that if Israel failed to believe the first sign, they might believe this second sign. There is probably some symbolic meaning to this sign, obviously having something to do with affliction, uncleanness and healing and cleansing. In Numbers 11:12 Moses complained to the Lord and said, "Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that Thou shouldest say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which Thou didst swear to their fathers'?" The bosom was the place of closeness and affection, the place for carrying and feeding infants. It could be that the demonstration with Moses' hand was a demonstration that God would use him to pick them up and heal and cleanse them. This may be reading too much into the text, though. The leprous hand made clean was at least another demonstration of and witness to the fact that God had sent Moses.

There was a chance that the Israelites might still be skeptical after the first two signs, so the Lord gave Moses a third sign. He would take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground and the water would become blood. The Nile was revered by the Egyptians as a source of life and all good things. Hapi was the god of the Nile. The third sign God gave Moses would demonstrate to the Israelites that their God was more powerful than the gods of



Egypt, that God had the power to turn the Nile into blood. Moses was to employ what is in modern missions called a “power encounter.” These pagan people would see in the signs the operative power of the true God. These three signs should show the Israelites that God had sent Moses and prompt them to put their trust in God and in Moses.

Exodus 4:10-12

Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 And the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 "Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say."

Moses is finished with his “what ifs.” Now he offers the Lord an excuse. Moses feels an acute inadequacy. He cannot speak. He is not eloquent. He is not a “man of words.” He has a slow mouth and a slow tongue. He says he has never been eloquent, not in the past nor in the present. He has always felt this inadequacy. He may have had a speech impediment like stammering or stuttering. Now God was asking him to go to Egypt to speak to the Israelites and to speak to Pharaoh on God's behalf. This was something he didn't feel like he could do. Some people are deathly afraid of public speaking. Some would rather do almost anything other than speak in public, and it looks like Moses was one of these people. For forty years or so he had lived a fairly solitary life, looking after his Father-In-Law's flocks. He was not a public figure. God was calling on him to lead Israel, and leadership requires communication, especially spoken communication. Often the best speakers are the best leaders, or at least they are the people that others are most willing to follow. This is one reason why Ronald Reagan was an effective President, because he was good at communicating his values and direction. A good speaker will usually have a following, for good or for evil. Moses saw the importance of being a good speaker and realized that he was not qualified in this aspect.

It's important to note that God did not contradict Moses. He did not say, “Come on, Moses, you're a good speaker! You just need a little practice, that's all!” He did not say what most of us say to others when they express inadequacies and misgivings. The point is that Moses was inadequate. It is a fact that he was not a good speaker. It is a fact that he was not equal to the task that God had assigned him. Our inadequacy is a given, and it is a good thing. The inadequacy of Moses would force him to trust in the adequacy of the Lord. His inability would make him trust in the Lord's ability. God will almost always call us to do something we are not able, in ourselves, to do, so that we will have to trust in Him and in His provision and power. Moses was right. He was inadequate. But God was more than adequate. This is what God points out.

God said, “Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” God's solution was not to try to give Moses greater confidence in his own speaking ability, but to point him to the One who made his mouth and gave him the ability to speak. There is a fundamental truth in verse 11. God makes us the way we are. He gives us the abilities and the disabilities we have. If we are born with disabilities it is because God has, in His sovereignty, created us that way. God indeed here says that He makes some who are dumb, deaf, seeing and blind. Why would He deliberately give someone a disability? He has His reasons. In John 9:1-7 we read of Jesus' encounter with a man who had been born

blind:

And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "*It was neither that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* in order that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work. 5 "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). And so he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing.

The disciples assumed that the man's blindness was a penalty, a punishment, for his own sin or the sin of his parents. They could not conceive that there was any other explanation. But Jesus explained that it was not sin that caused his blindness, but that he was made blind so that "the works of God might be displayed in him." He was made blind so that Jesus could come along at that moment and heal him. Our disabilities can display God's work as much as our abilities. Paul said that God had given him a "thorn in the flesh" in order to keep him from exalting himself and so that God could display His power in Paul's weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). The Lord has given me diabetes probably for much the same reason. In our infirmities He can display His power and grace. In Moses' case the Lord would be with his mouth and teach him what to say. He would take a man who had no speaking ability and speak through him. Moses' speech would be another evidence that the Lord was with him and was working through him. Just as Jesus could take a blind man and make him see, the Lord could take Moses and make him speak.

Exodus 4:13-17

But he said, "Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever Thou wilt." 14 Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 "And you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. 16 "Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him. 17 "And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

Finally, Moses reveals his true feelings. He's finished with the "what ifs" and the excuses. He just doesn't want to do what God has called him to do. He says to the Lord, "Lord, just send somebody else." He is fearful, he lacks confidence, he knows that in himself he isn't equipped for the task God is calling him to. He just wants to be let off the hook. But God has made His choice. He has worked behind the scenes to groom Moses for this task. Moses is more prepared than he knows. God was giving Moses the chance to become one of the greatest men in history. Few stand with Moses when we think of great men, but Moses almost forfeited this privilege because of his

At this, the "anger of the Lord burned against Moses." The word for "anger" has to do with the nose or nostrils<sup>3</sup>. God's nostrils flared at Moses' reluctance to take up the task, and He was provoked. When God calls us to a task and we start making excuses and dragging our feet and telling God why we can't do what He has told us to do, it stirs up His anger. It's like

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3 Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

when I ask my kids to wash the dishes and they give me static about how they just did it yesterday, and they really have a lot of homework, and they don't like doing it, and how their sibling hasn't done it as much as they have, and so on. It's frustrating and maddening when people won't cooperate.

Despite His anger toward Moses God was still gracious with him. He already knew that Moses would be reluctant, and had already prompted Aaron to come out and meet Moses. God says, "Alright, your brother Aaron is a good speaker, I'll send him with you." It is still Moses' job, but Aaron will go with him to speak for him. Moses is not off the hook. God will not choose another man instead of Moses, but He will provide Moses with some help. It's interesting that God refers to Aaron as "Aaron the Levite." Moses was as much a Levite as was his brother. Both of their parents were from the tribe of Levi (Exodus 2:1). Later Aaron would become the high priest, the main Levite for the whole nation. Perhaps what God says here is a foreshadowing of Aaron's future position.

Aaron would serve as the mouthpiece for Moses. God would put the words into Moses' mouth, and Moses would pass them on to Aaron. God would speak to Moses, Moses would speak to Aaron, and Aaron would speak to the people. All that they had to say would come from God. He would teach them what to say and what to do. What they accomplished they accomplished by speaking. Speech is a powerful thing. God spoke and created everything. Jesus spoke and healed people and stilled the storm and raised the dead. Moses and Aaron spoke and lead an entire nation out of Egypt.

God not only equipped Moses with Aaron as a helper, God also took over Moses' staff. The staff of Moses became the staff of God and the tool with which he would perform the signs that God had given him. We will see Moses use this simple staff many times to perform the signs and miracles that God had in mind to do. There was nothing magical or powerful about the staff, but it was used by God as a tool to accomplish His purpose. It is a picture of how God can use ordinary and simple things to do what he wants to do.

#### Exodus 4:18-23

Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

19 Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My first-born. 23 "So I said to you, 'Let My son go, that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born.'"

Moses asked leave of his father-in-law to return to Egypt, but did not tell him the real object of his trip. He said that he wanted to go to see if his brethren were still alive. Undoubtedly Moses had told Jethro about the sufferings of his people in Egypt, and about how they were cruelly oppressed by the Egyptians. It would be natural that Moses would want to return at some point to see how they were doing. Moses told Jethro nothing about how God had appeared to him and was sending him to Egypt to lead Israel out. He told him nothing

about the signs God had given him and how God was going to force Pharaoh to let Israel go. For some reason Moses thought it was necessary to conceal these details from Jethro. Perhaps he knew that Jethro would try to talk him out of it if he told him the whole plan.

In verses 19-23 God again speaks to Moses and gives him more specifics about what he is to do and what will happen. God assured him that the men who had wanted to kill him were dead and gone. He would not face prosecution for murdering the Egyptian, so he didn't need to worry about that. Initially Moses set out with his wife and sons, but evidently at some point he sent them back to Jethro. We will see more about this later. He also took the staff of God. Note that the staff is now called God's staff. God told Moses to perform all the signs He had given him before Pharaoh, and tells him that He will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will refuse to let Israel go. In back of Moses God will be working to bring about the result He desires.

Moses was to speak for the Lord before Pharaoh as a prophet. He was to tell Pharaoh that Israel was God's son, His first-born. The nation was His offspring, He had chosen Israel and given them life as a nation. Deuteronomy 32:6 says, "Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you." Deuteronomy 32:18-20 says, "You neglected the Rock who begot you, And forgot the God who gave you birth. 19 And the LORD saw *this*, and spurned *them* Because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. 20 Then He said, 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end *shall be*; For they are a perverse generation, Sons in whom is no faithfulness.'" Likewise, Jeremiah 31:9 says, "With weeping they shall come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they shall not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My first-born." In this Israel is a type of Christ, the true First Born Son of God.

God's order to Pharaoh was that he should let God's son go so that Israel might serve Him. Pharaoh was holding God's son, and God wanted His son released. Since Pharaoh would refuse, Pharaoh would lose his first-born. This was the eventual last plague that God sent on Egypt that brought about the death of all the first-born among the Egyptians, and Moses was to warn Pharaoh about this. Since Pharaoh continued to refuse to listen, he would bear the responsibility for the death of his own first-born. Hard-heartedness toward the Lord has dire consequences for us. When we refuse to listen to God and do what He says, we will bear the penalty.

#### Exodus 4:24-26

Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw *it* at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." 26 So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are* a bridegroom of blood"-- because of the circumcision.

There must be more behind this incident than is apparent from this text. We have to read between the lines here and make some suppositions in order to interpret and understand this incident. God had appeared to Moses and had ordered him to go back to Egypt to lead Israel out the the land He had promised them. Now God meets Moses and is seeking to kill him. Why would God now try to kill the man He had just commissioned to lead Israel to freedom? Obviously from the context it had something to do with his son being uncircumcised. God had established circumcision as the sign of the covenant between Himself and Abraham in

## Genesis 17:10-14:

"This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 "A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

I think that the problem here was that Moses had given into his wife, Zipporah on this issue. I think that he had failed to circumcise his younger son because his wife found the practice repugnant. I think that God had tried to deal with Moses on this issue, and Moses had become resistant because of his wife. I think this was a case of Moses being stubborn and disobedient to the Lord because he didn't want to displease his wife. This can be a snare to anyone. The husband-wife relationship is a powerful one and can be a force for evil or for good. Our spouse can lead us to do what is right or to do what is wrong. It is important that our first and primary relationship be with the Lord and if our spouse tries to influence us to disobey Him that we resist that influence. Moses had wanted to please his wife rather than obey the Lord, and it almost cost him his life.

Zipporah understood the situation and took the initiative to resolve the problem herself. She cut off her son's foreskin with a flint knife and threw the foreskin at Moses' feet. She submitted to the requirement of the covenant after having resisted it. I don't know if her words are bitter or sarcastic or what, but she is clearly doing something against her will that is distasteful to her. She says, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me." What does this expression mean? The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary says:

Zipporah calls Moses a blood-bridegroom, "because she had been compelled, as it were, to acquire and purchase him anew as a husband by shedding the blood of her son" (*Glass*). "Moses had been as good as taken from her by the deadly attack which had been made upon him. She purchased his life by the blood of her son; she received him back, as it were, from the dead, and married him anew; he was, in fact, a bridegroom of blood to her" (*Kurtz*). This she said, as the historian adds, after God had let Moses, go, לְמִילֹת, "with reference to the circumcisions." The plural is used quite generally and indefinitely, as Zipporah referred not merely to this one instance, but to circumcision generally.

The King James version renders her statement as, "Surely a bloody husband art thou to me." It sounds like she does not like the bloody nature of Moses' religion, but realized that she had to circumcise her son to save her husband.

### Exodus 4:27-31

Now the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him. 28 And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him *to do*. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; 30 and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

Just as He had said, God sent Aaron to meet Moses, and Moses briefed Aaron about what was going on. Then they went and met with the elders of Israel and Aaron told them what God had said to Moses, and they performed the signs that God had given Moses. When the people saw the miraculous signs, then they believed what Moses and Aaron had to say. This is why Paul says that Jews “ask for signs” in 1 Corinthians 1:22. If someone claims that they are a prophet and that God has sent them, the Jews believe they must provide a miraculous sign to validate their claim. This is why the Jews kept asking Jesus for a sign. In Matthew 12:38-40 it says, “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'” Later the scenario was repeated and Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 16:1-4, “And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He answered and said to them, 'When it is evening, you say, “*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.*” And in the morning, “*There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.*” Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot *discern* the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.' And He left them, and went away.” Though Jesus denounced those who sought after signs so strongly, yet He performed many signs. All of His healings, the times He raised the dead and drove out demons, the time He turned the water into wine, when He walked on the water and stilled the storm, all of these things were supernatural signs that He performed. In fact, the gospel of John is a book of signs. John wrote, “Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). There was no question of the veracity of His credentials as Messiah and the Son of God. Yet there were still some who came up to Him and said, “Perform a sign for us. Prove to us that you're the Messiah or a prophet.” Jesus is not a performer who performs on demand. The miraculous deeds He did were done because there was a need to be met and were done with compassion. We have the testimony of those who knew Him and saw His signs and works, and He expects us to believe based on their testimony. The ultimate sign He gave to all of us is that of His death and resurrection, the “sign of Jonah” that He mentioned. He does not need to give us any more proof, because He has already done it.

When the people of Israel heard the words of Moses and Aaron and saw the signs, they believed, and they realized that Yahweh was concerned about them and had seen their affliction. They understood that God had been watching over them, that He had not abandoned them. The effect of this was that they “bowed low and worshiped.” Faith leads to worship. Believing in the Lord leads to worshipping the Lord. According to Strong's Hebrew Dictionary, the word for worshiped is *shâchâh* - “A primitive root; to *depress*, that is, *prostrate* (especially reflexively in homage to royalty or God): - bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship.” They believed in the Lord and therefore revered Him. They expressed their reverence by bowing down to Him and recognizing His power and authority and love. We worship by submitting ourselves to the rule of God, by putting ourselves under His authority. Do not say that you worship the Lord if you don't listen to Him and don't obey Him. The one who worships God will at least

want to do what He says.

Exodus 5:1-9

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" 2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go." 3 Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." 4 But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get *back* to your labors!" 5 Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!" 6 So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, 7 "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8 "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' 9 "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it that they may pay no attention to false words."

Just as God said, Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and Aaron. He does not recognize the Lord. He does not know a God named Yahweh. He sees no reason to obey the voice of a God he does not know. He is an Egyptian and will not recognize the God of Israel. No matter what, Pharaoh is not going to allow Israel to go.

In their second appeal to Pharaoh in verse 3, Moses and Aaron are more specific. They say that the God of the Hebrews has met with them and the request is that they should take a journey of three days into the wilderness in order to sacrifice to the Lord. This was something that God was requiring them to do, it was not an option. They were in danger of having the judgment of God fall on them if they did not obey. They said that the Lord could fall upon them with pestilence or the sword if they did not obey Him. Disease or enemy attack could come upon them if they were disobedient, and these things would impact the Egyptians as well. Disobedience puts us in danger of the wrath of God. This is the first warning to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh says that he can't have the Israelites pulled away from their work. There are many of them and there is much work that they need to do, and Moses and Aaron would pull them away from it. He ordered them to get back to their labors. He also ordered the taskmasters to increase their burdens. They were to require the Israelites to gather their own straw for the bricks they were making, but the quota of bricks was not to be reduced. He says that laziness is the real reason they want to go sacrifice to the Lord. Pharaoh is going to make life even more difficult for the men of Israel in hopes of driving a wedge between them and Moses. He's going to show them that if they listen to Moses, things will just get worse instead of better. He says, "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it that they may pay no attention to false words." This is his intent. He sees Moses and Aaron as false prophets, as men whose words are empty.

Exodus 5:10-19

So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw. 11 'You go *and* get straw

for yourselves wherever you can find *it*; but none of your labor will be reduced." 12 So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. 13 And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, *your* daily amount, just as when you had straw." 14 Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?" 15 Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants? 16 "There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your *own* people." 17 But he said, "You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.' 18 "So go now *and* work; for you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks." 19 And the foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, "You must not reduce *your* daily amount of bricks."

There were Egyptian taskmasters over the Israelites, but Israelite foremen who directed the laborers. The orders and requirements were passed down this chain of command to the people who had to do the work. When the people could not produce the same quota of bricks because now they also had to gather straw, the foremen were beaten. They were punished for not meeting the quota. Pharaoh and everyone else knew that the Israelites would not be able to meet the quota if they had to gather the straw as well, but because he wanted to create enmity between the people and Moses, he imposed this impossible requirement.

The Israelite foremen came to Pharaoh to complain, asking him why he was treating them this way. They probably did not know that this order came down from Pharaoh himself. They pointed out that it was the fault of this requirement that they were not able to meet their quota of bricks. It was the fault of the Egyptians and not of the Israelites that the brick production had fallen off. Pharaoh quoted Moses and Aaron when he responded. He accused them of using this request to go sacrifice to the Lord as an excuse for their laziness. He implies that they did not really want to go worship the Lord, but that in reality they were just trying to get out of work. Sometimes religion can be used as an excuse to get away with something or to be exempted from something, particularly in our society where freedom of religious expression is respected. But in Israel's case at this time it was certainly not true. Everyone knew that Pharaoh's charges were false, but he also knew that the Israelite leaders would blame Moses for their increased suffering.

#### Exodus 5:20-23

When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. 21 And they said to them, "May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

22 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why hast Thou brought harm to this people? Why didst Thou ever send me? 23 "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has done harm to this people; and Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all."

Moses and Aaron were waiting for the foremen when they emerged from their meeting with Pharaoh. The foremen were upset with Moses and Aaron and called down the judgment of God upon them. They said that Moses and Aaron had made them "odious" to Pharaoh.



They stank before Pharaoh. Whatever favor they used to have with him was now gone and they blamed Moses and Aaron for it. Their bitter experience did not build their faith but extinguished it. Now they felt that Moses and Aaron had “put a sword in their hand to kill us.” Surely this is an exaggeration of the severity of the problem, but these are men who have just been beaten and accused of being lazy. They know that they will not be able to achieve the quota of bricks that has been imposed on them, and that therefore the beatings and violence against them would probably escalate. When we are suffering and are oppressed it is hard to see how the Lord is working. It is hard to trust in Him when it seems that everything is against you and is bound to get worse. Because of their suffering they were not able to see with eyes of faith and trust. But when things go from bad to worse it does not mean that God isn't working or that God has abandoned you. In this case the Lord had not yet begun to put pressure on Pharaoh. It was the beginning of the process and not the end.

Moses also gives in to despair and his faith is shaken. He asks the Lord why He has brought harm to the people. He asks why He sent him. He points out that he has spoken in God's name to Pharaoh and instead of letting them go, Pharaoh has brought more harm upon them. He is disappointed and dismayed that God has not delivered His people as He said He would. Moses also fails to see that there is still quite a bit to go in the process of deliverance. He doesn't yet see that it's not going to be a simple thing. God is going to bring great glory to Himself by working in a powerful way, but Moses doesn't see it yet.

We must be patient as we wait for God to work. God seldom does anything as quickly as we would like. He has His own timetable. God is not slow, but is patient (2 Peter 3:9). One day He set everything right, and all evil will be done away with.

#### Exodus 6:1-9

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he shall let them go, and under compulsion he shall drive them out of his land." 2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; 3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them. 4 "And I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. 5 "And furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. 6 "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 'And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you *for* a possession; I am the LORD.'" 9 So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of *their* despondency and cruel bondage.

The Lord reassured Moses that He was going to act and was going to force Pharaoh not only to allow Israel to leave, but that He would force Pharaoh to drive them out of his land. In verse 1 the Lord says, in effect, “Moses, you haven't seen anything yet!” He says, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh.” God will literally use a “strong hand” to deliver Israel. God is going to get tough with Pharaoh and will compel him to release His people. He is just at the beginning of His work.

The Lord reminds Moses of His name in verses 2 and 3. He is Yahweh, "I Am." When He appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob they knew Him as God Almighty (*el shaddai*), but did not know Him as Yahweh. God has revealed His true name to Moses and to that generation of Israelites. They have been privileged in a way that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not. God revealed Himself to Moses in a more intimate way, on a first-name basis. It is as if the President were to say, "Others know me as Mr. President, but you know me as George." These verses point to the fact that if we are going to truly know the Lord, He must reveal Himself, He must make Himself known to us. We can know a little about Him from His general revelation of Himself in creation, but we cannot truly know Him unless He reveals Himself. Thank God that He has done this!

The first thing that God did for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was to appear to them and make Himself known to them. They knew Him as God Almighty. The second thing that God did for them was to establish His covenant with them. Once they knew Him He made a covenant, a contract or agreement, with them. The covenant included God's intention to give them the land of Canaan. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were sojourners, strangers in that land, living in tents as shepherds. But God had promised to give them the land as their own possession. Now the time had come for the Lord to fulfill that promise and give the land to the descendants of Jacob.

The Lord assures Moses that he has heard the groaning of the sons of Israel and has remembered His covenant with them. God does not forget or abandon His covenants. He keeps His agreements and fulfills His contracts. We may forget God's promises, but He does not forget them. Israel may have forgotten about the Lord, but the Lord had not forgotten Israel. Israel had grown from 70 people who went down to Egypt into a nation of a couple million because God had blessed them in Egypt. He had done as He had promised, and they had become a great nation.

Having reassured Moses that He was mindful of His covenant and that He was just beginning to act to deliver them, God told Moses to go tell the Israelites these things. Since it was a fact that God had established His covenant with them in the past and had remembered it in the present, therefore God commands Moses to go tell them what He is about to do. Verses 6-8 contain a string of "I will" statements that Moses was to transmit to Israel. God says, "I will bring you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, I will take you, I will be your God, I will bring you to the land, I will give it to you." When God says that He will do something, we can count on the fact that He will do it. He is not unreliable. His promises and commitments are not empty.

First, He says that He will bring them out from under the burdens of Egypt. Israel was laboring under heavy burdens imposed by the Egyptians, and God was going to lift those burdens off of them and bring them out from under them. God is a burden bearer and burden lifter. Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken." Psalm 68:19 says, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God *who* is our salvation. Selah." Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). Man-made religion tends to impose very heavy burdens on people. The Jews of Jesus' day went beyond the ten commandments to impose a heavy legal burden on people that came from generations of tradition and interpretation of the Law. Jesus said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46). Jesus did not come to impose a load of burdens upon us, but to lift the load from us. He bore the load of the guilt of our sin on Himself on the cross so that we might be freed from

the weight of it. When God delivered Israel from the burdens of Egypt it was a physical picture of what He does for each of us in Christ when He delivers us from the burden of our sin and guilt. He delivers us also from the burden of having to obey the Law in order to be righteous, a weight which is impossible for us to bear (see Acts 15:10).

The second thing God says He will do for them gives us another picture, another metaphor. He says, "I will deliver you from their bondage." The Israelites are captives, prisoners and slaves of the Egyptians and need to be delivered. God will break them out of prison and lead them out of captivity. They are not free and God is going to lead them into freedom. This is also a picture of what Christ does for us spiritually. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:34-36). The slavery that subjects all people to misery is slavery to sin. Jesus came to bear our sins on the cross so that we might be freed from this slavery and enabled to live the kind of lives in Him that God has always intended. Paul tells us that in Christ we have died to sin and need no longer live in it and submit to it. Sin is no longer our master (see Romans 6).

Third, the Lord says, "I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments." To redeem means to buy back something that belongs to you. When you take an item to a pawn shop and receive a loan for the item, you have a certain amount of time where you can redeem your item, you can buy it back if you pay off the loan. If you don't redeem it, the shop owner can sell your item to someone else. Israel belonged to God. He had made a covenant with them and they were His people. The Egyptians had enslaved them, however, and now He would redeem them. He would redeem them with an outstretched arm and great judgments. He will not pay or compensate the Egyptians in any way, but he will redeem Israel with His power and with His just judgment. He will get them back for Himself with harsh measures. Christ also has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, as Paul writes in Galatians 3:13-14, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE'-- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." In Colossians 1:13-14 he says, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Our redemption was accomplished by Christ on the cross and consists of forgiveness of sins. Titus 2:14 says that Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." In Christ we are redeemed from lawless deeds and made the possession of Christ. He owns us if He has redeemed us, and we are to be zealous for good deeds instead of lawless deeds. If He has redeemed us, we belong to Him and are no longer to live for ourselves and for the things of this world.

Once God had brought them out, delivered them and redeemed them, then He would take them for Himself and be their God and they would be His people (verse 7). When He had redeemed them then they would be His people, His possession, and they would have Him as their God. When God has saved you and delivered you and redeemed you then you belong to Him and in a sense He also belongs to you. You are His child and He is your Father.

Once God had redeemed them they would also know for a fact, by experience, that He is Yahweh their God. At this point they did not truly know Him or trust Him, but later they would see and would know that He is the true God. Once they saw what He would do for them, then they would know that He is the Lord. God always acts first before we believe and before we

know. He looks for us and saves us and then we know Him and believe in Him. We cannot know Him unless He leads us out of sin to Himself. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). We are incapable of coming to Christ unless the Father works to draw us. No one has ever come to know the Lord without the Lord taking the first steps to bring them to Himself.

God said that He would bring them out of Egypt, and now He also says that He will bring them into the land that He swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God not only will take them out of the place where they should not be, but will also lead them to the place where they should be. The Lord does this for us as well. He takes us out of sin into righteousness, out of darkness into light, out of death into life. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." When we are saved there is a change in the administration in our lives. We are no longer ruled by sin and evil and darkness, but are now ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Moses went and told the Israelites these things that God had commanded him to say, but they refused to listen to him "on account of their despondency and cruel bondage." This passage seems to say that they had a justifiable reason for refusing to listen to Moses. He had come and had talked to Pharaoh and things got worse instead of getting better. Instead of being delivered from Egypt they were oppressed more than ever. They would not accept what Moses said because they could not see past their suffering. All they saw was that they got weaker and the Egyptians got stronger. They would not trust in the Lord until they saw Him work in a more powerful way.

#### Exodus 6:10-13

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, *11* "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." *12* But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" *13* Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

The Lord's instructions have not changed, nor has Moses gained any confidence. He still uses the excuse that he cannot speak. He says literally that he is a man of "uncircumcised lips." His lips have not been opened so that he can speak clearly. He complains that Israel has not listened to him, and asks how Pharaoh will listen to him. He has tried to speak to Pharaoh and Israel and it looks like his efforts have failed. Israel has turned away from him and he sees no reason Pharaoh should listen to him. The Lord does not answer him until we get to chapter 7. Verse 13 simply summarizes that God gave Moses and Aaron a charge bring Israel out of Egypt. This command was given to Moses and Aaron and Pharaoh and the sons of Israel. This command was for all the parties involved.

#### Exodus 6:14-27

These are the heads of their fathers' households. The sons of Reuben, Israel's first-born: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. *15* And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. *16* And these are the names of the sons

of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. 17 The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. 18 And the sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath's life was one hundred and thirty-three years. 19 And the sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. 20 And Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. 21 And the sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. 22 And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri. 23 And Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 24 And the sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. 25 And Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' *households* of the Levites according to their families. 26 It was *the same* Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." 27 They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the sons of Israel from Egypt; it was *the same* Moses and Aaron.

It appears that Moses begins to make a list of all the household heads of all the tribes, and begins with Reuben and Simeon. But then he gets to Levi and stops there. Clearly the intent is to show the Levitical credentials of Moses and Aaron, that they are indeed bona fide descendants of Levi.

A cursory reading of this genealogy makes it look like Levi's boys were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, and that Moses' father Amram was the son of Kohath. It appears that it was Levi – Kohath – Amram and then Moses. But the Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament points out that this could not be true:

But the Amram mentioned in [Exo\\_6:20](#) as the father of Moses, cannot be the same person as the Amram who was the son of Kohath ([Exo\\_6:18](#)), but must be a later descendant. For, however the sameness of names may seem to favour the identity of the persons, if we simply look at the genealogy before us, a comparison of this passage with [Num\\_3:27-28](#) will show the impossibility of such an assumption. "According to [Num\\_3:27-28](#), the Kohathites were divided (in Moses' time) into the four branches, Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites, who consisted together of 8600 men and boys (women and girls not being included). Of these, about a fourth, or 2150 men, would belong to the Amramites. Now, according to [Exo\\_18:3-4](#), Moses himself had only two sons. Consequently, if Amram the son of Kohath, and tribe-father of the Amramites, was the same person as Amram the father of Moses, Moses must have had 2147 brothers and brothers' sons (the brothers' daughters, the sisters, and their daughters, not being reckoned at all). But as this is absolutely impossible, it must be granted that Amram the son of Kohath was not the father of Moses, and that an indefinitely long list of generations has been omitted between the former and his descendant of the same name" (Tiele, Chr. des A. T. p. 36).

Moses' father was an Amram who came along later sometime after the Amram who was the son of Kohath, but was in the same line.

Moses' father Amram married Jochebed, who was his father's sister (his aunt). The Law would later prohibit such marriages (Leviticus 18:12), but at this time the Law had not yet been given. Given the longevity of people in those days, she could have been near Amram's age.

Aaron's wife was Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, and his sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. We will hear more about the sons of Aaron later. The sons of Aaron are

important because Aaron will become the high priest. We will also hear more about the sons of Korah, mentioned in verse 24.

Verse 25 mentions Eleazar's son Phinehas because later he would distinguish himself and gain the commendation of the Lord for putting a halt to idolatrous immorality in Israel (Numbers 25:7-13). The Lord said, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" (Numbers 25:11-13) Men who are jealous for God are supported and rewarded by God. He would not tolerate idolatry and immorality within the nation and he stood up for the holiness of God. Too often we cluck our tongues and shake our heads at these things and stand on the sidelines. Phinehas was a man who acted. He took a spear and put an end to that which was a slap in God's face.

Verses 26 and 27 underline the fact that it was Aaron and Moses mentioned in the genealogy who were to ones God sent to bring Israel out of Egypt and to speak to Pharaoh. They were descendants of Levi and had a legitimate standing to do what they were doing.

#### Exodus 6:28 – 7:7

Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, 29 that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you." 30 But Moses said before the LORD, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?"

7:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 "You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3 "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 "When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5 "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."

6 So Moses and Aaron did *it*; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. 7 And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Now we go back to where we left off in 6:12, with Moses again objecting that he is "unskilled in speech." Moses does not see how Pharaoh will listen to him. His lips are "uncircumcised" and he is not able to speak clearly. This was a real impediment for Moses. He has confidence in the Lord, but not in his own ability.

The plan is that Moses will be like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron will be his prophet. Aaron will do the speaking before Pharaoh. God would command Moses, and Moses would command Aaron, and Aaron would speak to Pharaoh. The message would be that Pharaoh should let Israel go out of his land. This was not a difficult message and would not be hard to communicate. I think Moses was overly anxious about the difficulty involved in speaking to Pharaoh.

Moses needed to understand that Pharaoh would not listen to him. His job was to speak to Pharaoh and communicate the Lord's command, and God would take care of the rest. In 7:3

God says that He is going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that He will be able to “multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” God wants Pharaoh's heart to be hardened so that He will be able to multiply His wonders. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” Kings and rulers are in a position where God will do with them as He will. If it is in God's interest to harden the heart of a king, He will do so.

The Lord tells Moses that because He will harden Pharaoh's heart it is certain that Pharaoh will not listen to him. Verse 4 says, “When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts.” It is not “if,” but “when.” Moses had asked, “How will Pharaoh listen to me?” and now God says, “Count on it – Pharaoh will not listen to you.” The task of a prophet is to speak the word of God whether people listen or not. When God sent Ezekiel to be His spokesman to Israel, He told him to speak whether they would listen or not:

Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 "And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 "As for them, whether they listen or not-- for they are a rebellious house-- they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 "And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. 7 "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious. (Ezekiel 2:3-7)

As it was with Ezekiel, so it was with Moses and so it is with us. We must deliver God's message to people whether they listen or not. We must not say, “Oh, nobody's going to listen anyway, so I'm not going to speak.” We have an obligation to share the good news of Christ whether people listen or not. We must trust that some will listen and be saved.

When Pharaoh refuses to listen, then God Himself will act. When words will not persuade Pharaoh, then God's actions will. He is going to lay His hand on Egypt, and it will not be good for the Egyptians. Egypt will be ruined as a result of Pharaoh's stubbornness. Great judgments will come upon them because of it. When God stretches out His hand and brings Israel out of Egypt, then the Egyptians would know that He is Yahweh, I Am. The Egyptians would see and experience His power and see that their gods were powerless before Him. It is best for us if we will listen to what the Lord says and heed His words rather than being stubborn and enduring the consequences of refusing to listen.

Moses did as God commanded. They went and spoke to Pharaoh. Obedience is following God's instructions. Moses and Aaron were not young men when they went to speak to Pharaoh, Moses was 80 and Aaron was 83. They were at the stage of life when most men in our society have been retired for a number of years. They were just getting started as leaders of Israel. They had the authority of their age as well as the authority of God behind them.

#### Exodus 7:8-13

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 9 "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw *it* down before Pharaoh, *that* it may become a serpent.'" 10 So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. 11 Then Pharaoh also called for *the* wise men and *the* sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. 12

For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Pharaoh would require Moses and Aaron to “work a miracle” as a condition for listening to them, and so they had the opportunity to perform the first sign before him. Obviously Moses had given his staff to Aaron, and Aaron had become his official spokesman and staff-handler. They threw down the staff before Pharaoh and it became a snake. Then Pharaoh's wise men and sorcerers came in and did the same thing. They could duplicate this miracle through their “secret arts.” They did not do this through the power of God, but through some other means, probably demonic. Pharaoh must have thought that it was no big thing that they could change the staff into a snake, since his own men could do the same thing. But then the staff of Aaron swallowed up the sorcerer's staffs. This was what is called in missions a “power encounter.” The Lord demonstrated that His power was greater than that of the wise men and sorcerers of Egypt. God showed Pharaoh that he was dealing with a God greater than the idols of Egypt. He gave Pharaoh a little taste of what was about to come into sharper focus.

Pharaoh hardened his heart, as the Lord said he would, and refused to listen to Moses and Aaron. The first sign had failed to convince Pharaoh.

#### Exodus 7:14-25

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. 15 "Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. 16 "And you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But behold, you have not listened until now." 17 'Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood. 18 "And the fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul; and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.'"

19 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of wood* and in *vessels of stone*.'" 20 So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood. 21 And the fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. 22 But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. 23 Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this. 24 So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile. 25 And seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

Here is the first of ten plagues that the Lord brought upon the land of Egypt because of the stubbornness of Pharaoh. As Pharaoh continues to harden his heart things will go from bad to worse for him and his nation.



God told Pharaoh explicitly what was going to happen. He sent Moses and Aaron to tell Pharaoh that because he had not listened and had not let God's people go that the Nile would be turned to blood. Then Pharaoh would know that Yahweh is God. God warns before He judges. He does not just bring judgment with no warning. He does not punish or discipline without letting us know what He's doing. The trouble is that we do not listen. We turn a deaf ear to him.

Pharaoh was going out with his attendants to the Nile, probably not to swim or drink or bathe, but to worship the Nile god. The Nile sustained all of life in Egypt and it was venerated by the Egyptians. God would demonstrate His power over the Nile by turning it to blood. It would be another power encounter and God would again prove that He is the real God.

An important question here is if the water of the Nile was literally changed into real blood. Some have said that the Nile simply took on a red color due to the silt flowing through the river when it is at it's highest. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary takes this interpretation, saying that there must have also been a chemical change that killed the fish and made the water putrid. This seems to me to be an attempt to make a miracle less miraculous and to offer a natural explanation for what happened. I think when the scripture says blood here it means blood, not just red colored, silt laden water. If it were a natural phenomenon, then why was there blood also in the pools and reservoirs and vessels of wood and stone as well as in the Nile? In this God is making a point to Pharaoh and Egypt. The water that brought them life has now been changed into blood that brings death. When it is inside the body, blood is a thing that is essential to life, in fact, scripture says that blood is the life of a creature (Leviticus 17:11-14). But when it leaves the body, it becomes death. The creature that loses it's blood loses it's life. The life-giving Nile became a putrid, stinking death-dealing thing. God is showing His superiority to the god of the Nile. He is saying that He is the one we are to worship and not the Nile river or any other natural created thing. This was God's first assault on the gods of the Egyptians.

The magicians of Egypt added to the trouble when they did the same thing with their "secret arts." I don't know where they got the fresh water to turn into blood, but somehow they did so. For seven days this went on and the people of Egypt had to dig around the Nile for drinkable water. Again, since his men were able to reproduce this miracle, Pharaoh paid no attention to Moses and Aaron and would not listen. He again hardened his heart.

#### Exodus 8:1-15

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 2 "But if you refuse to let *them* go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs. 3 "And the Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come up and go into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed, and into the houses of your servants and on your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. 4 "So the frogs will come up on you and your people and all your servants.'"" 5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the streams and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'" 6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7 And the magicians did the same with their secret arts, making frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

8 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Entreat the LORD that He remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to

the LORD." 9 And Moses said to Pharaoh, "The honor is yours to tell me: when shall I entreat for you and your servants and your people, that the frogs be destroyed from you and your houses, *that* they may be left only in the Nile?" 10 Then he said, "Tomorrow." So he said, "*May it be* according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 "And the frogs will depart from you and your houses and your servants and your people; they will be left only in the Nile." 12 Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD concerning the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died out of the houses, the courts, and the fields. 14 So they piled them in heaps, and the land became foul. 15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

Whereas the Nile turned to blood was a thoroughly supernatural thing, there was nothing unusual about frogs coming from the Nile. What was unusual and supernatural about the plague of frogs was the volume of frogs that God caused to come up out of the Nile. Never had so many frogs been seen before! Writing in Exodus and Advent Movements in Type and Antitype, Taylor G. Bunch describes the frogs of the second plague:

*The [Second] Plague of Frogs* Ex. 8:1–6. Frogs were regarded as sacred by the Egyptians because they lived in the River Nile and were considered the emblem of creative power. One of their gods was called "Heka," and was a frog-headed goddess. The description of these frogs is identical with a species in Egypt today called "**Rana Mosaica**," doubtless so named for that very reason. They are very loathsome creatures that crawl instead of hop and which croak constantly. During the plague, they were everywhere and couldn't be killed because they were sacred. They even entered the "ovens" or baking pans. In Egypt, the young frogs come out of the Nile in September and are sometimes so numerous as to be a menace even today. There are historical records of communities where frogs became such a menace that the people had to flee the country to escape them.

The Lord said this time to Pharaoh that if he didn't listen and let Israel go that He would "smite" the land with frogs. He would strike them with frogs. The frogs would be an offensive weapon against Egypt. Instead of being an object of veneration and worship the frogs would become an unbelievable annoyance. God said that they would be everywhere – in their houses, bedrooms, beds, on people, in their ovens and kneading bowls. Just imagine stepping on these little frogs wherever you walked, trying to sweep them away only to have more take their place. It must have been intolerable! No one would be exempt in Egypt. God said that these frogs would afflict Pharaoh, his people and his servants.

This was a plague that Pharaoh couldn't ignore as he had ignored the plague of blood. Though his magicians were able to duplicate this miracle also, still Pharaoh realized that he had to go to Moses and Aaron to get the plague stopped. The magicians of Egypt could make more frogs come up on the land, which was not helpful, but they could not make them go

away. They were helpless to stop the plague. The plague of frogs was horrible for everyone including Pharaoh and he quickly decided to ask for relief. He asked Moses and Aaron to entreat the Lord to remove the frogs and promised that he would let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord. Moses told him to name the time that they should ask the Lord to remove the frogs and Pharaoh replied that it should be the next day. Moses said, "May it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God." Through this plague and all the plagues the Lord, Yahweh, was making Himself known. He was demonstrating that there is no god like Him. He was proving to Pharaoh that He is the true God. The god of the Nile was nothing. The goddess Heka, the frog goddess, was nothing. Only the Lord could send such a plague, and only He could put a stop to it.

Moses promised that the frogs would depart from the land and be left only in the Nile on the next day. As he called upon the Lord, the Lord listened to Moses and all the frogs in the land died where they were. Throughout the land of Egypt there were dead frogs everywhere. The people were probably working for days to sweep and shovel out the dead frogs and pile them in heaps. The frogs did not just leave, but the people of Egypt had to deal with dead, stinking, decaying frogs for days. The land became foul because of the dead frogs. The plague of living frogs became a plague of dead frogs.

Pharaoh again hardened his heart and again refused to listen to Moses. He had relief, and so he reneged on his commitment to let Israel go.

#### Exodus 8:16-19

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.'" 17 And they did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. 18 And the magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

The next plague is the plague of gnats, brought about when Aaron struck the ground, the "dust of the earth" and it became great swarms of gnats. Again, this was a plague that afflicted the entire land of Egypt. Regarding these gnats, the [Keil and Delitzsch Commentary](#) says:

The כְּנָם, or כְּנִיָּם (also כְּנָם, probably an old singular form, *Ewald*, §163f), were not "lice," but σκνίφες, *sciniphes*, a species of gnats, so small as to be hardly visible to the eye, but with a sting which, according to *Philo* and *Origen*, causes a most painful irritation of the skin. They even creep into the eyes and nose, and after the harvest they rise in great swarms from the inundated rice-fields.

This description of the gnats makes them sound similar to chiggers. These have wings, however, and would have spread everywhere.

This time the magicians of Egypt could not duplicate the miracle and said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But still, Pharaoh did not listen, even to his own counselors. The magicians recognized that they had reached their limit. Again it is said, "But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said." The same thing is recorded in 7:22 and 8:15. Pharaoh was following the pattern that the Lord said he would

follow. As Moses and Aaron saw Pharaoh harden his heart, they should have been saying, "Yes, this is just what God said he would do," and should not have become discouraged.

Exodus 8:20-32

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he comes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 21 "For if you will not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of insects on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of insects, and also the ground on which they *dwell*. 22 "But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of insects will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. 23 "And I will put a division between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall occur.'"" 24 Then the LORD did so. And there came great swarms of insects into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was laid waste because of the swarms of insects in all the land of Egypt.

25 And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." 26 But Moses said, "It is not right to do so, for we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God what is an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not then stone us? 27 "We must go a three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us." 28 And Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Make supplication for me." 29 Then Moses said, "Behold, I am going out from you, and I shall make supplication to the LORD that the swarms of insects may depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow; only do not let Pharaoh deal deceitfully again in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD."

30 So Moses went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. 31 And the LORD did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people; not one remained. 32 But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.

A new element is introduced in this fourth plague. This time, the people of Israel will be exempt from suffering the plague of insects so that Pharaoh would see that the Lord was there watching over His people. God would demonstrate that He makes a distinction between His people and Pharaoh's people. This plague would be more than an annoyance. It would be a destructive plague. When the insects came "the land was laid waste" because of them. They caused destruction in the land of Egypt, probably destroying crops and eating and infesting stores of food. The people of Israel would not suffer this destruction. Sometimes the people of God will suffer with others as disasters come along. But in judgment God makes a distinction between His people and the people of the world. There is a real division between His people and others, and God will not ultimately treat us the way He treats the people of the world who do not know Him.

This time Pharaoh agrees to allow Israel to go sacrifice to the Lord, but only within the land of Egypt. Moses explained that that was unacceptable because the sacrifices they would offer to the Lord would be an abomination to the Egyptians and the Egyptians would stone them. The terms were that Israel should be allowed to take a three days' journey into the wilderness

to offer their sacrifices to the Lord. This was the Lord's command. Pharaoh then agreed to allow them to go sacrifice in the wilderness, but said, "only you shall not go very far away." It was imperative that the insects be removed from Egypt, and Pharaoh realized that only Moses could give him relief. He now sees that he must deal with Moses and must get Moses to "make supplication" for him. Moses is in the driver's seat, but Pharaoh still wants things done his way.

As Moses "made supplication to the Lord" the Lord listened to him and did as he asked (verse 31) and all the insects were removed from Pharaoh and his people and not one remained. The Lord really does listen to those who are His servants. If Moses had not prayed, God would not have removed the insects. God listens to the righteous and grants their requests. James 5:16-18 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit." Elijah was a righteous man, doing what God had commanded, and so God listened to his requests and did as he asked. The prayers of the righteous really do move God to do things He would not otherwise do. This is the power of prayer, the power to actually move the hand of God, which is an awesome power. Of course our role is to request, to ask, and not to demand. God has veto power over our prayers, otherwise prayer would be a very dangerous thing. Our prayers must align with His will and purpose. 1 John 5:14-15 says, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." Both Moses and Elijah were walking with the Lord, following His directions, and serving Him in His purpose. We cannot go our own way, doing our own thing, and expect that God will grant our requests. We must be seeking to accomplish what He wants done.

God's power was seen in the removal of the insects as much as in the sending of the insects. As suddenly as they had come, they were removed. In one day God sent the insects and in one day He removed them. This was not a natural, but a supernatural event. When Pharaoh got relief, he again hardened his heart and did not do as he had said he would do. He would not let Israel go.

#### Exodus 9:1-7

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and speak to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 2 "For if you refuse to let *them* go, and continue to hold them, 3 behold, the hand of the LORD will come *with* a very severe pestilence on your livestock which are in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the herds, and on the flocks. 4 "But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.'" 5 And the LORD set a definite time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land." 6 So the LORD did this thing on the morrow, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died. 7 And Pharaoh sent, and behold, there was not even one of the livestock of Israel dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.

The plague of the death of the livestock of Egypt was again a plague that made a

distinction between Egypt and Israel. On one day all the livestock of Egypt died, but not one of the animals of the Israelites died. Pharaoh himself investigators and found that God had done as He had said, and not one animal in Israel had died. He could see objectively that God had done as He had said, and yet he would not let the people go. People can see objective proof of the existence and power of God and they will still refuse to submit to Him. Their minds are blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) and they will not see nor acknowledge the truth.

#### Exodus 9:8-12

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh. 9 "And it will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt." 10 So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became boils breaking out with sores on man and beast. 11 And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians as well as on all the Egyptians. 12 And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

The sixth plague is this plague of fine dust that caused boils and sores on people and beasts throughout Egypt. The soot or ashes they threw into the air came from a kiln, from a furnace. This was possibly a furnace that was used in the manufacture of the bricks that the Israelites were making, or perhaps a smelting furnace. The root of the Hebrew word for boils means "to burn."<sup>4</sup> These boils and sores were no doubt very uncomfortable and painful. The magicians could no longer stand before Moses because they suffered from the boils as well as everyone else. Though it doesn't say so, I assume that again Moses and the Israelites were exempted from this plague. Moses was still standing, but the magicians could not any longer. Probably the boils were on their feet and they could literally not stand any longer.

Despite the pain and suffering of the boils and despite the fact that his magicians could give him no relief, still Pharaoh refused to listen and refused to let Israel go.

#### Exodus 9:13-35

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 14 "For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. 15 "For *if by* now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. 16 "But, indeed, for this cause I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power, and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. 17 "Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go. 18 "Behold, about this time tomorrow, I will send a very heavy hail, such as has not been *seen* in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19 "Now therefore send, bring your livestock and whatever you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought home, when the hail comes down on them, will die.'" 20 The one among the servants of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD made his servants and his livestock flee into the houses; 21 but he who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left his servants and his livestock in the

field.

22 Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." 23 And Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. 24 So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 And the hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, there was no hail.

27 Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones. 28 "Make supplication to the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." 29 And Moses said to him, "As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the LORD'S. 30 "But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." 31 (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. 32 But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they *ripen* late.) 33 So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and spread out his hands to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. 34 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35 And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

This seventh plague comes with a special warning. Things are about to get much worse for Pharaoh and his people. The same command is repeated to Pharaoh, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." Then the Lord says, "For this time I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth." The Lord tells Pharaoh that He could have dealt much more severely with him than He has so far. If He had wanted to, God could have wiped them off the face of the earth. But God had chosen not to do so because He had a different purpose. He had "allowed" Pharaoh "to remain" so that He might show His power and proclaim His name throughout the earth. Later, in Jericho Rahab said to the Israelite spies, "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt" (Joshua 2:10). The Gibeonites said, "We have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt" (Joshua 9:9). God does mighty acts for His sake, for the sake of His name and so that He might be known in the earth. He does these things to show that He is the one true God.

Because Pharaoh continued to exalt himself against the Lord's people, God said He would send a very heavy hailstorm the next day at about the same time of day. The warning is very specific. Pharaoh and his advisors knew what was going to happen and when. They had time to prepare. In fact, Moses even told them they needed to bring their servants and livestock in from the fields to safety indoors. He warned that every creature left outside would be killed by the hail. Hail can be a scary thing. When I was a kid we were in Colorado on vacation and

were driving with our camper when we ran into a heavy hailstorm. The hail was about the size of a marble, maybe smaller, and we parked under a tree until the storm passed. We were afraid the hail might break our windshield, it was so large and heavy. The hail that God sent on Egypt was heavy enough to kill a man, and God gave them fair warning so they could prepare.

Verses 20 and 21 show us two basic responses that people have to the word of God. Some of Pharaoh's servants feared the word of the Lord and went and made their servants and animals take shelter indoors. Some paid no attention to God's word and left their servants and animals outside as usual. Some had learned from the previous plagues that they needed to listen to Moses, that what he said as he represented Yahweh was the truth and what he said would take place. Some continued in their arrogance and unbelief and refused to listen to Moses, and paid the price. When God speaks we have these two options. If we have learned to fear Him we will listen and heed what He says. If we insist on going our own way we will suffer the consequences.

God told Moses to stretch out his hand toward the sky and then the hail would fall. Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky and the storm began. God did not just start the storm, but He used Moses and his staff as the instrument through which the storm began. In effect, Moses was the one who caused the storm to begin. God commanded, Moses obeyed, and the hail fell. In His dealings with mankind God works most often through His servants. He uses people to accomplish His will on earth among men. This is why God is always looking for people who will give themselves to Him as His servants, who will sanctify themselves to Him for His use. The prophet Hanani confronted Asa the king of Judah and said, "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars" (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is looking for men who will give their hearts to Him completely so that He can "strongly support" them. Moses was such a man, and so God used him.

The storm was no ordinary hail storm. It was an unprecedented storm. No storm like this had ever been seen in Egypt. This was a special storm sent by the Lord. The Lord sent the thunder and hail and rained the hail on Egypt (verse 23). It was a continual storm. Most storms will ebb and flow, will be heavy for a while and then slack off. This storm was continual and severe. It never let up for a moment. It must have been a very fearful experience.

The hail struck everything that was outdoors, all the people, all the animals, all the plants, all the trees. The trees were "shattered," were broken by the hail. The destruction was horrific. But in the land of Goshen, God's people were exempted from the storm.

Now for the first time Pharaoh admits he is at fault. He will only admit that "I have sinned this time." He says that the Lord is righteous, just, and that he and his people are wicked. He is not confessing prior sin, only that at this time he has sinned. It appears that he is going through the motions of repentance in order to put an end to the storm. Too often we do this. We see that we are suffering because of our sin, and so we "repent" and call on the Lord for forgiveness and freedom from the consequences of our sin, and then we go back to doing the very same thing we were doing before. Along with his confession, Pharaoh asked Moses to make supplication to the Lord so that the storm would end. He made a commitment that he would let Israel go. He said all the right things to get Moses to put an end to the storm. There may have even been a bit of sincerity in what he said. He may have been frightened by the power and destructive nature of this storm.

Again the end of the storm would be as much an act of God as the storm itself had been



so that Pharaoh would again see “that the earth is the Lord's” (verse 29). The Lord is in control of the earth and its creatures and its weather patterns and of everything in, on or around the earth. The land on which Pharaoh stands does not belong to him or to his gods, but to Yahweh. The skies above Pharaoh do not belong to him or his gods, but to Yahweh. Pharaoh is paying a high price to learn this lesson.

Moses agreed to bring an end to the storm, but he says, “I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God.” He knows that Pharaoh is insincere. He knows that Pharaoh will again harden his heart. Hard-hearted people like Pharaoh can see multiple demonstrations of the power and glory of God and still refuse to fear Him. Signs and wonders will not compel the hard-hearted to believe.

Some of the crops of Egypt, the flax and barley, were destroyed by the hail. But the wheat and spelt ripen later, so they were all right. Egypt's grain was not completely destroyed.

After the storm stopped, Pharaoh again sinned and hardened his heart and went back on his promise to let the Israelites go. Sin has a hardening effect on us. Hebrews 3:13 warns of this, “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Sin deceives us and makes us lie to ourselves. It hardens us and makes us less responsive to the word of God. This is why we need the encouragement of one another in the church. We need to exhort one another and challenge one another to keep listening to the Lord and following Him.

#### Exodus 10

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and how I performed My signs among them; that you may know that I am the LORD."

3 And Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 4 'For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. 5 'And they shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one shall be able to see the land. They shall also eat the rest of what has escaped-- what is left to you from the hail-- and they shall eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. 6 'Then your houses shall be filled, and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians, *something* which neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day that they came upon the earth until this day.'" And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

7 And Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" 8 So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?" 9 And Moses said, "We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." 10 Then he said to them, "Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. 11 "Not so! Go now, the men *among you*, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire." So they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up on the land of Egypt, and eat every plant of the land, *even all* that the hail has left." 13 So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the

LORD directed an east wind on the land all that day and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. 14 And the locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled in all the territory of Egypt; *they were* very numerous. There had never been so *many* locusts, nor would there be so *many* again. 15 For they covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every plant of the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Thus nothing green was left on tree or plant of the field through all the land of Egypt. 16 Then Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses and Aaron, and he said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. 17 "Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and make supplication to the LORD your God, that He would only remove this death from me." 18 And he went out from Pharaoh and made supplication to the LORD. 19 So the LORD shifted *the wind* to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea; not one locust was left in all the territory of Egypt. 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go.

The Lord adds something new here in verses 1 and 2 as He tells Moses about His purpose in hardening the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants. His first purpose in doing this was to continue performing His signs in Egypt, but now He adds a second purpose. He wants Moses and the Israelites to be able to tell their children and grandchildren about what the Lord did in Egypt. These powerful signs that God performed in Egypt in order to humble the Egyptians and deliver the Israelites were to be transmitted to succeeding generations, so that they might also know and fear the Lord. We have an example of how these things were recounted in Psalm 105:24-38:

24 And He caused His people to be very fruitful,  
And made them stronger than their adversaries.  
25 He turned their heart to hate His people,  
To deal craftily with His servants.  
26 He sent Moses His servant,  
And Aaron whom He had chosen.  
27 They performed His wondrous acts among them,  
And miracles in the land of Ham.  
28 He sent darkness and made *it* dark;  
And they did not rebel against His words.  
29 He turned their waters into blood,  
And caused their fish to die.  
30 Their land swarmed with frogs *Even* in the chambers of their kings.  
31 He spoke, and there came a swarm of flies *And* gnats in all their territory.  
32 He gave them hail for rain,  
And flaming fire in their land.  
33 He struck down their vines also and their fig trees,  
And shattered the trees of their territory.  
34 He spoke, and locusts came,  
And young locusts, even without number,  
35 And ate up all vegetation in their land,  
And ate up the fruit of their ground.  
36 He also struck down all the first-born in their land,  
The first fruits of all their vigor.  
37 Then He brought them out with silver and gold;  
And among His tribes there was not one who stumbled.  
38 Egypt was glad when they departed;  
For the dread of them had fallen upon them.

The Lord expects the older generation to pass on to their children and grandchildren the knowledge of the Lord. They were to tell the stories of what the Lord did in leading them out of Egypt. The art of storytelling in verbal form is being lost to our culture. To be sure, some professionals are still telling stories in written form and in films, but rarely these days do we tell our own stories to our children verbally. Our kids need to hear how the Lord has worked in our lives. When we tell our stories we should talk about Him and talk about our lives in reference to the Lord.

The Lord asked Pharaoh how long he would refuse to humble himself and let the Israelites go. Pharaoh's pride was the thing that was ruining Egypt. This is the thing that keeps us from cooperating with the Lord. In our pride we refuse to humble ourselves before the Lord and submit to His will. Pharaoh was the king of Egypt, he was in charge of his nation, he was the one to whom people were supposed to submit, and he would not submit himself to anyone. His pride will destroy him and his nation. Pride will destroy us, but humble submission to God will save us.

If Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go, the Lord would bring locusts into the land. There would be so many locusts that they would not be able to see the ground, but only locusts everywhere, and they would eat every bit of vegetation that was left by the hail. The locusts would also fill the houses of everyone in Egypt. It would be an unprecedented plague of locusts, like nothing ever seen before. Pharaoh had a decision to make. This was an ultimatum. If he decided not to let Israel go, this plague would come upon him the next day. After Moses announced this, he turned and left Pharaoh.

Now Pharaoh loses the support of his counselors. They had suffered great losses themselves because of the plagues that had come upon them, and now something worse was being threatened, something that would wipe out the rest of whatever they had. They said that Moses was a "snare" to them. He was a man who was causing them to be tripped and captured. They urged Pharaoh to let the people go so that they might serve Yahweh. They tried to show Pharaoh that Egypt had been destroyed by the plagues that this mighty God had sent. They had no further thought of trying to duplicate the miracles of Moses, but only to get relief from them. Pharaoh's servants could see the obvious wisdom of letting Israel go, but Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the Lord and could only see the humiliation he would suffer and the slave labor he would lose if he let them go.

Initially Pharaoh did listen to his counselors. He recalled Moses and Aaron and said they could go and serve Yahweh. However, he wanted clarification and asked who would be going. Moses replied that all the Israelites would be going, men and women, young and old, along with their livestock. It was to be a feast for the whole nation to the Lord. Pharaoh knew that if they all went they would not come back. To his way of thinking, this was an evil thing that Moses wanted to do. Pharaoh agreed to allow the men to go serve Yahweh, but the women and children would have to remain in Egypt. He thought that Moses should be content with this arrangement. After saying the Israelite men could go, he expelled Moses and Aaron from his presence. He gave the appearance of being reasonable, but he was not in a position to negotiate with the Lord. He was being required to do God's will against his will. He could not alter the command of the Lord and obey it partially. He could not say, "I'll let some of you go but not all of you." God's command was that all the Israelites be released, and nothing less would be allowed. Partial obedience is not obedience. Partial submission is not submission. When it comes to God's commands, we must fully obey all of them.

Pharaoh's terms were unacceptable, so God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the

land, holding his staff, and the locusts would come upon the land. The east wind the Lord sent brought with it the locusts that destroyed the land. The locust plague was another unprecedented disaster that came upon Egypt. There had never been so many locusts before, nor would there ever be so many again (verse 14). No doubt there had been naturally occurring locust infestations before, but this was a supernatural infestation. The locusts covered every square inch of the entire land. The land was dark with them, and they ate every green thing that was left after the hail.

Pharaoh acted quickly and called for Moses. This time he was in a big hurry to get the locusts out of the land. He confessed his sin against Yahweh and against Moses and asked for forgiveness, and asked again that Moses would intercede and ask Yahweh to "remove this death from me." Famine and death would come to them because of the locusts. The locusts were a deadly plague, destroying what had not already been destroyed in Egypt. Moses was his only hope, the only salvation from this plague. Pharaoh had been brought to a position of powerlessness before the Lord and Moses. He could not stop the plagues from coming, and he could not make the plagues go away. The only option for Pharaoh was to turn from his sin, humble himself, and submit to the will of God.

Moses did what Pharaoh requested and asked the Lord to get rid of the locusts, so the Lord sent a strong west wind that blew all the locusts away into the Red Sea. All the locusts were completely eliminated. But again the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart and he again refused to let Israel go. The Lord is hardening Pharaoh's heart by giving him opportunities to obey. When we are given the opportunity to obey and we refuse, our hearts become hardened toward the Lord. The more we hear from Him and refuse to obey, the harder our hearts become.

#### Exodus 10:21-29

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which may be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. 23 They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. 24 Then Pharaoh called to Moses, and said, "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you." 25 But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice *them* to the LORD our God. 26 "Therefore, our livestock, too, will go with us; not a hoof will be left behind, for we shall take some of them to serve the LORD our God. And until we arrive there, we ourselves do not know with what we shall serve the LORD." 27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Beware, do not see my face again, for in the day you see my face you shall die!" 29 And Moses said, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!"

With the ninth plague there is no record of a prior warning, no ultimatum was issued to Pharaoh. God just commanded Moses to stretch out his staff and bring on pitch darkness. Thick darkness came over the land of Egypt for three days. The Lord describes it as "a darkness which may be felt." There was an oppressiveness to this darkness. Of the many gods worshiped by the Egyptians, perhaps the primary god was Ra, the sun god. This plague was Yahweh's demonstration that He was more powerful than the most powerful god of the

Egyptians. The Lord was showing that He could completely nullify and blot out the sun.

Complete darkness is something that you can feel. It is very uncomfortable. When I was a boy we visited Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico and took a tour of the caves. When we were down in the depths of the cave our tour guide turned off the lights, and it became pitch dark. There was absolutely no light there whatsoever, and it was both disorienting and disturbing. After a minute or two, the guide lit a single match, and the light from that one match seemed to light up the entire cave. That experience showed me how vital light is to us. Without it we are nearly helpless. Little wonder that the first thing God said after creating the heavens and the earth was "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

Commentators have speculated that this plague of darkness was caused by a chamsin, a wind storm that was very severe and filled the sky with so much dust that the sun was obscured. I suppose this could be, but to fill the air with so much dust that it would bring about such utter darkness seems unlikely to me. I tend to think it was a supernatural act of God to blot out the light from the sun for three days, except in the land where Israel lived. It could be that the Egyptians were not even able to use the light from lamps or candles, as the text says, "They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days." It appears that all they could do was feel their way around in this thick darkness.

After the three days of utter darkness Pharaoh called for Moses and told him to go serve the Lord. He said that all the people could go, but the livestock had to be left behind. Again Pharaoh is trying to dictate the conditions under which he will let them go. He thinks he's being magnanimous by allowing even the little ones to go. But this is short of what the Lord commands and requires. Moses explained that they had to go with animals for sacrifices and burnt offerings. He did not know for sure what God would require them to offer, so they had to take all their livestock. Under these terms, Pharaoh was not willing to let them go. Again the Lord hardened his heart.

Now Pharaoh is fed up. He's had enough of Moses and Aaron. He commands them to leave him and warns them not to come back to him or they will die. He thinks that this will put an end to this dispute, but he is mistaken. God will put an end to the dispute. Moses says, "You are right; I shall never see your face again!" He is speaking prophetically. This is the last time Pharaoh will see Moses.

#### Exodus 11

Now the LORD said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will surely drive you out from here completely. 2 "Speak now in the hearing of the people that each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold." 3 And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Furthermore, the man Moses *himself* was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt, *both* in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

4 And Moses said, "Thus says the LORD, 'About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, 5 and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the first-born of the cattle as well. 6 'Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been *before* and such as shall never be again. 7 'But against any of the sons of Israel a dog shall not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.' 8 "And all

these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you,' and after that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger.

9 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders will be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10 And Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; yet the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

We must see clearly that chapter 11 plays out while Moses is still in the presence of Pharaoh (verse 8). There is a private word from the Lord to Moses in verses 1 and 3, and then the words of Moses in verses 3-8 were spoken to Pharaoh. This final plague would not be a surprise to Pharaoh, but God told him exactly what was going to happen.

This is it; this is the last plague that God will bring on Egypt, and after this plague Pharaoh will let Israel go, in fact he will drive them away from Egypt completely. The Lord now lets Moses know that the goal of freedom for Israel will be achieved after this final plague. Moses and the Israelites had been waiting through all these plagues, and now it was time for the fulfillment of God's promise that they would be released.

God tells Moses to have the Israelites ask their Egyptian neighbors for articles of gold and silver. Probably in any culture this is a rather audacious thing to do, to ask your neighbors for their valuables. Nevertheless this is what God tells them to do. He had given them favor in the sight of their Egyptian neighbors, and had disposed the Egyptians to grant these requests. In 12:35-36 we see that the Israelites did this and "plundered the Egyptians." One insight we get from verses 2 and 3 is that there were Egyptians who lived in close proximity to the Israelites. Probably some of the Egyptians had escaped some of the plagues because they lived among the Israelites. They were spared a lot of suffering and loss because God was protecting the Israelites in their midst in the land of Goshen. Sometimes pagans are blessed by their association with the people of God. Being the neighbor of someone who belongs to the Lord can be a great advantage. God has put us on this earth to bless our neighbors. The blessings that come to us should be passed along to those beside us.

Through this whole process the people of Egypt and the servants of Pharaoh had come to see Moses as a very great man. Though Pharaoh disdained him, everyone else in Egypt could see that Moses was great and esteemed him highly. Probably many of the Egyptians understood that it was Pharaoh's stubbornness that caused all the plagues to come upon them. It was Pharaoh who was responsible for the misery they were suffering and not Moses.

Through Moses, the Lord told Pharaoh exactly what was going to happen next. He was going to go through Egypt at about midnight and kill all the first-born in Egypt. Every first-born would die, and there would be no class distinctions. From the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the lowliest slave, every first-born would die. The only distinction would be between the Egyptians and the Israelites. Not one of the first-born of Israel would die, in fact, not even a dog would bark against the Israelites. There would be an unprecedented outcry in the land of Egypt. Never before had there been such mourning, nor would there ever be again. In every family in Egypt there would be death and mourning. Now if Pharaoh were wise he would at this point have stopped Moses and repented and allowed Israel to leave. He might have averted this last plague if he hadn't been so hard-hearted. He knew that what Moses said would certainly take place. The previous nine plagues had proven that he was up against the living God and that there was no hope of successfully resisting Him. Yet Pharaoh was so

proud he would not humble himself and still would not listen.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians would see again that God makes a distinction between those who are His people and those who are not. There would be judgment and death among the Egyptians, but among His people no one would die. We see this principle over and over in God's word. When the rebellious Israelites were sent back from the land of promise to wander in the wilderness for forty years, God made a distinction between those who were unbelieving and disobedient and Joshua and Caleb who were faithful. The rebels died in the wilderness, but Joshua and Caleb survived and entered the land. Jesus taught that the weeds would be separated from the wheat (Matthew 13), the bad fish separated from the good fish (Matthew 13:48), the goats separated from the sheep (Matthew 25:31f). Pharaoh would understand this when his firstborn died.

Moses declares that all the servants of Pharaoh would come and bow before him and urge him to go out with all his people, and that he would then go out. The Egyptians would plead with him to leave Egypt. They would see that they were in great peril if they did not allow Israel to leave. They would see that they were dealing with a God who could wipe them out if He chose to do so. The logical next step after the death of the firstborn might be the death of every Egyptian! They have seen things get worse and worse with each of the plagues, and the next step could only bring about the destruction of Egypt if they continued to refuse to listen to Moses and the Lord.

The anger of Moses burned against Pharaoh. He was enraged at the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. The anger of Moses reminds me of the anger of Jesus described in Mark 3:1-5:

And He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him. 3 And He said to the man with the withered hand, "Rise and *come* forward!" 4 And He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The hardness of men's hearts both grieves and angers Jesus. These men refused to see the truth of Jesus' teaching. They were willingly blind to the truth and would not listen to Him. A hard heart keeps us from learning the truth that Christ wants to teach us. The hardness of peoples' hearts will be a frustration to us. Their unwillingness to see the truth and to hear the truth will anger us, as it does the Lord.

As God has said to Moses all along, so again He reminds Moses that Pharaoh will not listen, that He has hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to multiply His wonders in the land of Egypt. It may seem cruel to us, but we must see that it was God's purpose to escalate things to this level. He wanted the Egyptians and the world to see the consequences of Pharaoh's refusal to humble himself. He wanted the world to see the demonstrations of His power and glory. Sometimes people die for God's glory. The Lord says this explicitly in the prophesy against Sidon in Ezekiel 28:21-23:

"Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, prophesy against her, 22 and say, 'Thus

says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, And I shall be glorified in your midst. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I execute judgments in her, And I shall manifest My holiness in her. 23 "For I shall send pestilence to her And blood to her streets, And the wounded will fall in her midst By the sword upon her on every side; Then they will know that I am the LORD."

God would be glorified through the judgment He would bring upon Sidon. In the same way God would be glorified and honored through the death of the first-born in Egypt. The Lord is dangerous. He is not always tolerant of our evil and our stubbornness. He doesn't think it's funny or cute when we resist Him and refuse to pay attention to Him.

#### Exodus 12:1-20

Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. 3 "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. 4 'Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons *in them*; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. 5 'Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 'And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. 7 'Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 'And they shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 'Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, *both* its head and its legs along with its entrails. 10 'And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. 11 'Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste-- it is the LORD'S Passover. 12 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments-- I am the LORD. 13 'And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt. 14 'Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. 15 'Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 16 'And on the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and *another* holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. 17 'You shall also observe the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. 18 'In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19 'Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien or a native of the land. 20 'You shall



not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."

It was a momentous thing that God was about to do in Egypt, and it was a thing that the people of Israel were to remember throughout history. It was the event that would bring about their deliverance from Egypt. It was an event that would foreshadow a greater deliverance that God would send in the future. To the Israelites, this month when the Passover occurred would be the first month of the year for them. This would mark a new beginning, a new era, for Israel as a nation.

On the tenth of the month each household was to take a lamb, an unblemished male one year old, a sheep or a goat. If there were not enough people in a household to eat an entire sheep, they were to split the sheep with a neighbor family. They were to keep it for four days, until the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month, and then everyone was to kill their lamb at twilight on that day. They were to take some of the blood of the lamb and apply it to the doorposts and lintels of their houses. That night they were to roast the lamb with fire and then eat it together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Whatever was left over was to be burned the next morning. They were to eat the passover dressed, with sandals on their feet and staff in hand, ready to depart on a moment's notice. They were to eat quickly, because they would quickly be expelled from Egypt. The time had come for them to leave Egypt and they needed to behave appropriately. There would be no more waiting, no more delays. What they had so long waited for would finally come to pass. They would finally see the fulfillment of God's promised deliverance. They would eat the passover dressed and ready to go, in faith that God would do as He had said. The first passover was an act of faith, of trust that God would spare them the death of their first-born if they followed his instructions, and of faith that He was now going to lead them out of Egypt.

In verses 12 and 13 the Lord explains what He is going to do that night. He is going to go through the land of Egypt and strike down all the first-born. We can imagine what this would have been like if we think of those within our own families who are first-born children. In my case, my wife would die, my son would die, and my brother would die. That's just in my immediate family. Thousands would be struck dead at the same time, and all those who remained would probably be grieving the loss of more than one person.

Along with striking down all the first-born, the Lord says that He will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. I'm not sure what this means for sure. Perhaps God destroyed the idols of Egypt that night as well as the first-born, or perhaps it just means that in killing the first-born He was judging the gods of Egypt as worthless and impotent things. Numbers 33:3-4 says, "And they journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their first-born whom the LORD had struck down among them. The LORD had also executed judgments on their gods." This is all we are told about God's judgment of the gods of Egypt, but this verse seems to support the idea that during the Passover the Lord did something that demonstrated His power over the idols of Egypt.

The blood of the lamb on the doorways of their houses would be a sign or a signal to the Lord, and He would pass over (Hebrew *pesach*) the houses where He saw the blood and the plague would not fall on those inside. The lamb would have taken the place of the first-born of that household. The blood of these lambs is a picture of the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The blood of Jesus causes the wrath

of God to pass over us. His blood averts the judgment of God on us. The fact that they also ate the lamb as a meal to prepare for their departure from Egypt also echoes what Jesus said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:51-63). Jesus is our food and drink, our sustenance. We have no life apart from Him.

The salvation of the Israelites from the death of the first-born was not automatic. They had to do something. In the case of this last plague it was not enough that they were Israelites. They had to appropriate for themselves the protection of the blood of the slain lamb. They had to kill the lamb and apply its blood to the doorway and then trust that the Lord would keep His word. So also we must, by faith, appropriate the blood of Jesus for ourselves and by faith apply His atoning death to our own lives that we might be forgiven and delivered from death.

They were to keep the day of the Passover as a memorial day, a day to be remembered throughout the history of the nation. The Lord wanted them to always remember what He had done for them in Egypt. Jesus instituted the Lord's supper on Passover. For Christians, the Lord wants us always to remember the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, for us. Paul says that the Lord's supper is a proclamation of the Lord's death (1 Cor. 11:26). He says in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, "Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Today, Christ is our Passover lamb, and when we take communion we are to remember His sacrifice. He is the true Passover sacrifice for all people for all time.

The Passover was followed by a week of eating unleavened bread. The first day all leaven was to be removed from their houses. God says that the one who eats anything leavened during these seven days would be "cut off from Israel." The Lord repeats this in verses 15 to 20 and seems to underline this requirement. All leaven was to be purged from their households for these seven days from the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month to the 21<sup>st</sup>. Not only were they to eat unleavened bread, but also they were to rid themselves of all leaven. There is a lot of speculation about what this leaven symbolizes and why they needed to get rid of it all during these seven days. Some say that it symbolizes wickedness or worldliness or the idolatry of Egypt. Some say it has to do with "puffiness" or pride that we need to get rid of in our lives. What is clear from the context is that it was done in memory of the fact that they had to leave Egypt in haste and did not have time to leaven their bread. They had to eat unleavened bread on their way out of Egypt because they did not have the time to let it be leavened (see verses 34-39). Along with the Passover lamb it was a memorial of how God delivered them from Egypt.

The first and last days of the feast of unleavened bread were to include holy assemblies. They were to be treated like sabbaths, and no work was to be done on those days, except what was necessary to prepare the food to be eaten. Remembering is best done in an assembly. We need to gather with others to remember. The redeemed need to gather to remember what the Lord has done for them. This especially has an impact on the younger generations. One person telling another what happened in the past has some impact, but if many gather together to affirm the same truth, then it is harder to deny.

Exodus 12:21-27

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, "Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover *lamb*. 22 "And you shall

take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. 23 "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite *you*. 24 "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 "And it will come about when you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, that you shall observe this rite. 26 "And it will come about when your children will say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' 27 that you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the people bowed low and worshiped.

The Israelites had learned through the plagues that God really was at work to free them from Egypt, and they had come to respect and trust Moses, the man of God. As a result they listened to him when he told them what to do regarding the Passover. When he told them what the Lord was about to do, they believed him and followed his instructions. There was no more bitter rejection of Moses and what he had to say.

Moses told them what to do and why. They needed to kill the Passover lambs and apply the blood to their doorframes, and that would keep them safe from the angel of death. That night the Lord would pass through all of Egypt to strike the first-born, but where He saw the blood of the lamb on the door, he would pass over that house and would not allow the destroyer to go in and kill anyone. The blood of the lamb would save them from death. The blood would say to the Lord, "We are trusting in your word. We have followed your instructions." Today the blood of the Lamb still delivers us from death and from the wrath of God.

Moses passed on the command of God to the elders that they were to observe the passover for themselves and their children forever. The word for "observe" means to put a hedge around something, that is, to protect it, to guard it. The Passover was something that they had to be careful to keep and to guard and to observe every year for all time. The Passover was a precious thing that recalled this night when God would save them from death and deliver them from Egypt. Each year as they observed the Passover, the children would wonder what it was all about and would ask, "What does this mean? Why do you do this?" It would create a "teachable moment" when the parents could talk about the Passover. Moses told them how to answer the question in verse 27, "It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes." The rites of baptism and communion, similarly, are "teachable moments" that God has given us. Every time we observe them we should talk about what they mean.

Upon hearing this, the Israelites "bowed low and worshiped." They gave honor and glory to the Lord. They had come to fear Him and had seen His mighty hand at work on their behalf, and so they honored Him.

#### Exodus 12:28-36

Then the sons of Israel went and did *so*; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 29 Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle. 30 And Pharaoh arose in the

night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. 32 "Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also." 33 And the Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, "We shall all be dead." 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, *with* their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders. 35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

The Israelites followed the Lord's commands and were preserved and delivered. Their first-born did not die and God fulfilled His promise to free them from Egypt. They had come to fear the Lord and to trust in Him, and so they worshiped Him and obeyed Him. They would have problems with their faith in the future, but at this point they believed and obeyed. Faith, worship and obedience are the three main ingredients in our walk with the Lord, and we see these three things in this context.

At midnight the Lord did as He had said and went through Egypt and killed all the first-born. Someone in every house was dead that night. There was no family among the Egyptians that was not affected. This was no amplified natural disaster like the frogs or insects, but this was an unmistakable act of God. Pharaoh was finally persuaded to release the Israelites. He got up in the middle of the night and called Moses and Aaron and told them to get up and get out of Egypt. Everyone could go and they could take their flocks and herds with them. There were no conditions or restrictions this time. There was an urgency in his words and no more hesitancy or reluctance. Pharaoh finally sees that he must obey, that he must submit himself to the command of the God of Israel. He tells them to go worship Yahweh as they had said they would, and also asks that they would "bless me also." He sees that he needs the blessing of Yahweh rather than His curse. He doesn't want the heavy hand of God's wrath on him any longer. He sees that God's favor is to be preferred over God's opposition.

The Egyptians also were anxious to see the Israelites leave. They urged them to go and wanted to "send them out of the land in haste." The reason for this is that they said, "We shall all be dead." They realized that if they continued to hold the Israelites in captivity that God would probably strike all of them down as He had the first-born. They were scared to death and were probably in a bigger hurry to have Israel leave than the Israelites were to leave themselves. Leaving a place where you have lived for 400 years would normally take a lot of preparation. There were things to be packed, wagons to be prepared, food to prepare, etc. You don't normally just grab a couple of things and go. Probably the Egyptians helped them with this and helped get them on their way.

As God had said, the Israelites asked for silver and gold and clothing from the Egyptians and the Egyptians gave it to them. The reason for this is that "the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request." The average Egyptian had come to favor the Israelites and had come to see the rightness of their cause. They sympathized with them in their suffering. Many Egyptians probably believed that the Israelites had been treated unfairly and cruelly by Pharaoh. The Israelites had lived among

them for hundreds of years before they were subjected to slavery, and many of their neighbors were probably appalled by how they were being treated. It was the Lord who had brought this about. He worked things out so that the average Egyptian favored the Israelites. The Lord can open doors for us in unexpected ways. He can make people and officials and agencies favorable to us so that His purposes can be carried out. Sometimes we need to be bold and even audacious in what we do and in what we request. If we are acting in the name of the Lord to fulfill His purpose, then we can have confidence that He will go before us to prepare the way.

#### Exodus 12:37-42

Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. 38 And a mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. 39 And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. 40 Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came about at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. 42 It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

The men of Israel who left Egypt numbered about 600,000. This is probably the number of men who were 20 years of age or older (Numbers 1:2-3). Along with them went some foreigners, a "mixed multitude." Doubtless some Egyptians went with them who had come to believe in the Lord. The first leg of the journey was from Rameses to Succoth, a little more than 20 miles. Along the way they ate unleavened bread, because they hadn't had the time to leaven the bread before baking it.

The text emphasizes the length of time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt in verses 40 and 41. They had been there 430 years "to the very day." I don't know if this means that it was the anniversary of the very day that they arrived in Egypt, or that it was the very day of the Passover that they departed. Probably the latter. The Lord had given Abraham the round number of 400 years that Israel would be in Egypt in Genesis 15:13. Now God had fulfilled the promise to judge the nation they served and to lead them out "with many possessions."

Israel is called "the hosts of the Lord." A "host" is a mass of people, and sometimes the term is used of an army (Psalm 27:3). Often we read of the "host of heaven," especially in 2 Kings and Daniel. Many times the Lord is called the "Lord of Hosts" (for example 1 Samuel 1:3 & 11). The point is that God is not just the God of individuals, but He is the God of large masses of people and creatures as well. We tend to be so individualistic that we tend to overlook this truth. God relates to us as individuals, yes, but also He relates to us as groups. Jesus taught us to pray, "**Our** Father...", and not just "My Father...". Israel was a nation, called out by God from the other nations of the world, and He related to them as a nation and as His people. The Church is also His "host" and His people. He has called us out of the world to be members of His kingdom and His family. We come to Him as individuals and we come to Him as a group, as members of His host.

It was in the middle of the night that Pharaoh called Moses and told them to get up and leave. It was that very night that the Israelites all got up and got on their way. They may have

been departing on their way even before sunup. So this night of the Passover was to always be observed every year throughout all the generations of the life of Israel. They were to observe it "for the Lord for having brought them out from the land of Egypt." It was a monumental night. The Lord had, that night, released them from Pharaoh's grip and set them free. It was to be observed by everyone in the nation for all time. Every year they were to remember what the Lord had done for them. Worship depends on this, on remembering what the Lord has done. We remember it, we recount it and retell the story, and then we honor Him for who He is and what He has done.

Exodus 12:43-51

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it; 44 but every man's slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. 45 "A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. 46 "It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. 47 "All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. 48 "But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. 49 "The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you." 50 Then all the sons of Israel did so; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. 51 And it came about on that same day that the LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

Since some foreigners went with the Israelites as they left Egypt, the Lord here makes it very clear that foreigners were not to eat of the Passover meal. They were not allowed to eat any of the Passover lamb. The Passover was for His people only. Now the exception was if a foreigner submitted to circumcision, in effect identifying with Israel and thereby becoming a member of the nation, then he could eat the Passover. Their foreign slaves also had to be circumcised before they were allowed to eat the Passover. Some things are reserved for God's people. Baptism and communion are for believers only. Someone must at least profess faith in Christ in order to take part in these ordinances. Of course, someone might lie at any time about this and still participate, but it is a dangerous thing to do. They invite judgment upon themselves.

Other rules regarding the Passover are mentioned in verse 46. The Passover was to be eaten by each family in a single house. None of the meat was to be brought outside the house. None of the bones of the lamb were to be broken. This is again a picture of Christ and the prophecy from Psalm 34:20, "He keeps all his bones; Not one of them is broken." This prophecy is cited by John in John 19:36 "For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.'" When the soldiers came to break the legs of the men on the crosses so that they would suffocate and die, they found that Jesus was already dead and they did not need to break His legs. God is saying "Here is the true Passover Lamb." We must come to Him to find life and deliverance from death.

Exodus 13:1-16

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Sanctify to Me every first-born, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me." 3 And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt,

from the house of slavery; for by a powerful hand the LORD brought you out from this place. And nothing leavened shall be eaten. 4 "On this day in the month of Abib, you are about to go forth. 5 "And it shall be when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall observe this rite in this month. 6 "For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. 7 "Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. 8 "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 "And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. 10 "Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year. 11 "Now it shall come about when the LORD brings you to the land of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, 12 that you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. 13 "But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; and every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. 14 "And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' then you shall say to him, 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. 15 'And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first-born of my sons I redeem.' 16 "So it shall serve as a sign on your hand, and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

The Lord claimed the first-born of every family and every beast as His own in Israel. This commemorated the death of the first-born in Egypt. Since He has spared the first-born in Israel, He claimed them as His own. This, along with the Passover and 7 days of unleavened bread, was a reminder of what God had done to deliver them from Egypt. The first-born of the livestock were to be sacrificed to the Lord, except that donkeys could be redeemed with a lamb, since donkeys were very valuable. The first-born people were to be redeemed with a substitute sacrifice.

Four times in this passage Moses mentions the "powerful hand" of the Lord by which He brought them out of Egypt (verses 3, 9, 14 and 16). This was the point of the Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread, and of the sacrifices of the first-born. These things were observed to recall the powerful hand of the Lord in saving them from Egypt. It is by our hands that we fight and wage war and act. Our hands are our primary tools for doing any work, and are therefore symbolic of power. If your hands are cut off, then your power is cut off. Psalms 76:5 says, "The stouthearted were plundered; They sank into sleep; And none of the warriors could use his hands." If you can't use your hands, you can't fight, and if you can't fight, you are powerless before your enemies. The Lord has a powerful hand. He demonstrated His powerful hand in Egypt when He killed all the first-born. He used His power to bring Israel out of Egypt, and they were commanded to observe these rites to recall what He had done for them and to tell the story to their children.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be like a "sign on your hand,

and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth” (verses 9 and 16). These things were mnemonic devices they used as tools to remember things that were important, kind of like a string on a finger. The Jews took this passage literally, along with Deuteronomy 6:6-8, “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.” Also Deuteronomy 11:18, “You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.” These phylacteries are called “tefillin” in Judaism and are small leather boxes that are strapped to the head and to the wrist that contain four passages of scripture written on parchment, Exodus 13:1-10, Exodus 13:11-16 (this passage we are studying) Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and Deuteronomy 11:13-21.<sup>5</sup> These are the four passages that make mention of the phylacteries. In wearing these things there was a constant reminder of how God had brought them out of Egypt, and how they were a special nation set apart to Him.

Another emphasis in this passage is the promise that God was going to give to them the land “which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey” (verses 5 and 11). In Genesis 15:18-21 we read:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

When Jacob blessed Joseph and his sons on his deathbed, he said, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.'" (Genesis 48:3-4.) The time had now come for God to fulfill this promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The “iniquity of the Amorite” (Genesis 15:16) was now complete, and it was time for them to be displaced by Israel. God had not forgotten the promise made 430 years prior. God will fulfill His promises in His time. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were long dead when this promise was fulfilled. We may have to wait longer than we think to see the promises of God fulfilled for us, but they will be fulfilled.

#### Exodus 13:17-22

Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Egypt." 18 Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. 19 And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God shall surely take care of you; and you shall carry my bones from here with you." 20 Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of

5 Katz, Lisa, “What Are Tefillin?” <[http://judaism.about.com/od/worshiprituals/f/tef\\_what.htm](http://judaism.about.com/od/worshiprituals/f/tef_what.htm)>



cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22 He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

The natural question when we study the Exodus from Egypt is, "Why didn't Israel proceed directly to the land of Canaan?" This paragraph explains the answer. God was leading Israel Himself, and He decided not to lead them through the land of the Philistines to Canaan. He knew the nature of these people, and knew they would rebel against Him if they saw war and conflict along the way. He knew they would change their minds and return to Egypt. In fact, when they later stood on the threshold of entering the land and 10 of the 12 spies reported that the men of the land were huge, and they were like grasshoppers compared to them, and that the land "devours its inhabitants," the people rebelled against Moses and Aaron and wanted to return to Egypt. Numbers 14:1-4 says, "Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.'" When they said this they had already seen war along the way. They had defeated enemies who had come out against them. They had seen God work for them in powerful ways along the way. Yet still they fainted with fear when they heard about the men of the land of Canaan.

We have this tendency to "change our minds" when we face hardship and difficulty and opposition. Fear will nullify our faith. God understands this, that we may drop our faith and obedience if it looks like the road ahead is too hard. We may prefer to go back to slavery and back to the old ways if it looks like the life of faith in the Lord will be too hard or too costly. When we get our eyes off the Lord and onto the obstacles and the enemies, then we may hesitate about moving forward. The key is to keep our focus on the Lord and on His ability to protect us and to work on our behalf to accomplish His purpose for us.

Instead of leading them Northeast through Philistine territory, the Lord led them Southeast to the Red Sea. As they left they "went up in martial array from the land of Egypt." This may simply mean that they were organized and marched like an army out of Egypt. I'm not sure that they were armed and equipped as soldiers, though they may have picked up some arms when they asked their neighbors for their goods. As they went out they got organized and figured out how to move this whole nation more efficiently.

Remembering the request of Joseph, and how he had made Israel swear to carry his bones up from Egypt, Moses took the body of Joseph with them. The Israelites had remembered Joseph even though Pharaoh had forgotten him. The Lord had fulfilled Joseph's promise to them, and they fulfilled their vow to him. They had passed down the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and were aware of their history.

As I've studied this I've discovered that there is considerable confusion and dispute over the route of the Exodus. Verse 18 tells us that God "led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red sea." Verse 20 gives us two places along the way, Succoth from which they set out, and Etham where they camped, which is "on the edge of the wilderness." The confusion comes from uncertainty about where these places were that are described in Exodus. Evidently their location cannot be fixed with certainty.

This passage makes it clear that the Lord was leading Israel. He went before them. This is a basic, fundamental principle of leadership, that leaders go first. Leaders go ahead of their followers, they do not drive them ahead of themselves. The Lord went before them both day and night. His leadership was not come-and-go, hit-or-miss leadership, but was consistent and constant. His leadership was dependable. As they followed, there He was, always ahead of them. Our leadership is often unfocused and inconsistent, but God knows where He wants us to go and will lead us with unwavering consistency.

He manifested His presence in a pillar of cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire by night. The pillar of fire gave them light at night so they could continue to travel. It sounds like they moved out quickly, and traveled both day and night. God made it clear where they were to go. They may have wondered at the route where He was leading them, but they followed anyway. Sometimes the way that God leads may not make sense, but our duty is to follow without fear or worry. He will get us to the place where He wants us.

#### Exodus 14:1-4

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. 3 "For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' 4 "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." And they did so.

The confrontation with Pharaoh is still not over. The Lord was about to manifest His power and glory again over Pharaoh and his army. The Lord told Moses exactly where to go and where to camp. Again, there is so much disagreement among experts as to where these places are that I am not going to try to figure it out. Suffice to say that God led them to a place that was "between Migdol and the sea" and was opposite Baal-zephon which was on the other side of the sea. It sounds like God deliberately led them in a pattern that would look to Pharaoh like they were confused and lost. He also led them to a place where they would be trapped between the sea and the armies of Pharaoh. He brought them to a place where they would have to trust in Him and where they would see Him work in a powerful and undeniable way. The Lord set Pharaoh up to pursue them and set Israel up to see His deliverance in a powerful way.

The Lord knew what Pharaoh would think and what he would say. He would say, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in." The first thing is that he would think they were lost and did not know where they were going. They were aimless. Second, he would think that they were trapped, they were shut in by the wilderness. He therefore thought that it would be easy to go and either capture them or destroy them with little trouble. When you're fleeing from an enemy you don't want to be lost and trapped. You don't want to be on the beach at Dunkirk with the German army at your heels. You want to be in a place where you have freedom to maneuver and you can get to safety. The Lord had made it appear to Pharaoh that Israel was lost and trapped, an easy victim in the wilderness. If the Lord had helped Israel in Egypt, it certainly didn't appear that He was helping them out of Egypt. To Pharaoh it looked like Yahweh had forgotten about them.

Again the Lord says that He is going to harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will pursue Israel. This will bring about glory and honor for the Lord. The Egyptians would again see that

Yahweh is the true living God. They would again see the folly of defying Him and of trying to destroy His people. When God acts, He acts for His honor and for His name's sake. He does not act simply to meet our wants.

#### Exodus 14:5-14

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" 6 So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; 7 and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the *other* chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 8 And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. 9 Then the Egyptians chased after them *with* all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. 10 And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11 Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 "Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13 But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. 14 "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."

Probably the period of time that Moses had said they would worship in the wilderness had passed and Pharaoh realized that Israel was not going to return, but that they were fleeing from Egypt. He saw that they were leaving permanently. At this, he had a change of heart and regretted his decision to allow them to leave. He actually thought that he had made a mistake. His heart was so hard that he actually set aside all that he had seen and learned through the plagues God brought on Egypt and decided to go in pursuit of Israel. His servants agreed with him.

It sounds like Pharaoh himself had a force of 600 chariots that he led, and then there were other chariots as well, commanded by other officers. It was probably a very large force of hundreds of chariots. This was a highly mobile and very swift force, which could easily catch up to the slow moving Israelites. In all this it is important to keep before us the fact that God had hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would do this (verses 4, 8 and 17). It was the Lord's purpose and intent that Pharaoh should take this course of action. It was all for the glory and honor of the Lord and it was also intended to prompt the Israelites to fear the Lord and trust in Him. It also had the effect of intimidating the people of Canaan who would later tremble in fear as Israel approached.

On this occasion it was the Israelites who trembled with fear. They saw the Egyptians coming with their chariots and with their army marching after them. They became very frightened (verse 10) and did at first what they should have done, they cried out to the Lord. When you see something coming that scares you to death, cry out to the Lord. Fear should turn us toward the Lord and not away from Him. Faith and trust in Him is the antidote to fear. When we face something that is far bigger than we are that we cannot handle, we must

remember that the Lord is there and there is nothing too big or too hard for Him. Israel may not, at this time, have been able to fight the army of Egypt, but they were no problem for the Lord. He already had a plan to destroy them, and in fact, it was His plan that they should be coming out against Israel in the first place.

People who are very fearful will often over-react and panic. They will say things that are unreasonable. The Israelites accused Moses of bringing them out into the wilderness to die at the hands of the Egyptian army. They asked him why he had done this. They said that he should have left them alone to serve the Egyptians, as if they had no desire to leave. They implied that it was Moses' idea to lead them out of Egypt and not their own. At this time of fear it looked to them like it was preferable to have remained in Egypt. It was time for Moses to calm their fears.

Moses' command was "Do not fear!" There was no real reason for fear on the part of the Israelites. The Lord had planned to lure Pharaoh out to pursue them, and the Lord had planned to save them that day. Everything was under His control. The situation was well in hand. All they needed to do was follow directions and watch God save them. Moses said, "Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today." Salvation is something that God accomplishes. He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Israelites could not save themselves from the Egyptians, but the Lord could. Israel was not yet saved completely from the hand of Pharaoh, but soon they would be. Pharaoh could still threaten them, but not for much longer. How would God save them? Moses says, "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent." It would not be the efforts of Israel that would save them, but it would be God's doing. This is a type and a picture of our spiritual salvation. We are not saved from sin because of our efforts, but because of what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. God has "fought for us" against our great enemy and has defeated him through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul says in Romans 8:1-4, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." God did what the Law could not do, He "condemned sin the flesh" by sending His own Son in our likeness as an offering for sin. Through the sacrifice of the Son of God, God has saved us.

#### Exodus 14:15-18

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. 16 "And as for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. 17 "And as for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 "Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen."

It was not a time to be crying out to the Lord, it was a time to move ahead. The Lord says to Moses, "Get going!" There is a time to cry out and call out to the Lord, and there is a time to move forward in faith. It was time for Israel to move forward in faith. They had prayed, they

had petitioned the Lord, they had looked to Him, and now it was time to act. It is often easier and more comfortable to pray, but often we also need to act on our prayers and do something bold so that God can act and work with us. He would divide the Red Sea, but they had to walk through it in faith and obedience. God will do His miraculous part as we do our faith part.

Again the staff of Moses comes into play at this point. It is the tool that the Lord used to initiate and accomplish His miracles. God told Moses to lift up his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea, and the sea would be divided so that Israel could walk through it on dry land. This was the part that Moses was to play. God would use him to lead the people through the sea. They would gain respect for Moses as they saw God's power work through him and his staff. The Lord and Moses would work in concert to deliver the nation. Sometimes the miracles of God require the faithful obedience of His servant. One might ask if the waters of the Red Sea would have been divided anyway if Moses had refused to raise his staff. If Moses had said, "No, this is crazy! Seas don't divide when men raise their staffs!" then God may not have done His part.

As for the Lord (verse 17), He would harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they would continue to pursue Israel into the Red Sea. It was not courage and bravado that prompted the Egyptians to pursue them, but hardened hearts. Their eyes were blinded and their hearts hardened to the truth that was right there in front of them. They could see the pillar of cloud that represented the presence of the Lord. They could see the Red Sea miraculously divided before them to allow Israel to walk through. They had seen all the miracles that the Lord had done in Egypt. Yet they still thought they could pursue and overtake and defeat Israel. A symptom of a hard heart is a refusal to acknowledge the truth about God and about our condition that is plain. Romans 1:18-20 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." God has made His existence plain and evident, but men suppress this truth, they hold it down. They invent alternate "truth" that is more comfortable for them, such as Darwinism, and then follow the "truth" they have invented. There is no lack of evidence for the existence of the almighty God, it is everywhere we look. All creation is covered with His fingerprints. His incredible power and intelligence is plain if we will open our eyes to see it. But a hard heart will not open it's eyes. A hard heart will refuse to admit the truth and will cling to delusion and speculation.

The Lord's intent in doing this was that He might receive honor. Through Pharaoh and his army the Lord would be honored. The word for "honor" in verses 17 and 18 is *kâbad*, which means in it's simplest sense "to be heavy." When something is heavy it is important, it carries weight, it is something serious and substantial. We still use this kind of language today. If we say that we "take something lightly" it means that we treat it as something unimportant or inconsequential. But if we speak of something that's "heavy" we mean it's serious, it's something to be reckoned with. To honor God means to realize that we must not take Him lightly. We must see that He truly is God, that He truly is a God who lives and who acts and who rules over everything. When Pharaoh and his army was destroyed in the Red Sea, the Egyptians saw that they had better stop trying to mess with Yahweh. The Egyptians then knew that He is Yahweh, the true and living God who looks out for His people and works powerful wonders to accomplish His purpose.

#### Exodus 14:19-31

And the angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea *back* by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. 22 And the sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. 24 And it came about at the morning watch, that the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. 25 And He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians." 26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." 27 So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28 And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. 29 But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 And when Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

It was night when Israel passed through the Red Sea. The Angel of God who was in the pillar of cloud moved behind Israel to keep the Egyptians from approaching them as they moved forward through the sea. He gave light to the Israelites, but darkness to the Egyptians (Joshua 24:7). So the Israelites could see well where they were going and what they were doing. All night, the waters of the Red Sea were swept back on the left and on the right by a strong east wind. The text is clear that there was a wall of water on both sides of the Israelites as they passed through the sea. Wherever it was that they passed through the Red Sea, it was not at a place where the waters were simply pushed back in one direction. It must have been an awesome experience to see these things happening and to walk through the Red Sea on dry land.

Despite the awesome display of power, the Egyptians still pursued the Israelites into the Sea. Despite the parting of the waters, and despite the pillar of cloud before them that protected Israel, the Egyptians still were hard-hearted and still pursued Israel. The Lord looked down on them from the pillar of fire and brought them into confusion. He did not have to strike them dead, He just had to make things difficult for them. He caused the chariot wheels to swerve and made it difficult for them to proceed. When they realized what was happening, that Yahweh was fighting for the Israelites, they finally decided to drop the pursuit and flee. This decision was made too late. This will be the situation that many will find themselves in on the last day, the day of judgment. It will be too late to turn away from

opposition to the Lord and get right with Him. They will see that they have brought disaster upon themselves and won't be able to do anything to avert it.

The Lord used Moses and his staff to prompt the parting of the waters, and the Lord used Moses and his staff again to bring the waters back over the Egyptians. The Lord had caused the Egyptians to halt and begin to flee, but it was through Moses that their destruction was brought about. The waters would not come back over the Egyptians until Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. Moses would decide when this would happen, and it would require Moses' obedience to make it happen. Moses obeyed the Lord, stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to normal right at daybreak. This happened while the Egyptians were fleeing right back into the sea, trying to turn and go back the way they had come.

When Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, the sea "returned to its normal state." It returned to its natural condition. What had happened to the sea was not normal, but was supernatural. The waters surged back over Pharaoh and his chariots and army. The waters covered them and not one soldier escaped. God's destruction of the Egyptian army was complete, and it required no fighting on the part of Israel. All they had to do was believe the Lord and follow His instructions. The fearsome army that was pursuing Israel was wiped out in a moment, and they saw the awesomeness of the God who was protecting them and leading them forward.

The destruction of the army of Egypt was the salvation of Israel. The same thing that saved Israel brought destruction on Pharaoh and his army. This contrast is clear in verses 28 and 29. The parted waters allowed all Israel to pass through safely, but the waters then were also used to completely destroy the Egyptians. The thing that is salvation to us is condemnation to the world. Jesus can be our Savior or our Judge, depending on whether we trust in Him or not. If we believe in Him we are saved, but if we refuse to believe we are condemned (John 3:16-18).

The Lord saved Israel on that day. They could not congratulate themselves on how they had saved themselves from the Egyptians. The Lord was the one who saved them. All they did was follow His instructions given through Moses. If we are going to be saved from sin and the wrath of God it is the Lord Himself who must do it for us. Yes, we must repent and put our faith in Christ, but salvation is completely His work. We are like drowning people whose only role in their rescue is to cooperate with the rescuer.

The parting of the waters of the Red Sea and the miraculous escape from the Egyptians was a demonstration of the power of the Lord. The effect of seeing this and of experiencing this for the Israelites was that they feared the Lord and believed in Him and in Moses. They saw what an awesome God Yahweh was through this experience. They saw that the Egyptian army was powerless before their God. They saw that the Lord is not one to be trifled with and that they must respect Him. They saw also that He had fulfilled His promises and that He cared about them and was watching over them. They saw that they could trust Him to provide for them and protect them. They saw also that He was working through Moses to accomplish these things. They saw that Moses was the representative of God to them and the one that He had chosen to lead them. When we see the power and love of God demonstrated for us it should build in us both the fear of the Lord and faith in the Lord. In fact, reading and learning of these things in Scripture should have this effect. I did not walk through the Red Sea, but as I read of what the Lord did there for Israel, I should also come to fear the Lord and trust in Him.

### Exodus 15:1-21

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. 2 "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. 3 "The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name. 4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. 5 "The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone. 6 "Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Thy right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. 7 "And in the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow those who rise up against Thee; Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, *and* it consumes them as chaff. 8 "And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. 9 "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them.' 10 "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. 11 "Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? 12 "Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them. 13 "In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; In Thy strength Thou hast guided *them* to Thy holy habitation. 14 "The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. 15 "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. 16 "Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; Until Thy people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. 17 "Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. 18 "The LORD shall reign forever and ever." 19 For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them; but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea. 20 And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. 21 And Miriam answered them, "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea."

I believe this is the first song recorded in the Bible. It is the song of Moses referred to in Revelation 15:3, "And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations." The song was prompted by what they had just experienced. The Lord had demonstrated His power in an unprecedented way. No nation or people had ever seen what they had seen. No nation had ever experienced the deliverance and grace that they had just experienced. It was time for praise and worship and exaltation toward the Lord.

The song is summarized in verse 1, "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea." This summary is repeated when we are told in verse 21 that Miriam sang the song. They would sing to the Lord because He is highly exalted, He is lifted up. They would sing because of this fact which they had seen demonstrated in His powerful deliverance of Israel. We sing praises to the Lord because of this fact that is always true, He is highly exalted.



There are three movements to this song, verses 1-5, verses 6-10, and verses 11-18. Each movement begins by pointing to aspects of the greatness of the Lord, then recounts what He has just done in defeating the Egyptians and delivering Israel. The third movement goes on to look at the impact of God's destruction of the Egyptians on the peoples around them and the Lord's future plans for Israel.

In the first movement Moses begins by pointing to the Lord and what He is to him. It is a personal statement. He says, "The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will extol Him." The first part of this statement is repeated later in Isaiah 12:2, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For the LORD GOD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation." Psalms 118:14 also repeats this declaration, "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation." Probably the last thing explains the first two things; that is, because the Lord has become my salvation He is also my strength and my song. It is because He has saved me that He is now my strength and song. It is only those He has saved who have a relationship with Him who can say, "God is my strength and song." When we are weak and helpless, we must recall that He is our strength. His strength is seen in our weakness, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." The Lord would not remove Paul's "thorn in the flesh" because it was His purpose that the "thorn" should keep him from exalting himself and provide an opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate His power through Paul's weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

If God is your song, it means that He is the theme of your song. He is the subject of your song, you sing of Him. We usually sing about those things that are most significant to us. The Beach Boys sang about surfing, cars and girls because those were the things that were important to them. Many singers sing of love and romance because that is an important theme in their lives. Blues artists sing about pain and loss and hardship because those things have dominated their experience. When God is your salvation and strength you want to sing about Him.

There was a time when God was not "my salvation." If He was there, I thought He was unknown and unknowable. But He took the initiative to seek and save me in Christ, and now I can say, "He has become my salvation." Once I did not know Him, but now I know Him because He saved me.

Moses makes parallel statements about the Lord in verse 2b, "This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him." As God has saved Moses, now Moses is going to claim Yahweh as his God. Yahweh is his exclusive God, and he will honor no other god. He has decided to praise Him and to extol Him. The Lord will have the place of honor and praise in his life, and he will lift up His name. Moses will boast of the Lord and what He has done. There is continuity here, too, because Yahweh was the God of his father as well. When Moses was growing up his parents probably taught him about the Lord and about His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He could look back and see how the Lord had worked out His purpose in the life of Israel. Now God had fulfilled the promise that He had made centuries before and had delivered them from Egypt.

Moses says that Yahweh is a warrior, literally a "man of war" or "man of fighting." The Lord can and will fight for His people when it is called for. God had demonstrated this aspect of His character by casting Pharaoh's chariots and army into the sea and drowning them (verses 4 and 5). The idea that God is a warrior is not very popular today. We want to think that God is

always a God of peace, who has no enemies and is kind and friendly to everyone. But God is a fighter and does oppose His enemies vigorously. Jehoshaphat said "O LORD, the God of our fathers, art Thou not God in the heavens? And art Thou not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Thy hand so that no one can stand against Thee." (2 Chronicles 20:6.) Psalm 2 warns us of the folly of trying to stand against the Lord and His anointed Son. The Psalm concludes, "Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" God the Son is just as much a God of wrath and warfare as God the Father. It's not a good idea to try to stand against the Lord or oppose Him; you are bound to lose sooner or later. But there is grace and forgiveness for those who will surrender to Him, repent and trust in Him.

In the second and third movements of this song Moses turns from speaking about the Lord to speaking to the Lord. He goes from preaching to prayer. We need both preaching and prayer in our worship. I think too often we emphasize preaching over prayer, but here in the song of Moses most of it is prayer. Where there is prayer in the Bible, the New American Standard turns to archaic English with the "Thys" and "Thous".

First, Moses reflects in prayer on Yahweh's right hand. He says, "Your right hand is majestic in power, Your right hand shatters the enemy." Since for most of us our right hand is our dominant hand, the right hand came to symbolize the hand of power and of might. The right hand is the offensive weapon of a man; it is the hand he uses to fight and to work. God's right hand is majestic in power, it is unbelievably powerful. Because His right hand is very powerful the effect is that He is able to shatter the enemy. We see the power and then see how that power is used. God sometimes uses the power He has to destroy His enemies. We must not think that God never acts to employ His power. Sometimes when it is in His interest He will act powerfully to destroy His enemies.

The greatness of God's excellence is seen in the way that He overthrew those who rose up against Him. The word for "overthrow" means to pull something down and break it to pieces. The Egyptians rose up against the Lord, but He pulled them down and destroyed them. Moses says this is a characteristic of Yahweh. He is a God who overthrows those who rise up against Him. Those who rise up against the Lord can count on being overthrown. No one who opposes the Lord will do so successfully, not in the long term. The metaphor changes in verse 7b from tearing down and shattering to burning. The Lord is a God whose anger burns up the enemy like chaff. The anger of the Lord is pictured as a fire, like a flamethrower that completely consumes the enemy. Note that His anger is "sent forth." God's anger is controlled and directed. His anger is not capricious and unpredictable. His anger is not like ours, but He is in complete control of it. Sometimes our anger controls us and causes us to do things that we would not otherwise do, things that we later regret. God's anger is never out of control. He is not controlled by emotion, but controls His emotion.

Moses gets to the specifics of how the Lord shattered and consumed the enemy in verses 8-10. It was the blast of His nostrils that caused the sea to part and allowed Israel to pass through safely. The waters were "piled up" and "stood up like a heap" and were "congealed in the heart of the sea" by the breath of God. The enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them." The goal of the Egyptians in pursuing Israel was not simply to capture them and bring them back to Egypt, but to destroy them and plunder them. They were confident that they would achieve their goal. Note the repeated use of "I" and "my." These people were very confident of their own plans and success in achieving their purposes. But

they didn't face up to the fact that they were dealing with the Living God. Many bluster in their confidence and boast about what they are going to do and achieve, but do not factor in the Lord and His purposes. James warns us about this kind of attitude in James 4:13-17:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup> Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." <sup>16</sup> But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

We do not know for sure when we make our plans what will actually happen. We don't know what the Lord might do, what He might have in mind. We must make our plans with the Lord's will in view. Despite the confident plans of the Egyptians, the Lord intervened with His plans and the Egyptians were covered by the sea and sank like lead in the waters. Their confident boasting came to nothing and the Lord completely overturned their plan.

The last movement of this song, in verses 11-18, begins with a rhetorical question, "Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" The question is, "Who is like You?" The implied answer is "No one is like Yahweh." This is a way of saying that no one is like the Lord, no one compares to Him. The gods of Egypt were impotent before Him. No other god, goddess or deity can compare with Yahweh. He is the true, living and active God, not a man-made representation of anything.

Moses mentions three aspects of God's uniqueness in verse 11. First, he says the Lord is "majestic in holiness." The Hebrew word for "majestic" means "to *expand*, that is, *be great* or (figuratively) *magnificent*: - (become) glorious, honourable."<sup>6</sup> The Lord is great or magnificent in His holiness. His holiness is no ordinary holiness. He is holy like no one else is holy. This is why the seraphim cry out to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:3) The repetition of the word is a way of intensifying the idea. It is like saying "The Lord of hosts is very, very, very holy." Holiness has to do with two ideas. First, to be holy is to be set apart from the common, from the earthly, and from the rest of creation. God as Creator is totally set apart from His creation. He is completely "other" from everything else. He transcends everything and rules over everything. The second thing about holiness is what we usually think of, and that is purity. To be holy is to be pure, clean, undefiled, unpolluted. In this sense God wants us to be like Him (Leviticus 11:45 and 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16). In this context Moses is probably thinking primarily of the first sense of holiness, that God is completely "other" and unique from all others.

Second, Moses says that the Lord is "awesome in praises." The Hebrew word for "awesome" has the basic idea of fear or reverence.<sup>7</sup> The King James renders this "fearful in praises." Of course, this is talking about our fear and our praise towards God. When we contemplate God we should be full of awe, full of fear, full of reverence for Him. We praise Him because He is so awesome.

The third thing about the Lord is that He works wonders. When God acts and does His work directly, we call that a wonder, a miracle. Israel had just seen one of God's greatest

<sup>6</sup> Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

wonders performed for them. The parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army was obviously a great miracle of God, one of the greatest of history. In fact, even today there is much debate over where it happened and how it happened, but hardly any debate over whether it happened. Very few skeptics seem to try to maintain that it is a fiction. They often try to explain it away as some sort of coincidental natural phenomenon, but few try to say it never happened.

What wonder had God worked? Well, He had stretched out His right hand and made the earth swallow the Egyptians. The stretched out right hand of Moses mirrored and symbolized the stretched out hand of the Lord. As Moses stretched out his hand, the Lord also did the same and the Egyptians were destroyed.

Verse 13 turns to mention the way that the Lord guided Israel. Two aspects of His character are mentioned in the way that He led the nation. He led them in His lovingkindness, and he guided them in His strength. He led them because of His kind love, His loyal love for them. This word “lovingkindness” is a translation of the Hebrew term *ḥeṣedh*. The [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#) says this regarding *ḥeṣedh*:

When used of God *ḥeṣedh* denotes, in general, “the Divine Love condescending to His creatures, more especially to sinners, in unmerited kindness” (Delitzsch). It is frequency associated with forgiveness, and is practically equivalent to “mercy” or “mercifulness” (Exo\_20:6), “showing lovingkindness (the English Revised Version “mercy”) unto thousands of them that love me”; Exo\_34:6 f, “slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness (the English Revised Version “plenteous in mercy”); (Exo\_34:7) “keeping lovingkindness (the English Revised Version “mercy”) for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (compare Num\_14:18); Mic\_7:18, “He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in lovingkindness” (the English Revised Version “mercy”). This quality in Yahweh was one by which He sought to bind His people to Himself. It is greatly magnified in the Old Testament, highly extolled and gloried in, in many of the psalms (Ps 136 has the constant refrain, “For his lovingkindness endureth forever”). In Deu\_7:12 it is associated with the covenant, and in 2Sa\_7:15 with the covenant with David (compare Isa\_55:3, etc.). It was something that could always be relied on.

It was God's lovingkindness that caused Him to redeem Israel and lead them out of Egypt and to guide them to His holy habitation.

It was God's strength that enabled Him to guide them. Some leaders want to lead their people to a new place or to a certain goal, but they lack the strength and ability to do so. God has no lack of strength to guide His people. What He purposes to do in His lovingkindness He accomplishes through His strength. In His omnipotent strength and power He guided His people out of Egypt into the land He had prepared for them.

Who is it that God leads? Who does He guide? He guides those whom He has redeemed. He does not lead and guide everyone, but only those who belong to Him because He has purchased them for Himself. He had redeemed Israel from Egypt. Isaiah 43:1 says, “But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!’” Jesus says much the same thing when He talks about His “sheep” in John 10. He redeems them by laying down His life for them because He is the Good Shepherd. He says in John 10:27-29, “My sheep

hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand." If we have been redeemed by the Lord we can count on His leadership and guidance. In fact, Romans 8:14 says, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." If we are being led by the Spirit of God, it is proof that we are children of God, and all who are children of God are being led by the Spirit of God. Now certainly we can refuse that leadership or fail to follow it, but the truth is that if we are redeemed children of God we are being led by His Spirit.

The Lord had a destination to which He was leading them, to His "holy habitation." He was leading them to the place where He Himself would dwell, the place that would be holy and set apart for Him and for His people. It is the Lord's purpose ultimately to lead us to the place where He is. Jesus mentioned this as He prayed in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world." He said that the narrow road we are to take is the road that leads to life in Matthew 7:14. God leads His people through this life and upward and onward into the next. We will not be home, we will not arrive, until we stand with Him in His heavenly habitation.

The peoples who lived in the land of Canaan had heard about what the Lord had done for Israel. Their reaction was one of trembling, anguish, dismay, terror and dread (verses 14-16). Moses mentions specifically the "inhabitants of Philistia," the "chiefs of Edom," and "the leaders of Moab," and then generally "all the inhabitants of Canaan." When Rahab in Jericho hid the Israelite spies, she said to them, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." (Joshua 2:9-11) The reputation of the Lord and the news of how He cared for Israel went before them into the land of Canaan. You can fight against a nation of men, but you can't fight against the almighty God! These people could see that the true and living God was fighting for Israel, and they trembled with fear.

Verse 16 pictures the powerlessness of these people to stand in the path of the people of God. He had purchased them and was leading them. They would pass over these peoples. They are motionless because of the greatness of the arm of the Lord. God would subdue these people for Israel. This was something Israel lost sight of, however, when they later gave in to fear and disbelief. But Moses speaks of their victory over these people as if it were an accomplished fact.

The Lord had made a place for His dwelling which was His sanctuary (verse 17). His hands had established this place. Moses also calls it "the mountain of Thine inheritance." It was to this place that He would bring His people. He would bring them to live where He had already established a place for Himself. Moses says, "Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain." God will both bring them to the place and then plant them there. They would be firmly established in this place. This prophecy is fulfilled in an earthly sense when God brings them to Canaan, and especially when He establishes Jerusalem as the place where He will dwell. Micah 4:1-2 says, "And it will come about in the last days That the mountain of

the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, And the peoples will stream to it. 2 And many nations will come and say, 'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD And to the house of the God of Jacob, That He may teach us about His ways And that we may walk in His paths.' For from Zion will go forth the law, Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." This prophecy also will be fulfilled for us in a spiritual sense as well according to the promise of Jesus in John 14:2-4, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 "And you know the way where I am going." God wants His people to be where He is. He wants to plant them in His prepared place so that they can be with Him and be fruitful. The Lord is a family-oriented person. He loves to have His children with Him in His home, so He makes a place for them and brings them there to live with Him forever.

Once God brings His people into His dwelling, He will reign forever. With this declaration Moses ends his song in verse 18. Yahweh always will reign. The nations of this earth are just fleeting, temporary human institutions, but the Lord's kingdom will have no end. The kingdom He has established will not be overthrown or replaced. There His people will be secure and safe forever.

Verse 19 again explains the occasion for the song. It was sung because the Lord had destroyed the horses of Pharaoh and his chariots and horsemen in the Red Sea, but Israel had walked through the midst of the Red Sea on dry land. The Red Sea was salvation for Israel, but destruction for Egypt.

Miriam led the women in singing the song of Moses. She took a timbrel, a small percussion instrument like a tambourine, and led the women in dancing and singing. It appears that the women answered the men as they sang the song. She echoed the first verse of the song, "Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea." It's interesting to note that Miriam is called a prophetess and "Aaron's sister." She is not called Moses' sister, though she was sister to both of them. She was the older sister of Moses who had helped save him from death in the Nile when he was a baby (Exodus 2:3-8). Though she was Moses' older sister, she did not rank with Moses. She is called the sister of Aaron because both she and Aaron were to submit to the leadership of Moses. Moses was the leader God had chosen, not Miriam or Aaron.

#### Exodus 15:22-27

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. 26 And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer." 27 Then they came to Elim where there *were* twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.

How quickly our attitudes can change! Three days after the exultant celebration beside the Red Sea, the people of Israel were grumbling and complaining against Moses because there was no water to drink at Marah. The water there was polluted and toxic. The celebration and the rejoicing was forgotten because they were frustrated that they had no water. Moses did what they all should have done, he “cried out to the Lord.” This is often our pattern. Often when we run into a grave need or a frustrating roadblock we complain and grumble. We get angry and challenge our leaders. We moan and groan. What should we do? We should cry out to the Lord. We should fall to our knees and say, “Lord, there's no water here that we can drink! What should we do? Please provide for us here!” This is what Moses did and the Lord provided a solution. When he cried out to the Lord, the Lord showed Moses a tree. When Moses threw the tree into the water, the water became drinkable. Why a tree? I have no idea. He could have used a rock or a bush or a flower. I don't believe there was any special chemical property in this tree that made the water sweet. I think the tree was just a tool God used to miraculously make the water potable, like the many times He used Moses' staff.

This incident was a test for Israel, and established a statute and regulation for them, that they should trust in the Lord at such times and look to Him. The explanation for this is in verse 26, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer.” This is a command with a conditional promise. If they would keep the command, God would keep His promises. This is the most basic form of the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel. “If you listen to Me and keep My commandments, I will not afflict you with the diseases which I put on the Egyptians. I will heal you.” When it comes to our relationship with the Lord, our responsibility is to listen to Him and obey Him, to hear, trust and obey. This has not changed. Jesus said “My sheep hear My voice...and they follow me” (John 10:27). God will look out for our welfare and will bless us if we will listen and obey.

In this command the Lord goes from the general to the specific. First He says “give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight.” What does that mean? How do we do that? How do we hear His voice? The second phrase gets specific; He says it means, “give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes.” Listening to the voice of the Lord means paying attention to His commandments. When we study the Word of God and pay attention to it we are listening to His voice. Doing what is right in His sight means keeping His statutes, it means obeying the commandments we have learned from His word. Hearing precedes obeying and obeying depends on hearing, so our first step in obedience is to listen. But listening does not inevitably lead to blessing. The blessing comes when we heed what we have heard and put it into practice in our lives. Jesus said, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17). Blessing comes when we do what we know we should do.

The Lord set a precedent here for not only delivering them miraculously, but also for providing for them in a miraculous way. They had seen Him work to save them from Egypt by exercising His mighty hand, and now they saw Him make the waters of Marah drinkable by His hand. God not only saves His children, He also provides for them. He watches out for them. They did not need to be afraid. They did not need to panic. They just needed to trust Him and look to Him.

Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 And the sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. 5 "And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8 And Moses said, "*This will happen* when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'"

10 And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. 15 When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. 16 "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.'" 17 And the sons of Israel did so, and *some* gathered much and *some* little. 18 When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat. 19 And Moses said to them, "Let no man leave any of it until morning." 20 But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them. 21 And they gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt. 22 Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 then he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning." 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it. 25 And Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the* sabbath, there will be none." 27 And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My



commandments and My instructions? 29 "See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 And the house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white; and its taste was like wafers with honey. 32 Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded, 'Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" 33 And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations." 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. 35 And the sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. 36 (Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)

The first test of the Israelites was thirst when they came to Marah. The second test was hunger in the wilderness of Sin. It was a month and a half since they had left the land of Egypt and they were on their own in the wilderness. They came to this place where there was nothing for food, and so again they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The entire congregation was involved in this grumbling. Probably there were some leaders who got the grumbling started and so it spread to all the people. In their distress the truth was distorted. Difficult times have a way of distorting our views of things. They forgot the oppression they suffered in Egypt and remembered the "pots of meat" and how they "ate bread to the full." The past in Egypt now looked idyllic to them and they forgot how they had cried out to the Lord for deliverance. The people wished that the Lord had killed them in Egypt where their bellies were full of meat and bread. They accused the Lord of bringing them out to the wilderness to kill them with hunger. They reasoned that if they had been in Egypt at least they would have died with full stomachs. Here they would die of hunger, a horrible way to die! We must beware of this temptation when times get hard. We must be careful that we continue to trust in the Lord and not grumble against Him and accuse Him of having evil intentions.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 gives us some important insight into what the Lord was doing through these difficult times in the wilderness for Israel, "And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD." The Lord's purpose was to humble them, to test them to see the contents of their hearts, and to teach them. To accomplish this He let them be hungry and then fed them with manna. Hunger and deprivation will humble us and make us see how fragile and dependent we are. Hunger shows us that we are not invincible and self-sustaining. Something from the outside must nourish us to preserve our lives and give us strength. What God wanted to know was if these people would keep His commandments. Would they trust Him? Would they look to Him, listen to Him and obey Him? The answer at this point seems to be that they would not listen to Him and obey Him. They were skeptical about Him and rebellious. The lesson He sought to teach them by letting them be hungry and then providing them with the manna was "that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." We will recognize this as the passage that Jesus

quoted to Satan when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:4). We need more than physical bread, physical food; we need the word of God. We need to hear from God and to listen to Him and live according to what He says. Instead of grumbling, the Israelites should have learned to call on God and to ask Him what to do and then listened to His reply. When we come to a time of need in our lives, we must learn to listen to what the Lord has to say.

In verses 4 and 5 the Lord gave Moses a summary of how He was going to feed Israel for the next 40 years. He said, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." God's solution to the problem was simple. He would rain bread on them around their camp every day. All they had to do was go out and gather it up for themselves and their families. On the sixth day they would get twice as much so that it would cover the seventh day, the Sabbath day, as well and they would not have to work on the Sabbath. This would be a test for them to see if they would follow the Lord's instructions. Each day they would have to depend on the Lord for their daily bread. Each day they would have to go out and gather just enough for that day. He would not provide a week's worth of food at a time, but just that day's food. We have this tendency to want to store up and hoard the supplies we need and then we trust in what we have stored up for ourselves. We tend to find our security in the accumulation of things and supplies, but we need to find our security in the Lord. He is the One who supplies what we need, and He can supply just what we need when we need it.

As if they had not yet seen enough demonstrations that the Lord was with them and was taking care of them, Moses says in verses 6 and 7 that the people will know at evening that the Lord has brought them out of Egypt and in the morning they would see the glory of the Lord. They would see again another demonstration that God was caring for them. The Lord would give them meat in the evening and bread in the morning. The explanation for this is "for the Lord hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him" (verses 7, 8 and 9). Moses and Aaron were nothing, just the spokesmen of the Lord. Their grumbings were against the Lord, and so the Lord would again be gracious and would show them His glory. They made it clear that the Lord had heard their grumbings against Him. When we grumble and complain, God hears. He takes note of our moaning and groaning. He is not deaf. Too often, though, we don't realize that we are complaining against Him. If we are following His leading we must learn to accept what comes along and to trust Him in it. If we are not following His leading then it is not His fault if we fall into trouble and need. Many people find themselves in difficult situations of their own making because of their own poor choices and then grumble against God because of it. God has not promised to keep us out of trouble if we ignore Him and His commands. He has not promised to bail us out if we get ourselves into trouble because of our foolishness. He may be gracious and help us if we turn to Him, but we must not complain if we have decided to go the wrong way in life.

For Israel at this point, God put up with their grumbling because He had brought them out to this wilderness. He was responsible for the place in which they found themselves. He was planning to feed them and care for them and had not abandoned them. Their grumbling betrayed a lack of faith and confidence in Him, however, that needed to be corrected.

It's possible, even likely, that when we grumble against leaders in our lives that we are in reality grumbling against the Lord. He puts authorities over us and decides who will be in charge. He leads us to the place where He wants us to be. Therefore if we are unhappy and

dissatisfied and grumble and complain, we are really grumbling against Him and His plan for us. The Lord says, "I have heard your grumbings." He is listening.

God called all the people to come near to Him and He appeared to them in the cloud. He told them through Moses and Aaron that He was going to give them meat in the evening and bread in the morning and then they would know that He is Yahweh their God. That evening they had quail meat, and in the morning the first manna was rained on them. He told them what He was going to do and then did it. He showed them that He could easily feed them and meet their needs. In Him they had all they needed to survive.

In the morning the Israelites saw the manna for the first time. When they awoke there was a layer of dew all around the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there was the manna. It is described as "a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground." Maybe this is where the name of "Frosted Flakes" comes from! The Israelites said, "What is it?" Moses answered, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." It is described further in verse 31 as being "like coriander seed, white; and its taste was like wafers with honey." It probably could be eaten as it was, or it could be baked or boiled (verse 23). Since Moses identified it as bread, no doubt they could bake the manna into loaves of bread. It sounds like a pleasant sort of food. It was like sweet bread. The Lord did not give them something nasty to eat, but something good and pleasant.

All they had to do was go out and gather up the manna. They did not have to plow or plant or go hunting. They did not have to water any crops. All they had to do was go get the manna and eat it. God's command was that each man should go gather as much as he should eat for himself and his family. The guideline was that each should gather an omer each. Verse 36 tells us "an omer is a tenth of an ephah." According to the International Bible Society website, an omer was 2 quarts.<sup>8</sup> When they went out and gathered the manna for the first time, some gathered much, and some gathered little, but the amazing thing is that the one who gathered much had no excess, and the one who gathered little had no lack (verse 18). I think this implies that the Lord miraculously made sure that every man had what he needed for that day, no more and no less. This seems to be the way that the Lord likes to do things. He provides what we need when we need it.

The Lord told them not to leave any of the manna they had gathered until the next morning. They were to eat all of the manna on the day they gathered it. But they didn't listen to Moses. They tried to save some of the manna for the next day, but "it bred worms and became foul." The Lord arranged it so that the manna would be no good if they tried to save it for the next day. This was the first instance of disobedience in regard to the use of the manna. The Lord was showing them that they could trust Him day-by-day to provide what they needed, and that they didn't have to hoard their food or try to stretch it into the next day. He would give them just what they needed for one day, and then the next day He would do the same. Now of course the exception during the week was on the sixth day. They had to prepare to rest on the Sabbath, the seventh day, so they received twice as much on the sixth day and then as they saved it for the Sabbath it did not breed worms and grow foul. The sixth day manna was good for two days.

Just as some of the people tried to keep some of the manna for the next day, some went out on the Sabbath looking for the manna, despite the instructions they had received. The Lord was again provoked. He said, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?" There are always people who do not listen to instructions, or think that they

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8 [http://www.ibs.org/niv/table\\_measures.php](http://www.ibs.org/niv/table_measures.php)

don't apply to them. There are always people who leave their cell phones on in the theater, or blow through stop signs, or make noise in the library, or fling their trash on the ground for others to clean up. The Baskin Robbins ice cream store in town has tried to implement a "take a number" procedure in order to serve people fairly in order. The trouble is that people will not follow the instructions, and the procedure has failed. The Lord set down His procedures, but there were some who would not listen and thought the manna should be there on the Sabbath. This seems a small thing, but it is symptomatic of people who won't listen to Him and follow His directions. Any leader will get frustrated with such followers and God is no exception. The Lord asked Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?" The disobedience of some caused Him to chew them all out. The guilt of the few will impact the many. The Lord is serious about the Sabbath and about keeping His commands. He will do His part, and His people must do their part. Having repeated the instructions, the people learned to stay in their places and rest on the Sabbath. They saw that the Lord would not send any manna on the Sabbath. The Lord does not overlook His own commands and neither should we.

The Lord wanted them to remember how He fed them for forty years in the wilderness, so He commanded them to take an omer of the manna and put it in a jar and to keep it before the Lord throughout their history. Future generations were to see this bread that God had given them. God wanted them to have objective evidence of His care for them and of the miraculous way that He had fed them. The manna was put inside a golden jar and placed inside the ark of the covenant (Hebrews 9:4) which also contained Aaron's rod which had budded and the tablets with the ten commandments written on them. The ark was full of evidence of the truth of the writings of Moses. The ark and its contents corroborate the scriptures, and served to confirm the truth of them to the Israelites.

For forty years Israel ate the manna as they lived and wandered in the wilderness. It sustained them until they came "to an inhabited land...the border of the land of Canaan" (verse 35). For forty years they lived in a wilderness where no one lived, that was uninhabited. People did not settle in the harsh land where they wandered. It was necessary for God to feed them for an entire generation.

#### Exodus 17:1-7

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

The Israelites have not yet learned to trust in the Lord and look to Him. They are still skeptical of Him. They still do not believe in Him, nor trust Moses. Despite seeing miracle after miracle and now seeing daily how God provided them with food, they still did not believe in the Lord and trust Him. They “journeyed by stages” from the Wilderness of Sin to Rephidim. Numbers 33:12-14 tells us of the places where they camped along the way, “And they journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and camped at Dophkah. 13 And they journeyed from Dophkah, and camped at Alush. 14 And they journeyed from Alush, and camped at Rephidim; now it was there that the people had no water to drink.” In traveling to this place, they were following the command of the Lord. He had led them to this place where there was no water. Again He was testing them to see if they would trust Him. Again He used a fundamental need to try to get them to turn to Him.

Once again, the people quarreled with Moses. They demanded he give them water to drink. They quarreled with him by saying, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” They also asked, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” (verse 7). They angrily accused Moses of intentionally bringing them up from Egypt in order to kill them with thirst. They could see no other reason for him leading them to this place. They were quick to attribute evil motives to Moses and Aaron. People who are fearful and distrusting have a tendency to do this. They have a hard time believing that others really are trying to help and to do things for their good and not for their harm. We must be on guard against this tendency. Not everyone has evil motives. Not everyone is out to get us and to trample over us for their own profit. Some, to be sure, do have evil motives and we must be wary, but we must also be careful that we don't start to see conspiracies and evil plots around every turn. We should give our leaders the benefit of the doubt unless they demonstrate that they are corrupt and evil.

Their question, “Is the Lord among us or not?” constituted a test of the Lord (verse 7). Moses confronted them about this, saying, “Why do you test the Lord?” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says about this word “test,”

The words have a sinister connotation in present-day usage which has not always attached to them. Originally the words were of neutral content, with the sense of “putting to the proof,” the testing of character or quality. Thus, God is “tempted” by Israel's distrust of Him, as if the people were actually challenging Him to show His perfections.

Clearly in the context, though, this “testing” of the Lord was something they should not have done. They were challenging God to prove Himself when He had already done so many times. The Lord does not have to prove Himself. He is not obligated to perform for us. Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign” (Matthew 12:39). People who demand that God prove Himself as a condition for their faith are evil and adulterous. God has already made Himself evident through creation (Romans 1:18-20). The problem of unbelief is not due to a deficiency in God and any lack of proof that He has given us; the problem is with us, in our stubborn, evil hearts that refuse to believe.

Moses was afraid that the people were going to stone him to death. He cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.” Fearful, distrustful people are the most dangerous to try to lead. Moses could have been overthrown in a moment. God probably would not have allowed it, and often protected Moses and Aaron, but

from a human standpoint, Moses was in a precarious position as a leader. The people were afraid that they were going to die of thirst and did not see a solution. The solution was staring them in the face, but they would not humble themselves to simply ask the Lord for the water they needed. Instead they were on the verge of rebellion. When dire and urgent needs come up or unforeseen difficulties arise that cause trouble it does not always mean that our leadership has failed and we need to replace them. It means that together with our leaders we need to seek the Lord's solution. All along in this process the Lord was testing these people to see if they would trust Him and listen to Him. Tough times are God's testing times for us. Will we look to Him and trust Him or will we rebel and turn away?

As Moses cried out to the Lord, the Lord told him what to do. He was to take some of the elders of Israel and go before all the people to the rock there at Horeb (Sinai). He was to take his staff, the staff with which he had struck the Nile, and strike the rock, and water would come out of the rock. When Moses struck the Nile with his staff according to God's command, it turned to blood (Exodus 7:15-20). Now again the Lord would do something related to water as Moses struck the rock. This time instead of making fresh water foul He would create water for them where there was no water. The same staff that had taken water away from the Egyptians would now be God's tool to give water to the Israelites.

Moses gave this place a special name, "Massah and Meribah." The words mean "proving and strife"<sup>9</sup> or "temptation and murmuring."<sup>10</sup> Because the sons of Israel quarreled with Moses and tested the Lord, that is the name that Moses gave the place. They had asked, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" They questioned whether the Lord was really with them, was really guiding them and watching over them. It is stupefying that they would ask this question. Hadn't they seen miracle after miracle? Weren't they eating the manna He gave them every day? Hadn't He destroyed their enemies? Hadn't He led them through the Red Sea on dry land? Hadn't He led them visually with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day? How could they question whether He was with them? Yet this is what people ask when they find themselves in a time of dire need. We tend to forget the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord when we lose a job, or a loved one gets a deadly illness, or some other disaster strikes us. We all have this tendency to ask, "Where is the Lord?" At such times we must lay aside the temptation to "quarrel" and complain and test the Lord, and simply call upon Him and trust Him. We must recall how He has protected, provided and led us in the past and thank Him for His faithfulness in the present.

#### Exodus 17:8-16

Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10 And Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. 14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of

<sup>9</sup> [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament](#)

Amalek from under heaven." 15 And Moses built an altar, and named it The LORD is My Banner; 16 and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."

Sometime while Israel was at Rephidim, the Amalekites came out and fought against them. There is a little more information about this in Deuteronomy 25:17-19:

"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, 18 how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. 19 "Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget."

Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12), and these were his descendants who came out to fight against Israel. Amalek was the aggressor. They attacked the stragglers at the rear of the Israelite procession. They attacked when Israel was faint and weary. The reason they did this was that they did not fear God. They had no respect for the Lord, and so they attacked His people, which is a foolish thing to do. If you fear the Lord you will not attack His people. You don't want to oppose those whom God favors. This is the first time since leaving Egypt that the Israelites were called upon to take up arms and fight against their enemies.

Joshua was appointed as the leader of the Israelite army. Moses told him to choose the men who would fight for them. They would fight the Amalekites the next day. Joshua had one day to muster his forces, and then the next day they would be in battle. Moses would go to the top of the hill with the staff of God. As long as Moses held the staff up with his hands, Israel prevailed over Amalek. But when he got weary and let his hands down, Amalek prevailed. Moses, Aaron and Hur on the hilltop could see that as long as Moses held the staff high, they had the victory, so Aaron and Hur had Moses sit on a rock, and they each supported one of his hands. I think the staff held high over the battle symbolized their trust in the Lord to give them victory. It symbolized their prayers for deliverance. It was the tool that God used to channel His power and His work through Moses.

Sometimes a leader's hands get "heavy" and they need help. They need people to stand beside them and help them carry the weight of leadership. Aaron and Hur provided that support to Moses at this time. A leader is foolish to go it alone and refuse help. We also need to look for those times when our leaders need support. They need to be humble enough to ask for help, and we need to be sensitive and aware enough to offer it.

Because Moses' hands were steady until the sun set because of the support of Aaron and Hur, Joshua overwhelmed Amalek. In this case it was not enough to simply hold the staff aloft, they had to fight as well. Moses had to do his part, and Joshua also had to do his. The success of the troops in the battle depended on Moses holding up the staff. That is, the success of Israel in the battle depended on the God's involvement and His blessing. The Lord was showing them that as they fought victory did not depend on their weapons or skill or numbers, but it depended on Him.

The Lord told Moses to write these words as a memorial in a book, and to recite them to

Joshua, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven," and, "The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation." This is more severe than what He had done to Egypt. This was a thing that was to be remembered by Israel. The passage in Deuteronomy underlines this as something they were not to forget and tells us again that God intended to "blot out the memory of Amalek" when Israel had rest in the land He would give them. In the book of Judges the Amalekites often teamed up with the Midianites to attack and oppress Israel. It was against this group that Gideon fought in Judges 7. Finally in 1 Samuel 15 we read that the Lord commanded Saul to go and completely destroy Amalek and all they had. He was to kill all of them and all of their livestock. Though Saul claimed to have "utterly destroyed the Amalekites" his obedience was incomplete and as a result the kingdom was taken from him and given to David. Later it was the Amalekites who raided Ziklag, the city David occupied with his men when he lived among the Philistines (1 Samuel 30). Clearly there were still Amalekites around after Saul had supposedly destroyed them.

After Joshua defeated Amalek Moses built an altar and named it "The Lord is My Banner." As Moses stood on the hill holding up his staff, he had no banner attached to it. A banner, a flag, shows who has the ascendancy over a group or a territory. When US soldiers raised their flag over Iwo Jima they were saying that the US was in control of that area. It gave great courage and joy to the men fighting on that bloody island to see their flag flying over Mount Suribachi. The "banner" attached to the staff of Moses was the Lord Himself. He was in control of the nation and of the battle. Naming this altar "The Lord is My Banner" was a way of memorializing the event and the truth that they must depend on the Lord for their victories.

#### Exodus 18:1-11

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away, 3 and her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." 4 And the other was named Eliezer, for *he said*, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." 5 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God. 6 And he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her." 7 Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare, and went into the tent. 8 And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the LORD had delivered them. 9 And Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11 "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people."

The word had gotten around about Israel and about what the Lord had done for them. One of the people who heard about it was Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. He heard how the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt. This is what God wants when He acts. He wants the word to



get around to peoples everywhere. He wants them to see that He is the living God who works on behalf of His people.

Jethro got Moses' family together and came to Moses. He came with Moses' wife Zipporah and his two sons Gershom and Eliezer. We have heard of Gershom previously, in Exodus 2:22, but we have not heard of Eliezer until now. The name Eliezer means "God of help." Moses had given him this name because he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." Jethro sent word ahead to Moses that he was coming with Moses' wife and sons, and Moses went out to meet him. Moses was camped with all Israel at the mount of God. They had come to the place where the Lord had appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1). Now Moses has been delivered twice. The Lord has helped, not only Moses, but his whole nation as well.

It's interesting that we are told about the great reunion between Moses and Jethro, and how they greeted each other, kissed each other and then went into the tent to talk, but nothing is said about the reunion with his wife and sons. They were probably happy to see each other again, but I guess the important part of the story is about Moses and Jethro. It's possible there was still tension between Moses and Zipporah after the confrontation over their son's circumcision in chapter 4. Sometimes close family is not that close, and they prefer to be apart rather than being together. It's possible that Moses and Zipporah were not that thrilled to see each other, but this is only speculation.

Moses told Jethro about all that had happened. He told him about all the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for the sake of Israel. He told him about the plagues and about the passover. He told him about the parting of the Red Sea and of the destruction of Pharaoh and his army. He told him about how the Lord had led them by day and by night. All of the great things that God did, He did for the sake of His chosen people. He was concerned about them and was acting for their good and for their welfare. He had proven what He had said in Exodus 3:16, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt." Moses also told Jethro about the hardships that they had encountered on the way since leaving the Red Sea and how the Lord had delivered them. He told him about the way the Lord had provided food and water. He probably served Jethro some of the manna that God had provided that day. He told him about the battle with Amalek and how the Lord had given them victory as he held up his staff.

Jethro's reaction was rejoicing. He rejoiced over the goodness of the Lord toward Israel. This is what people need to see, the goodness of the Lord. The goodness of the Lord is seen primarily in what He does for His people. God is good and gracious to everyone to a certain level. Jesus talked about this in Matthew 5:43-48:

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you 45 in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? 47 "And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Everyone is a beneficiary of the goodness of God, of His general grace and mercy toward

all of us. But His goodness is especially seen toward those who are His children, who are called by Him, who love Him and are devoted to Him. We all treat our children better than those who are not our children. We care for those who are our own children because we are responsible for them. We are not responsible for those who are children of another. Jesus said that some are “sons of the kingdom” and some are “sons of the evil one” (Matthew 13:38). God is under no obligation to take care of the sons of the evil one. God was especially good to Israel because He had chosen and taken them as His own people. It was not because they were better or more deserving, but because He had chosen them.

Jethro's rejoicing was expressed verbally, as I should be. He said, “Blessed be the Lord who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.” It was now proven to Jethro that Yahweh was indeed greater than any other god. He may have still been a pagan, but at least he acknowledged the surpassing greatness of Yahweh. He saw what Yahweh had done for His people. No other god had ever done such great works. No other god had ever delivered his people as Yahweh had delivered Israel. If there had ever been arguments and debates between Moses and Jethro over the comparative merits of one god versus another, those debates were settled now. Unquestionably the greatest god of all was Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel. This is perhaps the most common way that people come to know the Lord, through the testimony of others who have been redeemed by the Lord. Moses told Jethro what the Lord had done for them and Jethro was convinced that the Lord was the greatest. When we share with people, we not only must share the truth about Christ, about His coming, His death and resurrection, but also we must share what the Lord has done for us in Christ, how He has redeemed us and forgiven our sins and washed us from our guilt and made us new creatures in Christ. We must tell them of the healing He has brought about in our lives.

#### Exodus 18:12-27

Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God. *13* And it came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. *14* Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" *15* And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. *16* "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor, and make known the statutes of God and His laws." *17* And Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. *18* "You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. *19* "Now listen to me: I shall give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, *20* then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do. *21* "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them, as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. *22* "And let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute

they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. 23 "If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace." 24 So Moses listened to his father-in-law, and did all that he had said. 25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. 27 Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

After making the confession that the Lord was greater than all other gods, Jethro offered a burnt offering and sacrifices to the Lord, and Aaron came along with the other elders of Israel and ate with Jethro and Moses before the Lord. Once you see the truth about the Lord and come to trust in Him, then it is time to worship Him. It is time to bring Him offerings and acknowledge His greatness. Jethro acknowledged and worshiped the Lord. He backed up His belief with action and showed that he now honored the Lord. Faith in the Lord produces worship of the Lord.

The next day Moses spent the whole day dealing with problems and disputes among the people of Israel. From morning until evening they gathered around him and waited for their turn to present their problems to Moses and have him serve as judge for them. Jethro was appalled. He asked Moses why he alone was the judge for all of these people. Moses explained the procedure. The people came to him to inquire of God, and Moses judged the issues based on the statutes of God and His laws. Jethro pointed out the problem. He said, "You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." One man trying to judge the individual disputes of about 2 million people was just not practical. It was too burdensome for Moses and too wearisome for the people waiting for the resolution of their disputes. Moses had taken on too much responsibility. Sometimes we do this to ourselves, we take on too much responsibility because we feel like we must, or that no one else is equipped to do it. Sometimes our pride keeps us from delegating responsibility. Sometimes we just don't know how to go about sharing the burden. In the case of Moses it appears that he just hadn't seen that this could be done any other way. It hadn't occurred to him that he should or could delegate some of this responsibility.

Jethro admonished Moses to listen to him. He gave Moses a plan for sharing the burden. He suggested that Moses should represent the people before God and bring their disputes to Him. The Lord then would reveal His laws and statutes, and Moses would teach them to the people. This in fact is what happened. God gave Moses His laws, and Moses gave them to the people. Jethro was telling Moses what God had already decided to do. If the people all knew God's laws and statutes, there would, theoretically at least, be fewer disputes and conflicts to begin with. Most disputes and conflicts come from violating God's laws of behavior, so if the people knew those laws and obeyed them, conflict would be minimized.

Jethro's plan was that Moses was to choose men to serve as what we might call lower court judges, having authority over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They should be "able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain" (verse 21). The word for "able" carries the idea of force, strength, virtue or valor. They were to be men of ability, of power and authority. He was to choose men who had already demonstrated leadership ability. You don't want leaders who don't know how to lead or who are too timid or fearful to lead. You

don't want judges who are afraid to make decisions or to enforce the law. You want judges who have the strength to decide what is right.

These judges should also fear God. They should have a proper reverence for God and for His law. God would give the law, and without the fear of the Lord the judges might not care enough to enforce His law. Job 28:28 says, "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'" The man who fears the Lord is a wise man. The fear of the Lord is defined as wisdom. The parallel thought tells us that the fear of the Lord is to "depart from evil." It is the fear of the Lord that makes us depart from evil. Proverbs 8:13 tells us, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate." A judge needs to be a man who fears the Lord and therefore hates evil. He hates to see people violate God's law. He hates pride, arrogance, evil ways and perverted mouths. The fear of the Lord will make a man judge properly and behave properly.

The third characteristic that Jethro mentions is that these men should "hate dishonest gain." 1 Samuel 8:3 gives us a sad summary of the character of Samuel's sons, "His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice." Pursuing "dishonest gain" leads to accepting bribes and perverting justice. People in positions of authority have the opportunity to do this, to turn from making an honest living to enriching themselves by accepting bribes, "looking the other way" when crimes are committed, and failing to enforce the law. This is why we need men in authority who hate dishonest gain. This needs to be a strong value with them. They must be men who cannot be bought at any price.

These men, chosen as leaders and judges over designated groups in Israel, would judge the people at all times. Dealing with the disputes of the Israelites would be their job and not Moses'. If there was a major dispute that was beyond their ability to deal with, then it would come to Moses. Moses would serve as the supreme court in Israel. Jethro pointed out that this would make things easier for Moses and these men would bear the burden with him. A wise leader is a leader who shares the burden with other competent people. A wise leader finds others who can handle different aspects of the organization for him. Companies these days don't just have a CEO who does everything, but they also have a CFO who handles finances, and a CIO who handles information, and others who fulfill other functions. The CEO who tries to handle everything himself will burn out quickly.

Jethro pointed out more benefits of this proposal in verse 23. He said that if Moses would do this and God would so command him, there would be two benefits. It would enable Moses to endure and the people would go home in peace. There would be a benefit for Moses and for the people. For Moses, sharing the load would give him greater endurance. The word for "endure" means to stand. Jethro saw that Moses was in danger of collapsing under the weight of responsibility he was carrying. He needed to share the burden if he wanted to continue standing. A durable leader is a leader who delegates to trustworthy people. For the people of Israel, they could get their disputes and problems solved more quickly and efficiently and be able to go home in peace. They would not have to spend lots of time waiting for their turn to see Moses and could get things settled more quickly. There is a fundamental injustice in a justice system that is too slow and overloaded. People lose confidence in the legal system if it takes too long to settle criminal and civil cases. This is probably one of the biggest problems with our legal system today. The whole process takes far too long in many cases.

Moses listened to Jethro and took his advice. He chose men of ability and put them over the people and gave them authority to judge. They solved the minor disputes, and brought the

most difficult cases to Moses. In this incident we see that Moses was a humble man who could accept advice and counsel. There was none of the pride that keeps men from listening to others and hearing what they have to say. He could see that Jethro had some good ideas that would benefit both himself and the nation.

#### Exodus 19:1-8

In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. 3 And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. 'These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.'" 7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.

Three months after Israel left Egypt they arrived at mount Sinai. There they camped in front of the mountain and there Moses met with the Lord. Moses went up the mountain to God and the Lord called out to him. This is the beginning of the process of the Lord giving Moses the covenant, the Law by which His people were to live. The Lord here gives Moses a brief message to transmit to the people of Israel. The Lord reminded them of what they had seen Him do for them, and then tells them what they will become if they will listen to Him and obey Him.

First there is the reminder. They themselves had seen what the Lord had done to the Egyptians. They had seen how He picked them up and carried them on eagles' wings and brought them to Himself. When He liberated them from Egypt with His great power, His purpose was not simply to set them free from oppression, but to bring them to Himself. When the Lord called Moses He told him that the sign he would receive that it was indeed the Lord who had sent him would be that after he had brought the people out of Egypt, they would worship Him at this very mountain (Exodus 3:12). Now Moses and the nation saw the fulfillment of that promise and that sign. Now they had been delivered from Egypt and brought to mount Sinai. Now they saw that the Lord was faithful. God does not save us simply to free us from oppression, but also to bring us to Himself. He saves us so that we may walk with Him and have a relationship with Him. His purpose is to bring us to Himself. He leads us out of the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:13).

After reminding them of what they had seen Him do for them, the Lord gives them a conditional promise. Notice in verses 5 and 6 He says "If...then." If they will obey His voice and keep His covenant, then they will be His possession among all the nations and will be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Their job is to obey His voice, to listen to Him and to do as He says. This requires and assumes faith. Obedience flows from faith (Romans 1:5 and 16:26). Obedience is impossible to the unbeliever. Once we are believers we must be taught to obey His voice and keep His covenant. This is what Jesus commanded in the Great

Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Disciples are to be taught to observe all that He has commanded. To listen and to obey is a characteristic of one who belongs to the Lord, who has been bought by Him and possessed by Him.

The Lord says that they will be His "own possession" if they will obey His voice and keep His covenant. The Keil and Delitzsch commentary says this about the meaning of this:

If they would hear His voice, and keep the covenant which was about to be established with them, they should be a costly possession to Him out of all nations (cf. Deu\_7:6; Deu\_14:2; Deu\_26:18). הַאֲדָמָה does not signify property in general, but valuable property, that which is laid by, or put aside (לְאֲדָמָה), hence a treasure of silver and gold (1Ch\_29:3; Ecc\_2:8).

Those who listen to Him and obey Him are to Him a precious treasure that He hides away and protects. It cost Him a lot to purchase us for Himself and if we listen and obey He will prize us above everything else. The entire earth belongs to the Lord, but those who listen to Him, are devoted to Him, and do as He says are a special treasure to Him.

It was also the Lord's purpose that Israel be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." A priest is one who stands between men and God and is a mediator between them. Israel was to be a kingdom full of priests who would stand between the Lord and the rest of the world. The other nations would come to Israel to learn of the Lord; this was His plan. The idea was not that they alone would be blessed among all the nations of the earth, but that God would use them as a conduit of blessing to all the other nations and peoples. We see this purpose in the promise to Abraham, "And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3). Ultimately this promise and purpose was fulfilled in Jesus Himself, who is our great High Priest (Hebrews 8). It is through Jesus that the blessing of God comes upon all the families of the earth. The book of Revelation picks up this idea of a kingdom of priests:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:4-6).

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 "And Thou hast made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

The kingdom of priests that Jesus has established is composed of people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. They are those who have been purchased by His blood and released from their sins by His blood. They will reign with Him. Jesus is the great Priest –

King, and we will reign alongside Him if we belong to Him.

The nation of Israel would also be a holy nation. They would be set apart among all the nations as God's own people. He had chosen them, He had saved them, He had made them His own, and so they would be holy. This is why they had to avoid compromising with the other nations around them. They had to listen to the Lord and follow Him instead of listening to the other nations and following their practices. This is always the challenge for the holy people of God. They are at odds with the world, and so must get their directions from the Lord and not from the world. If we listen too much to the world, we will stray from the holy path that God lays out for us.

Moses came down from his meeting with the Lord and called the elders together. He gave them the message from the Lord, and all the people said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" Moses then went back and told the Lord what they had said. He brought the words of the Lord to the people, and the words of the people to the Lord. The Lord will be true to His word, but will the people be true to theirs? We know that the answer is no, they would not do as the Lord had spoken. They gave lip service to the Lord but did not truly listen to Him and obey Him. It is much easier to say that you will obey than to obey. Our performance lags far behind our intent. Obedience starts with a decision and an intention and a commitment, but too often we begin but do not carry through to the end. This reminds me of Jesus' parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-32:

"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. 30 "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted *it* and went. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The latter." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

Israel here in Exodus 19 is doing exactly as the first son did in the parable. The Lord came to them and said, "Listen to Me and obey Me," and they said, "We will!" but did not do it. Obedience may be more difficult than we think because it is against our sinful nature. Our flesh does not want to submit to the Lord. We need to have the willing intent to obey Him, and we need to make the commitment, but we also need to have the power of His Spirit to carry through with that commitment. When we find that we are not able to fully obey, we need to feel that "remorse afterward" that will lead us to repentance and faith and a renewed commitment to follow the Lord. The "way of righteousness" that John preached was repentance and faith, and it is still the way of righteousness for us today, repentance from our sins and faith in Christ is the road to righteousness.

Exodus 19:9-25

And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. 10 The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11

and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 "And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain."

14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." 16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. 19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. 20 And the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. 22 "And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." 23 And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for Thou didst warn us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the LORD said to him, "Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break forth upon them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

In this chapter the Lord is preparing to personally speak to the people there at Sinai. He is about to give them the ten commandments. He is about to give them an awesome demonstration of His presence and power, and this time they will hear His voice. Having gotten their commitment to listen to Him and obey Him, He is about to give them the commands they are to obey. The plan is in verse 9, "I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever." God has two purposes that He mentions. First, He wants the people to hear it when He speaks with Moses, and second that they may believe in Moses. When you know that the Lord is speaking to a man, you want to follow that man. Many claim that the Lord speaks to them, but when you hear God Himself speak to a man, then you know for yourself by experience. God was going to solidify the authority of Moses by letting all the people hear Him speak. They would know that when Moses went off to talk to the Lord, he really was talking to the true and living God. Today we have the word of God and following the Lord means paying attention to the written word and obeying its commands by the power of the indwelling Word.

The Lord gave Moses and the people two days to prepare for their meeting with Him, and the meeting would happen on the third day. The first part of their preparation was that they must be consecrated or sanctified. They needed to be cleansed and purified. The word means to be clean. They needed moral and physical cleaning. They were to wash their clothing and they were to avoid sexual intercourse during these days (verse 15). Filthy, defiled people may not come before the Lord. No one may stand before the Lord who has not been



cleansed. The good news of the gospel is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7-9). Because of this we have confidence to enter the holy presence of God Himself (Hebrews 10:19-22). God has provided for our cleansing through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. We only stand before Him in Christ and in His righteousness.

The Lord told Moses to set up bounds, boundaries, for all the people around the mountain so that they would not go up onto the mountain or touch its border. This was some sort of boundary line, perhaps defined by stones or ropes or something that would make it very clear to the people how close to the mountain they could approach. The mountain would be a very holy place when God descended upon it and the people were not allowed to set foot on any part of it. If anyone did touch the mountain they were to be put to death by stoning or shot with an arrow. No one was to touch the trespasser with their hands. God is telling them that He is too holy for them to approach Him. You don't come casually into His presence. Only specially prepared people can come before Him and stand in His presence. Moses and Aaron were the only ones who would be allowed to come up onto the mountain with Him. It is a serious thing to approach God. He is spotlessly holy and we are desperately wicked and filthy. He has reached a long way down to embrace us as His children and we should not treat Him with any disrespect. If God places boundaries for us, it is for our own good and for our protection. If He says, "You can come this far, but no further," we must listen to Him and pay attention to the limits He sets upon us. If we violate the boundaries we will pay the consequences.

The people would be allowed to come to the mountain as far as the boundary on the third day when they heard a long blast on the ram's horn. The horn would be the signal that it was time to come to the mountain to hear from the Lord. The Lord would give them this signal. This appearance of the Lord to the people would be a full multi-sensory experience. They would see Him shrouded in a thick cloud, they would hear Him speak, they would see the smoke ascending from the mountain, they would hear the blast of the horn and the thunder, they would feel the earth quake beneath their feet.

Moses went down and gave the people this message from the Lord. He consecrated them and told them to wash their garments. He told them to be ready for the third day. He told them to abstain from sexual intercourse. He carried out his function as a priest to prepare them to come before the Lord. Before we come to the Lord we should do some self-evaluation. We should ask Him to reveal any sin in our lives. We should start with cleansing.

On the third day it was time for all the people to meet God. In the morning there was an awesome demonstration of the presence of God on the mountain. There was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound. The people trembled with fear. Moses led the people to the foot of the mountain where they stood to meet the Lord. The mountain smoked because the Lord came down upon it in fire and the whole mountain quaked violently. This awesome display was a summons to come and meet the Lord. Many probably felt like fleeing! The Lord wanted to strike fear into their hearts so that they would respect Him and listen to Him. He wanted them to see that He was Holy and that there is no god like Him.

The trumpet sound grew louder and louder, and then Moses spoke and the Lord answered with thunder. That's when the Lord came down on the mountain, to the top of Mount Sinai, and called Moses to come up to Him. You come to God when He calls you and summons you. We do not barge into His presence. We do not come to Him unless He bids you to do so. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44). Even Moses had to wait until God invited him to

come up to Him.

The first thing the Lord did as Moses came up was to tell him to go back down to warn the people not to try to come up on the mountain to see Him. If they tried to come up to gaze upon Him they would perish. It must not have been easy for Moses, at his age, to scale Mount Sinai, but as soon as he gets up there he has to come back down to warn the people again. The Lord wanted to protect them as He gave them the ten commandments. There was a real danger for all the people, even for the priests, that the Lord might “break out against them” if they broke through the boundaries to try to see Him. Their curiosity could lead to their deaths. Again, His restrictions are meant for their good and their protection. We don't understand how pure and holy God is, and therefore how unapproachable He is for us in our sinful state. Moses reminded the Lord that they had set boundaries out around the mountain, but God repeated that he was to go down and warn them again, so Moses went down and warned them.

In Deuteronomy Moses reminded the next generation about what had happened on this day:

*"Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children.' 11 "And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens: darkness, cloud and thick gloom. 12 "Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form-- only a voice. 13 "So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14 "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it. 15 "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, 16 lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. (Deuteronomy 4:10-18.)*

This passage gives us more insight into the Lord's purpose in this meeting with the people. He let them hear His words so that they might learn to fear Him and that they might teach their children. It was a day to be remembered and repeated and passed down through the generations. The lesson of the day was: fear the Lord. This is essential. If we do not fear the Lord we will not listen to Him nor obey Him. Proverbs 8:13 defines the fear of the Lord this way, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate.” When we fear the Lord we hate evil; we hate pride and arrogance and evildoing. When we fear the Lord we hate what He hates and we turn away from evil.

When He spoke to them He did not allow them to see any form that would represent Him so that they would not have any basis for making an image of Him. He did not want them to have any sort of pattern for making a graven image. He wants us to worship Him without having any kind of image representing Him. We have a tendency to worship the image instead of the reality, and the Lord wants us to know Him in reality.

The author of Hebrews tells us that as Christians we have not come to an experience like that of the Israelites:

For you have not come to *a mountain* that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR AND TREMBLING." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. 25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *shall we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. 26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." 27 And this *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:18-29.)

We have not come to see an earthly demonstration of the power and glory of God, but we have come to the heavenly reality in Christ. We have come to Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai. We have come to the real dwelling place of God. We have come to God's city, the heavenly Jerusalem, where Jesus and all the saints dwell. Here there is a warning for us as well that carries more weight than that which Moses and the Israelites heard. Then He warned them on earth, now He warns us from heaven. Then He shook the earth, but in the future He will shake the heavens as well. The message for us is that we must not "refuse Him who is speaking." The Israelites who refused to listen did not escape judgment, how much more will we not escape if we refuse the One who speaks from heaven! Judgment is coming and everything that can be shaken will be removed, but the kingdom we receive through our inheritance in Christ is one that cannot be shaken.

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

8 "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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 belongs to your neighbor."

As the people stood before God in front of the mountain, God Himself spoke to all of them and gave them the ten commandments. He wanted all of them to hear these words. This is the core, the essence, of His law and His requirements for them.

The first order of business was that the Lord made it clear who He was. He said, "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." They have not come to this mountain to encounter a new and different God from the one who led them out of Egypt. The same God who brought the plagues upon the Egyptians and parted the Red Sea and gave them food and water in the wilderness was the God who spoke to them now. He affirms the name that He gave to Moses. He is their God, not one of the Egyptian gods or a god from any other nation. He is their God because He had come and chosen them. They had not invented Him, but He had set His love and grace upon them to let them know Him. The Lord defines the land of Egypt as the "house of slavery." For Israel, Egypt was not a land of freedom, but of slavery and oppression. God had succeeded in His purpose of freeing them from the house of slavery. They were now His free people and not slaves of the Egyptians. They now belonged to Him and not to the Egyptians. He had purchased them and redeemed them and they were now free to worship and serve Him. The Lord leads us out of slavery into true freedom, the freedom to follow Him, to worship Him, to know Him and to know the truth that sets us free. He sets us free to do what is right and good rather than what is evil.

In verses 3-17 we find the Ten Commandments. An important thing to notice about them is that they deal first with our relationship to God in the first four commands in verses 3-11, and then with our relationship to other people in the last six commands in verses 12-17. The first and most important relationship is with the Lord God, and then the next most important thing is our relationship to our neighbors. Jesus pointed this out when He was asked which commandment was the greatest. He said, "'You shall love the lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40.)

The ten commandments are an expansion of these two essential commands. In the ten commandments God gives us specifics about how to love Him and how to love our neighbor.

Another important point about the ten commandments is that eight of them are negative prohibitions (“you shall not...”), and two are positive prescriptions, “remember the sabbath day” and “honor your father and your mother.” This is important because usually when we think about the ten commandments we think of the “thou shalt not’s.” This causes us to think that obedience to God simply involves avoiding things we shouldn’t do. But obedience also requires that we actively do certain things. We are to observe the sabbath. We are to honor our parents. Avoiding things we shouldn’t do is often easier than doing those positive things that we should do.

The first and most important command is in verse 3, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” On the surface of it in this English translation, it looks like the Lord may be saying that He is to be the top God above all your other gods. No god is to come before Him in priority, He is to be the number one God. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary points out that in the Hebrew it literally says, “Let there not be to thee other gods beyond Me, or in addition to Me, equivalent to *πλὴν ἐμοῦ* (lxx), ‘by the side of Me.’” So God is saying, “Don’t put any other gods next to Me.” He is prohibiting the worship of any other gods beside Himself. He is to be the only God we worship and serve because He is, in fact, the only true and living God. It is worthless and a waste of time to worship any other god. It is an affront to God to worship anything else. Psalms 135:15-18 says:

The idols of the nations are but silver and gold,  
The work of man's hands.  
16 They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
They have eyes, but they do not see;  
17 They have ears, but they do not hear;  
Nor is there any breath at all in their mouths.  
18 Those who make them will be like them,  
Yes, everyone who trusts in them.

Other gods are products of the minds of men and are not real. They cannot speak, they cannot hear, they are not alive. There may be some demonic powers behind them, but they lead men into deception and darkness, not into truth and light.

The first commandment is the most fundamental and foundational commandment. If we don’t honor God and give Him first place in our lives we will lack the incentive to follow the rest of the commandments. Respect for His laws flows from respect for Him and His authority. If we are having trouble obeying God’s commands, we should look at this first commandment and ask, “Do I really put God first? Does He have first place in my life?” We can trace all of our sins to a failure to observe this first commandment.

The second command flows out of the first, “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” Since the true and living God is to be our only God, then we are not to engage in the practice of making our own gods. We are not to invent other gods that are more to our liking, nor are we to attempt to depict the Lord in the form of some sort of statue or image. Yahweh has revealed Himself and His true nature, and all other gods and all other religions are man-made. When we turn away from Him we do not believe in nothing, but we will believe in anything. We have this tendency to make up our own gods or to depict God as we want Him to be. Even atheists worship the god of Darwinism, of a supposed naturalistic process

whereby all things are somehow evolving, adapting and improving without any divine or supernatural intervention. They speak of evolution as if it in itself were an intelligent process. We must be careful that we are not worshiping something that we or others have invented, but that we are truly worshiping the Lord as He is.

This command must not be construed as prohibiting artistic expression in sculpture and painting and so forth. The point is that we are not to make such a thing for the purpose of bowing down to it and worshiping it. Sometimes artwork can even serve a religious purpose. When God gave Moses the instructions for making the ark of the covenant, He commanded Moses to make it with two golden angels on top of it (Exodus 25:18-20). These angel sculptures were not to be worshiped, of course, but were meant to communicate a truth about the holiness and specialness of the ark and its contents.

We are not to make idols nor are we to worship or serve them. If we come across idols made by others we are not to bow down to them or become their servants. We don't respect idols nor work for them. We don't look to them for help or call upon them in times of trouble and need. Why is this? The Lord explains the reason that we are not to worship idols when He says, "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Yahweh is a jealous God. He will not share first place with anyone or anything. He is totally intolerant of the worship of any other being or supposed deity. He is like a jealous husband who will not tolerate his wife fooling around with another man. Jealousy is not always inappropriate. A husband should be jealous about his relationship with his wife and a wife should be jealous about her husband. If some guy comes along and tries to seduce my wife, I should get jealous and angry. I should defend my wife and my marriage. If my wife strays, I should be jealous and upset; it is a natural and appropriate reaction. There is nothing wicked or evil about the jealousy of God. Because of who He is, He deserves first place in everyone's life and worship, and when He does not receive the honor He is due, He is appropriately jealous.

The jealousy of God leads Him to action. He "visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." Refusing to honor God leads to consequences not only for ourselves, but for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But what does the word "visits" mean? In what sense is my iniquity "visited" on my children? The word is *pâqad* and has the basic meaning "to *visit* (with friendly or hostile intent)."<sup>11</sup> One commentator quotes from the translation notes of The Net Bible:

The word *dqP* (*paqad*) is difficult to translate. It essentially means that God intervenes in the lives of people for blessing or for cursing. Some would simply translate the participle here as "punishing" the children for the sins of the fathers. That is workable, but may not say enough. The verse may mean that those who hate Yahweh and do not keep his commandments will repeat the sins their fathers committed and suffer for them. Deut 24:16 says that they will die for their own sins and not their father's sins. It may have more to do with the patterns of sin being repeated from generation to generation; if the sin and the guilt were not fully developed in the one generation, then left unchecked they would develop and continue in the next. But it may also indicate that the effects of the sins of the fathers will be experienced in the following generations. God is showing here that his ethical character is displayed in how he deals with sin and righteousness.

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11 Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

There is a justice at work in the dealings of God that is not there in the pagan world.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation seems to make good sense. If the term “visiting” means “punishing” then the idea here is at odds with Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:20. Deuteronomy 24:16 says, “Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” Ezekiel 18:20 says, “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.” I think the idea is that God has set things up in such a way that I will have a tendency to repeat the sins of my father and grandfather and so on, and my children will have a tendency to repeat my sins. Sinful patterns are passed down from generation to generation. I will not be punished for what my father has done, but I will be held accountable for the same sins that I commit.

The Lord “visits” the iniquity of the fathers on subsequent generations among those who hate Him. Those who hate Him, reject Him and opt for other gods are those who experience this “visiting” of their iniquity. They especially will experience the curse of generational sin and punishment. Fathers who are idolaters will have children who are idolaters. It tends to get worse and not better as generation follows generation until you have something like Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham. Fortunately the cycle can be broken through repentance and a returning to the Lord.

Verse 6 gives us the good news. While many reject the Lord and hate Him, still there are thousands who love Him and keep His commandments. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary says this word means “to the thousandth generation,” “He shows mercy to the thousandths, i.e., to the thousandth generation (cf. Deu 7:9, where דֹּר לְאֶלֶף stands for לְאֶלְפִים.” The contrast is striking. While the consequences of rejecting the Lord will last for four generations, the blessings of loving the Lord will impact a thousand generations. God's mercy will endure to a thousand generations. God's wrath is short-term, but His compassion endures forever. As He says in Psalms 30:5, “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.” God prefers to show mercy. He prefers to pardon rather than to judge, to forgive rather than to condemn.

The great characteristic of those who love the Lord is that they keep His commandments. Scripture consistently teaches that if we love the Lord we will obey Him and that if we claim to love Him but don't obey Him we are liars. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). 1 John 2:3-5 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.” 1 John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” We demonstrate that we love God by keeping His commandments. You cannot love God and disregard His commandments.

The third commandment is, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” The name of the Lord, Yahweh, is a holy name, and it is not to be misused or misappropriated. The name is synonymous with the person. The true, living God is Yahweh, “I Am.” That is how He identified

<sup>12</sup> <http://technoheaven.com/bi/PAQAD.doc>

Himself to Moses. Conservative observant Jews will not even speak this name because it is so holy. But note that the Lord is not saying that we may not use His name, just that we must not misuse it. His name may be invoked when we use it properly, in praise and adoration, in prayer, and in properly speaking of Him. The word translated “take” means to lift, to pick up, to carry. So the Lord is warning us against taking up His name to misuse it for evil or empty purposes.

How do we “take” the name of Yahweh in vain? What are we to avoid when it comes to using His name? Let me suggest four ways that people misuse the name of the Lord. Probably the thing we think of first in our culture is when people use His name as a swear word in cussing and cursing. This surely is an example of taking His name in vain, but is probably not the main idea in view here. Just how we got into the habit of using the name of God and of Jesus as an imprecation I don't know. In any case, it is obviously a misuse of the name of God

A second way that we take God's name in vain is when we take an oath using His name and fail to fulfill that oath. If in court we swear on God's name that we will tell the truth and then we lie, we have taken God's name in vain. We have used His name to reinforce a lie and we have committed perjury. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day tried to get around this truth by swearing on other things. Jesus denounced them strongly in Matthew 23:16-22:

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' 17 "You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.' 19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 "Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it. 21 "And he who swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 "And he who swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it."

To swear by the temple or the altar or by heaven is to swear by the Lord. They were swearing by the name of the Lord even if they invoked these other things, and therefore they were taking His name in vain. James warns in James 5:12, “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.” It is better not to swear and take an oath upon yourself. Just be honest and say what you mean and mean what you say.

A third way that people take the name of the Lord in vain is when they misrepresent Him. If we say that the Lord has done something or said something that He has not done or said, we take His name in vain. On the other hand, if we deny that He has done something He has done, we also take His name in vain. When hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans some Christians claimed that it was the judgment of God on the city. Without a direct, reliable and clear word from the Lord Himself on the issue, I don't see how it's possible for us to know about this for sure. Job's friends got into trouble for doing just this thing. Throughout Job's sufferings they maintained that he was being judged for his sins, that surely he must have done some evil that had caused the Lord to pour out His wrath on Job. But they misrepresented the Lord. In Job 42:7-8 the Lord calls them on the carpet, “And it came about



after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. 8 Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you *according to your* folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.'" They had taken the Lord's name in vain by speaking wrongly of Him. They had misinterpreted what the Lord was doing in Job's case, and ended up speaking falsely about Him.

A fourth way that people take the name of the Lord in vain is when they try to use the name of the Lord when they don't truly know Him. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:21-23.) It is only those who really know the Lord and are known by Him who have the authority to use His name and can use it properly. We see this clearly in the account of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16:

But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

These men could not use the authority of Jesus because they did not personally know Him and His Spirit did not live in them. They took up His name in vain.

Again in this command, the Lord gives us a reason that we are not to take His name in vain, "for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." Other translations render this, "for the Lord will not *hold him guiltless* who takes His name in vain" (WEB Bible, KJV). The idea seems to be that the Lord will not consider someone who takes His name in vain to be clean or innocent of wrongdoing. We bring guilt upon ourselves if we misuse the name of the Lord. The Lord does not consider this to be a small thing.

The fourth commandment, the sabbath commandment, is the last of the ten commandments that deal with our relationship to God and the first of two positive "you shall" commands. The [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#) says "the root *shābhath* in Hebrew means 'to desist,' 'cease,' 'rest.'" [Strong's](#) dictionary suggests that the word means an intermission. The sabbath was an intermission to the week, a day to cease from regular work and rest.

As we examine the sabbath command, let's first consider Exodus 20:8-11 alongside Deuteronomy 12-15 because in Deuteronomy Moses elaborates a bit more on this commandment.

<b>Exodus 20:8-11</b>	<b>Deuteronomy 5:12-15</b>
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"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. 11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

'Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 'And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

In Exodus the command is that they should “remember” the sabbath day. In Deuteronomy the command is that they should “observe” the sabbath. The Hebrew word for “observe” is *shâmar*, to hedge about, to guard to protect.<sup>13</sup> The sabbath has already been mentioned in Exodus in connection with the provision of the manna in Exodus 16:23-30. By the time the commandments were given the Israelites were already observing this practice, therefore God tells them to “remember” the sabbath. The day was to be circled on the calendar each week and set aside as a day of rest. It was to be guarded and protected as a special day. They were not to fudge on this and sometimes set aside the day of rest in order to get things done. All of their work was to be done on the other six days of the week. This requires discipline and planning and preparation. (By the way, this commandment could be seen as a command to work as well. God expects that we will work and labor for six days in a week. This is the pattern He has established. God did not give us a four or five day work week, but a six day work week!)

In Deuteronomy Moses expands the list of those who must not work on the sabbath. In Exodus he mentions you, your son, your daughter, your male or female servant, your sojourner and your cattle. In Deuteronomy he adds oxen and donkeys to the cattle. He then explains further, “so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.” It could be that Moses had to explain this further at this later date because people were looking for loopholes. If the cattle couldn't work on the sabbath, then maybe the oxen and donkeys could. It's possible that the Israelites, as they obtained servants, overlooked the command that they also should rest on the sabbath, so Moses underlined this in Deuteronomy. For work-oriented, “get it done” kinds of people rest can be a difficult discipline. It can be hard to force yourself to stop working and rest. This is why God is so adamant about it. We need rest to recharge, to worship and to reflect and spend time with family and friends. In the sabbath God is making us take time for relationships.

It is striking that in Exodus the Lord gives us one reason for observing the sabbath and in Deuteronomy He gives us another. In Exodus He explained that the Lord created everything

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in six days and then rested on the seventh. Therefore He blessed the sabbath, the day of rest, and made it holy. This is the reason that we should observe the sabbath, and this is why it is not exclusively a Jewish thing. The sabbath, the “rest day,” is something built into the rhythm of the week that God established. He worked for six days and then quit His work on the seventh, and He established this as the pattern for all men for all time. On the other hand, in Deuteronomy Moses does not mention this aspect of the sabbath. Instead he says that the sabbath was a day to recall that they were slaves in Egypt, and to remember how the Lord brought them out of Egypt and delivered them. Moses then says, “therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.” The sabbath was given a secondary purpose. In addition to recalling how the Lord rested on the seventh day, it was also the day that they as a nation would recall how the Lord had brought them out of Egypt. Observing the sabbath would become a Jewish distinctive because they would be the nation that had been saved by the Lord, who knew the Lord and honored Him. To honor Him they would need to observe the sabbath. Later in Exodus we read:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>13</sup> "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. <sup>14</sup> 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup> 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. <sup>16</sup> 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' <sup>17</sup> "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:12-17.)

Alongside circumcision, the sabbath would also be a “sign” between Yahweh and Israel, that they were His people and they knew Him. It was a sign of the covenant He had established with them. Here again Moses explained that the sabbath was established by God when He rested after His work in creation.

We must further explore the question, “Is the sabbath law in effect now? Are all people obligated to keep the sabbath or is this just for Israel? Is this command set aside today?” There is a lot of controversy and disagreement about this among Christian commentators. Let me just mention a few things from scripture on this.

First, the sabbath, as we have seen, is rooted in the creation week. Moses writes in Genesis 2:2-3, “And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” It was established as God's day of rest from the beginning of all things. It was not invented after Israel left Egypt. The word “sabbath” first appears in Exodus 16:23, but the principle is as ancient as creation.

Second, the sabbath command seems to be the only one of the ten commandments that we assume can be set aside. We would never say that we should disregard the command to

have no other gods or that we do not need to honor our father and mother or that the command to avoid adultery does not apply to us, and so on. Yet we say that the sabbath command does not apply to us and that it was only for Israel. I'm not sure it's safe to assume this in view of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-19, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Those who are citizens of the kingdom do not set aside or annul any of the commandments. Jesus fulfilled all of the law, but the law is still in force as a guide for behavior and obedience. In fact, in the remainder of Matthew 5 Jesus went on to explain that His requirements were more stringent than those of the law! He said that our righteousness had to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if we want to enter the kingdom (Matthew 5:20). Jesus told His followers that they must keep and teach the commandments, and that they would be diminished in the kingdom if they didn't.

A third factor we must consider is the teaching of Jesus and of the New Testament regarding the sabbath. We can't go into it in depth here because it is really beyond the scope of this Exodus commentary, but let's just consider a few points regarding this. When it comes to the teaching of Jesus there are several key passages where Jesus and the disciples are accused of breaking the sabbath. This was a major criticism from His detractors, that He did not keep the sabbath. In fact, the Pharisees used this as a reason to reject Him as the Messiah. They said in John 9:16, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."

In Matthew 12 we read that the disciples were picking some heads of grain and eating them on the sabbath. The Pharisees saw this and pointed out to Jesus that they were doing what was not lawful on the sabbath. Jesus did not deny that they were "working on the sabbath" nor did He try to justify what they were doing. Instead, He said,

"Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:3-8.)

A clear point here is that sometimes men may fail to keep the letter of the law and yet they remain innocent. The priests "work" on the sabbath in order to fulfill the other requirements laid upon them and are therefore innocent. David and his men ate the consecrated bread and yet they were innocent. Sometimes it is necessary to violate the strict letter of the sabbath law in order to meet human needs or fulfill other requirements. Another example of this is from John 7:22-23 where Jesus pointed out that the priests had to "work" on the sabbath to circumcise a boy if the eighth day after his birth happened to be a sabbath. Genesis 17:12 required that a boy be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after his birth. In order to fulfill the law of

circumcision they had to violate the sabbath law if the 8<sup>th</sup> day was a sabbath.

Jesus pointed out that if there were an emergency on the sabbath, anyone would naturally forget about “not working” on the sabbath in order to take care of the emergency. He pointed this out in Luke 14:5, “Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?” It was inconceivable that if a man's son or even his animal fell into a well on a sabbath that he would not act immediately to rescue him! He would not say, “Sorry son, you know it's the sabbath. We'll be back as soon as we can when sabbath is over to pull you out of there.” There are circumstances in life where human need overrides the sabbath law.

In Luke 13 we read of Jesus healing a woman in a synagogue on the sabbath. She had been bent double and could not straighten up, and Jesus freed her from her illness. The synagogue official was upset and said, “There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Jesus replied, “You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water *him*? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (Luke 13:15-16.) Even the synagogue official “worked” on the sabbath by leading his animals to water. If we concern ourselves with the needs of our animals on the sabbath, how much more should we be concerned about the needs of people! Jesus says that it is entirely appropriate that this woman should be released from the grip of Satan on the sabbath day. It would have been cruel to refuse to meet her need because it was a sabbath. The sabbath is not a day to neglect human needs because of some strict and slavish interpretation of the sabbath law.

In Mark's account of the incident when the disciples were picking grain and eating it on the sabbath, he quotes Jesus as saying, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). The sabbath day, the day of rest, was made for man's benefit. It was not created to be a burden and a trial to men, but to be a blessing to them. It is a day to be enjoyed and anticipated, not to be loathed and dreaded. The Lord never meant that we should have sabbath police, going around pointing fingers and evaluating whether others were working or not. He never meant that we should define down to the finest point what constituted “work.” The sabbath had become a burden rather than a blessing to the Jews, and Jesus wanted to put it back to its proper place and function. The Jewish leaders were constantly looking for people who violated the sabbath so they could condemn them and make them fall into line with their traditions. Satan has a way of taking things that are supposed to be blessings to men and making them into burdens instead. Along with the sabbath, prayer can be one of these things. Prayer for many is a burdensome obligation rather than a blessing and a great privilege. Instead of enjoying prayer and enjoying the sabbath we are riddled with guilt over how we are not “doing it right” or not doing it well enough. We are too obsessed with examining our performance to enjoy these things and use them as they were intended. We need to learn to relax and enjoy the sabbath and enjoy prayer as God intended.

Jesus said that He is Lord of the sabbath. He is in control of the sabbath, and the sabbath is not in control of Him. He created the sabbath and transcends the sabbath. He is not subject to the sabbath, but the sabbath is subject to Him. He is the one who decides what may and may not be done on the sabbath. From what we've seen, it's fine with Jesus to meet human needs on the sabbath. It's OK to take care of your animals on the sabbath. It is necessary to work if an emergency arises on the sabbath. There is no problem with healing on the sabbath.

The apostle Paul has an important comment on the sabbath in Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17 things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." The sabbath is a shadow of which Christ is the substance. The author of Hebrews tells us that those who believe in Christ enter the true rest of God (see Hebrews 4). The place where we find true rest is in Christ Himself. He said that if we would come to Him He would give us rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30). In Christ we cease from our works, from our fleshly attempts to get into the kingdom of heaven, and we rest in Him. He has done all the work for us. On a spiritual level true rest, real rest, is in Christ. The sabbath is a picture of this rest that we receive in Him. I think we still need to observe a day of rest during the week for the sake of our physical and emotional health, but true rest for our souls only comes from Jesus.

If we in the church and in society today have made any error regarding the sabbath law, I think that it is in setting it aside completely. When I was a boy Sunday, the "Lord's day" was considered to be the sabbath, and virtually every business was closed on Sunday. There were a few supermarkets and some gas stations that were open on Sundays, but just about everything else was closed. If you needed to shop, you had to do it on a day other than Sunday. If there was something you needed, you planned to get it sometime Monday through Saturday because you knew everything would be closed on Sunday. Now, of course, there are still many small businesses that close on Sundays, but today all the larger stores and restaurants (except for Chik-fil-A) are open for business as usual on Sunday. It is interesting to read the fact sheet from Chik-fil-A about why their restaurants close on Sundays:

Of the many unique characteristics that distinguish Chick-fil-A, Inc. from other quick-service restaurant companies, the most notable – and the most asked about – tradition is that of closing all its more than 1,380 restaurants on Sunday. Following is a brief explanation of how the "Closed-on-Sunday" policy started and why it will continue to remain in place.

Since Truett Cathy, founder and CEO of Chick-fil-A, opened his first restaurant in 1946, he has made his Closed-on-Sunday policy as much a part of the Chick-fil-A brand as the original Chick-fil-A® Chicken Sandwich. While many question the chain's policy and how Chick-fil-A could forgo sales on one of the busiest days for food service, Cathy answers challengers by saying closing on Sunday is one of the best business decisions he has ever made.

Cathy's practice of closing his restaurants on Sunday is unique to the restaurant business and a testament to his faith in God. Within the first week of business at his Dwarf Grill restaurant in Hapeville, Ga. more than 60 years ago, Cathy knew that he would not deal with money on the "Lord's Day." Today, the Closed-on-Sunday policy is reflected in the company's Corporate Purpose:

**To glorify God by being a faithful steward to all that is entrusted to us.  
To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A.**

Cathy believes that being closed on Sunday says two important things to people: One, that there must be something special about the way Chick-fil-A people view their spiritual life; and, two, that there must be something special about how Chick-fil-A feels about its people.

Cathy believes that by giving employees Sunday off as a day for family, worship, fellowship or rest, the company attracts quality people. And people, Cathy says, are the cornerstone of all that Chick-fil-A does as a chain. Chick-fil-A has the opportunity to attract individuals who want to be associated with an organization with a values-based vision, is purpose-driven and that truly values a balance between work and family.

In today's business world, the Closed-on-Sunday policy may seem to be a costly business decision. But, as company sales figures have consistently proven, Chick-fil-A restaurants often generate more business per square foot in six days than many other quick-service restaurants produce in seven. Chick-fil-A generated more than \$2.64 billion dollars in sales in 2007, and the chain has enjoyed sales gains for 40 consecutive years (every year since the first Chick-fil-A restaurant opened in 1967). Cathy credits "blessings from the Lord" for the great success the company has enjoyed, and he remains as committed as ever to maintaining the Closed-on-Sunday policy. "I feel it's the best business decision I ever made," says Cathy.<sup>14</sup>

I think that we still need to observe the sabbath principle today, that we need a day of rest during the week. In today's world it is not always possible for us to do this on Saturday or on Sunday, but I think we need to set aside one day a week when we do not do our usual work and we worship and spend time with family and friends. It is a pattern that the Lord God Himself set in creation and established for our benefit.

The fifth commandment is the first of the commandments that have to do with our relationships with other people and how we treat them. It is also the second of the positive or prescriptive commands (not a prohibition, "You shall not...", but a prescription, "You shall..."). Significantly, the first command having to do with our relationship to others deals with how we treat our parents, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you." The two positive commandments, the sabbath law and the requirement to honor parents, are brought together in Leviticus 19:2-3, "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God.'" Both of these commandments require us to be intentional and to take active steps to fulfill them. It is often easier to avoid doing things we shouldn't than it is to actively do things that we should.

The Hebrew word for honor is *kâbad*, and is a root word meaning "to be heavy."<sup>15</sup> The command is to recognize the weight or importance that our parents carry. We are to give our parents the respect that they deserve. We are prohibited from treating our parents lightly or not taking them seriously. Proverbs 30:17 says, "The eye that mocks a father, And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it." To mock or scorn father or mother is a violation of this commandment. Our relationship to our parents is our first relationship, and it brings with it the obligation to honor them.

The Lord says that honoring our parents will prolong our days in the land. The parallel command in Deuteronomy 5:16 expands on this a bit, "Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you." If they wanted their lives prolonged and if they wanted things to go well with them in the land He was giving them, then one key was that they had to honor their parents. This commandment is clearly affirmed in the New Testament as Paul writes in Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH." To this commandment is attached a promise of success and long life. We also see that one aspect of honoring father and mother is obedience. A young child who will not obey his parents is not honoring them as he should. This is what honoring our parents means when we are young, that we obey them and submit to their authority. We recognize that God

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14 [http://www.chick-fil-a.com/pressroom/downloads/fact\\_sheets/Closed\\_on\\_Sunday.pdf](http://www.chick-fil-a.com/pressroom/downloads/fact_sheets/Closed_on_Sunday.pdf)

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has put them in authority over us and we owe them our cooperation.

When we are adults we still have a responsibility to honor our parents. Jesus talked about one aspect of this when He confronted the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 15. The Pharisees and scribes confronted Jesus because His disciples did not observe the tradition of washing their hands before eating. Jesus had a scathing reply,

And He answered and said to them, "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.' 5 "But you say, 'Whoever shall say to *his* father or mother, "Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given *to God*," 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And *thus* you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 8 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 9 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" (Matthew 15:3-9.)

The Pharisees and scribes taught that one could get around the requirement of honoring father and mother by claiming that his wealth had been dedicated to God. They would say to their parents, "Sorry Mom and Dad, I wish I could help you, but the money I had that I could have used for you has been given to God." Jesus is saying here that for an adult child part of what it means to honor our parents is to support them in their old age when they can no longer work and support themselves. We have an obligation in the sight of God to care for our parents and to use our resources to help them when they are old. This was God's retirement program for the elderly. Many older people insist that they do not want to be a "burden" to their children, but God's plan was that children should take care of their parents when they are old. Of course in biblical times families usually lived together on the same land for generations. Sons would inherit their fathers' property and stay there. They would be nearby so that they could take care of each other. There was more mutual dependence than there is now in our society. Today we encourage our kids to leave the nest and move elsewhere and be independent. We tend to see ourselves as failures if our kids stay at home for too long. But we still have this obligation to honor our parents. We have a duty to care for them. The Lord is watching and will reward those who honor their parents with a long life and prosperity.

"You shall not murder" is the sixth commandment. The Hebrew word for "murder" is *râtsach*, "A primitive root; properly to *dash* in pieces, that is, *kill* (a human being), especially to *murder*: - put to death, kill, (man-) slay (-er), murder (-er)."<sup>16</sup> The prohibitions here against murder, adultery and stealing are each short, two-word sentences, "No murder. No adultery. No stealing." The Lord does not elaborate on them at this point, but later there is clarification on certain points, particularly where the death of a person at the hands of another is involved. Moses says later in Deuteronomy 19:4-6, "Now this is the case of the manslayer who may flee there and live: when he kills his friend unintentionally, not hating him previously-- 5 as when a *man* goes into the forest with his friend to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down the tree, and the iron *head* slips off the handle and strikes his friend so that he dies-- he may flee to one of these cities and live; 6 lest the avenger of blood pursue the manslayer in the heat of his anger, and overtake him, because the way is long, and take his life, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated him previously." Clearly there is a

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distinction made between intentional and unintentional killing. It is premeditated murder that is prohibited. Accidents will happen and people will die as a result, but no one was to be held guilty for accidentally killing someone else.

Jesus expanded this commandment. He said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell" (Matthew 5:21-22). Jesus says that being angry with a brother makes us guilty. The word "*raca*" means empty or worthless. To angrily call someone a fool makes us guilty enough for hell. Murder flows out of anger, rage and disdain for others, and so anger is the root of murder. The Lord judges not just our external deeds, but our intentions as well. He looks at the heart. Most of us have the hearts of murderers. We have often been angry enough to kill others if we hadn't been restrained by the thought of consequences. This exposition and expansion of the commandment indicts us all and makes us all guilty.

The prohibition of adultery is the seventh commandment. Sexual relationships outside of marriage are prohibited. Leviticus chapter 20 spells things out very explicitly:

'If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. 11 'If *there is* a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 12 'If *there is* a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 13 'If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 14 'If *there is* a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no immorality in your midst. 15 'If *there is* a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal. 16 'If *there is* a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. 17 'If *there is* a man who takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he bears his guilt. (Leviticus 20:10-17)

Adultery was a capital offense calling for the death penalty. We see here that the Lord also clearly condemns homosexual behavior, incest and bestiality. To claim that any of these things is natural and normal and harmless and approved by God is blasphemy. Genesis 2:24 defines marriage and the proper context for the sexual relationship, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." It is in a one man – one woman marriage that sexual intercourse is intended and blessed by God.

Again, Jesus expanded this commandment in Matthew 5:27-28, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." In saying this He did not contradict the commandment, but expanded it. When we look at

someone to lust after them, we have committed internal adultery. We have violated this command in our hearts. Thus, most all of us are adulterers according to the standard of Jesus. The act of adultery starts in our hearts. We commit adultery there before we do it physically. In Matthew 15:19-20 Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." He also taught that when we divorce and remarry we commit adultery (Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9) except in the case of immorality or unchastity. We must not think that we are guiltless if we have not physically committed adultery. We have probably often committed the act in our hearts.

"You shall not steal" is the eighth commandment. The Lord respects private property rights. If something belongs to someone else I am not to take it from them. Jesus pointed out that this is the weakness of earthly treasure. Jesus said that treasure laid up on earth is subject to the thieves who "break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19) and urged us to lay up treasure in heaven where this does not happen. Jesus pointed to the truth that a "strong man" will protect his property against thieves (Mark 3:27 and Luke 11:21-22). Since the Lord recognizes property rights, we must recognize them as well.

The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." I suppose this commandment prohibits lying and false gossip, but in particular it prohibits a false accusation against someone. This is speaking of telling a lie **against** a neighbor. It is a particularly malicious kind of lie. It is a lie designed to get someone in trouble, to get them prosecuted for something they did not do. Moses expanded on this in Deuteronomy 19:15-20:

"A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. 16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days. 18 "And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. 20 "And the rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.

In court you can't trust the word of one person who brings an accusation against someone else. You can't know what their motive is. If a man was accused by another, the judges were to investigate thoroughly. They were to do the work of detectives. A man was not to be assumed to be guilty just because he was accused by someone else. This is probably where we get our idea of presuming innocence unless guilt can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. If there were two or more witnesses to the wrongdoing, then it is more probable that the man was guilty. If the judges found that the accusation was false, then they were to punish the accuser as he had intended to punish the one he accused. This would have a social effect. Others in the nation would hear what had happened to the false accuser and would not follow his example. When false accusations are allowed to stand and become commonplace it leads to injustice, chaos and violence. We must not be quick to assume guilt if we hear a rumor about someone.

Proverbs says a number of things about false witnesses. Proverbs 6:19 says that a false witness is one who utters lies and who "spreads strife among brothers." It is one of the seven

things that God hates and are an abomination to Him. Proverbs 12:17 says, "He who speaks truth tells what is right, But a false witness, deceit." Proverbs 14:5 says, "A faithful witness will not lie, But a false witness speaks lies." Proverbs 19:5, "A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who tells lies will not escape." Proverbs 21:28, "A false witness will perish, But the man who listens *to the truth* will speak forever. Proverbs 25:18, "*Like* a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor." It is a dangerous thing to be a false witness. If we bear false witness against others we will not escape the justice of God.

The last of the ten commandments is a unique one because it deals with our inner life rather than our outer life. It deals with desire rather than behavior. In a nutshell it says, "You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor." Whether it's your neighbor's house, his wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, you are not to covet anything he has. This command prohibits desire for something that belongs to someone else. It is a prohibition of lust and evil desire. The Lord knows, and we know too, that this is the root of many evils. James writes, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:1-2). In James 1:13-15 he says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Lust, evil desire, coveting, is the thing that carries us away and entices us to sin. It is the source of temptation. We see it operating in the first temptation of the woman in the garden. Genesis 3:6 says, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." She desired the forbidden fruit and so she took it and ate it. The coveting, the desire, brought forth the sin. In the tenth commandment God tells us to cut off sin at the root, at the point of desire.

Paul says he had a problem with this commandment. He says that the commandment is good and right, but the problem was that it actually had the effect of creating covetousness in him! He writes in Romans 7:5-11:

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. 7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. 9 And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.

The problem is not with the law, with the commandment, but with my flesh. Our sinful,

fleshly passions are “aroused by the law.” Paul illustrates this by pointing to the commandment prohibiting coveting. He would have been ignorant of coveting if the law had not contained this commandment. Sin in him used the law against coveting to produce all kinds of coveting in Paul's life. The commandment stimulates our sinful nature to produce the sin it prohibits. The good news from Romans 7 and 8 is that followers of Christ are able to “serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.” We can walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh (Romans 8:1-14). By the Spirit we can “put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13). The Holy Spirit in us is the one who enables us to refuse the temptations of our covetous, sinful flesh.

#### Exodus 20:18-26

And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. 19 Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." 20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."

21 So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. 22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 'You shall not make *other gods* besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. 24 'You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. 25 'And if you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. 26 'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

This was an awesome and frightening experience for the Israelites. They heard the thunder and saw the lightning on the mountain. They heard the loud trumpet sound and saw the mountain smoking. They didn't have to be told to stay away, they stood at a distance on their own initiative. They were too frightened to come closer. They were so afraid they thought they were going to die. They asked Moses to be their mediator. They asked to hear from God through him rather than hearing directly from God Himself. What they say here sounds kind of absurd when you think about it. They said, “let not God speak to us, lest we die,” as if Moses had the authority to restrict the words and activity of God. If God wants to speak to you, He will speak. No man has authority over God, not even Moses! When God speaks to you directly it is a scary thing. When He shows up in person there is an overwhelming sense of our own sinfulness and filthiness in the presence of total holiness.

Moses reassured them and told them not to be afraid. God had not come and spoken to them in order to kill them. Moses tells them explicitly what God's purpose was in appearing to them and speaking to them. He said, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” There were two purposes to God's appearance before them. First, He was testing them. He had given them specific instructions about this moment, about not coming too close and not attempting to come up to Him on the mountain and so forth. As He spoke to them He was testing whether they would listen and obey. Would they follow the instructions He had given them? In

this case it appears that they did. Second, He wanted them to fear Him so that they would be kept from sin. The King James version translates this literally, "that His fear may be before your faces." God wanted them to have a persistent fear of Him. He wanted them to remember this awesome moment so that when they thought of violating His commands they would recall how frightened they were in His presence. The fear of the Lord is the thing that keeps us from sin. Job 28:28 defines the fear of the Lord, "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'" The fear of the Lord is wisdom and it means to depart from evil. The man who fears the Lord departs from evil. Proverbs 16:6 says, "By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil." A major key to avoiding sin is to cultivate the fear of the Lord.

Moses complied with the wishes of the people and approached the Lord who was in the thick cloud, and the Lord spoke to him and told him what to say to the people. The first thing was to remind them of their experience. They had personally heard Him speak to them from heaven. They were very privileged people. They had heard the voice of God Himself directly. This is a rare experience. God had done them a great favor by appearing to them on the mountain and speaking to them. By this He had given them the basis for the proper fear of Him.

In verse 23 the Lord reminds them not to make their own gods. They were not to use gold or silver or any other material to make an idol for themselves. These people needed this warning because they came from Egypt, a place where idols were the rule. The Egyptians had made all kinds of idols and worshiped all sorts of things. This was the pattern that Israel had seen there and saw in all the nations around them. We will see that these people will violate this command very soon.

They were not to make idols, but they were to make altars. The altars were needed for their sacrifices to the Lord. It was not necessary to have a representation of the Lord, but it was necessary to have an altar for sacrifice. In every place that they settled they were to make an altar for their burnt offerings and peace offerings. Everywhere the Lord designated as a place where His name was to be remembered they were to build an altar. If they followed these instructions the Lord would come to them and bless them. The altars were to be of earth or of uncut stones. They were not to use tools to build these altars, because if they did they would profane the altars. The altar was not to be an impressive demonstration of the artistry and cleverness of man, but was to simply be an earthly tool for worshiping and honoring God through sacrifices and offerings. They were just heaps of dirt or rocks where the offerings were made. We tend to be impressed by structures as the disciples were when they pointed out the temple buildings to Jesus (Mark 13:1-2). The structures can distract us from the central point, which is honoring God with our reverent worship.

One further point about the altars was that they were not to build steps up to the altar "that your nakedness may not be exposed on it." Stairs were prohibited for the sake of modesty and proper decorum.

#### Exodus 21:1-11

"Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them.

2 "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. 3 "If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 "If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he

shall go out alone. 5 "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' 6 then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently.

7 "And if a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. 8 "If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. 9 "And if he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. 10 "If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. 11 "And if he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of money*.

In those days sometimes a man had to sell himself into slavery because of debt or poverty. Slavery was an option for a man who found himself destitute. Slavery was a fact of life, and the Lord acknowledged it and laid down regulations regarding it. It is significant that the Lord does not prohibit slavery among His people, but does regulate it. Moses gives us more detail in Deuteronomy 15:12-18:

"If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. 13 "And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. 14 "You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. 15 "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. 16 "And it shall come about if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; 17 then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. And also you shall do likewise to your maidservant. 18 "It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years *with* double the service of a hired man; so the LORD your God will bless you in whatever you do.

In the case of a "kinsman" a Hebrew slave, they were to serve for six years and then be set free without any payment required for their redemption. In fact, the master of the slave was to provide the slave with animals from his flock, grain from his threshing floor and wine from his wine vat. A Hebrew slave was not to go out destitute, lest he end up having to sell himself again into slavery. The master was to give to the slave according to the blessing he had received from the Lord, and in view of the fact that he and his descendants were slaves in the land of Egypt. There were no class distinctions between the people of God. What the slave was, the master had been. The master was to recall that he was a slave and the Lord had redeemed him and set him free, therefore it was his responsibility after six years to also set his slave free, and set him free with blessing and provision.

If the Hebrew slave was married when he entered into servitude, his wife was to be released when he was released. One could not keep the man's wife and make him go out alone. However, if the master gave a wife to the slave, then the wife and children would still

belong to the master when the slave went out. Naturally, this would cause many slaves to decide voluntarily to remain in the service of their masters permanently. Most men would not trade their families for their freedom. A man could opt to remain in the service of his master. Note this was the slave's choice and not the master's. This was also a public choice. The slave was to plainly say, "I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man." There seems to be an implication here that this was said publicly and very plainly. It was to be definite and not coerced. It was to be plain to all that this slave had decided to voluntarily remain in the service of his master.

If a slave said that he would not leave his master, a ceremony is prescribed to confirm this decision. The master was to bring the man to God, and then place his ear against the door or doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary says, "His ear was then to be bored with an awl against the door or lintel of the house, and by this sign, which was customary in many of the nations of antiquity, to be fastened as it were to the house for ever." This ceremony indicated to everyone that this man was a willing servant of the master and had forfeited his right to freedom.

It might happen that a man might sell his daughter as a slave to a fellow Hebrew. In the case of female slaves, they were not to be set free after six years. I guess the reason is, from this context, that the purpose for buying a female slave was marriage, either for the buyer or for his son. The girls were bought to become wives and concubines. There would be a sexual relationship involved. The word translated "designated" and "designates" in verses 8 and 9 carries the idea of engagement or betrothal. The NIV translates it "selected." The girl was purchased for the purpose of marriage, and so would become more than a mere servant in a household.

If the master of the slave girl has a case of "buyer's remorse" and finds that the girl does not please him, he is not allowed to sell her to foreigners. He is to allow her to be redeemed, to be ransomed or bought back. She might be bought back by her father if his circumstances had changed, or by a relative, or perhaps by another Hebrew. He cannot turn around and make a profit off of her by selling her to foreigners. He has been unfair to her. He had "designated her for himself" and then changed his mind. The WEB bible translates this as, "since he has dealt deceitfully with her." She was sold by her father with the expectation of becoming the wife of the buyer. Instead she finds herself rejected by him and threatened with the possibility of being sold to someone else. When we marry the Lord expects us to keep that covenant. When we "change our minds" and decide that we are no longer satisfied or pleased with the arrangement, we become treacherous, deceitful and unfair. We break our word and betray the trust of the other person involved. In the case of these slave girls, the Lord steps in to say, "No, you can't just get rid of her easily in a way that will benefit you. You have to let her be redeemed."

A man may have bought a slave girl with the intention of giving her to his son as a wife. In this case he is to treat her as a daughter. If the son takes another wife, the rights of the slave wife are not to be reduced or withheld. She is to receive her full allotment of food, clothing and sexual attention (verse 10). If the man is unwilling to maintain the slave wife in this way, she is to be set free without any payment. The slave girl was bought as a wife, and was to be treated as a wife. She had the right to the necessities of life, and as a wife, had a right to the husband's bed as well. She had a right to children. Just because she was purchased as a slave from a destitute man did not mean that she had no rights.

Exodus 21:12-14

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. 13 "But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. 14 "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him *even* from My altar, that he may die.

The death penalty was decreed for those who committed murder. The Lord established his requirement and explained it in Genesis 9:5-6, "And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from *every* man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." Humans bear the image of God and if one human intentionally kills another, the murderer is to be put to death himself by other humans. The current trend toward erasing the death penalty in these cases can be attributed to the denial of the image of God in man. We are trying to get rid of the death penalty because we no longer believe that man is special and bears the likeness of God. Refusing the death penalty does not elevate man, but lowers him. It is a denial of the unique value of the life of the one who was murdered. The Lord God has decreed the death penalty for those who murder others, but we have overturned His decree.

The Lord makes a clear distinction between intentional murder and accidental killing. If a man kills another accidentally he is not to be held liable for murder. The Lord would set up a place to which the man could flee and then have his case properly judged. However if it were true that a man had killed another intentionally, presumptuously and with guile, he was to die. Even if he had come to the altar of God to offer a sacrifice for his sin, he was to be taken from there and put to death. He was not to be allowed to get around the responsibility for his murder.

Exodus 21:15-17

"And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

16 "And he who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. 17 "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

The death penalty was prescribed for those who would attack their father or mother as well. This does not necessarily mean that they killed their father or mother, but that they had assaulted them. Parents are to be held in the highest regard by their children.

Kidnapping was a capital offense. Then as now kidnapping was done for monetary gain. Sometimes a person was kidnapped so that they could be sold into slavery. But whether the victim was sold or was still held by the kidnapper, the kidnapper was to be put to death.

Cursing father or mother was grounds for the death penalty as well. God's command is that we honor our father and mother, but if we curse them, if we treat them with contempt, we are worthy of death.

Exodus 21:18-27

"And if men have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but remains in bed; 19 if he gets up and walks around outside on his staff, then he who struck him shall go unpunished; he shall only pay for his loss of time, and shall take



care of him until he is completely healed.

20 "And if a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod and he dies at his hand, he shall be punished. 21 "If, however, he survives a day or two, no vengeance shall be taken; for he is his property.

22 "And *if* men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no *further* injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges *decide*. 23 "But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

26 "And if a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye. 27 "And if he knocks out a tooth of his male or female slave, he shall let him go free on account of his tooth.

When men quarrel and fight with one another there is a give and take that you don't have with premeditated murder. One man may be as guilty as the other. Therefore, if a man injures another in a quarrel but the injured man recovers, the one who hurt him is not to be punished. He is to compensate the man for his lost time and work and take care of him while he recovers. We have a responsibility to help someone we have injured if we have had a fight with them.

A man was to be punished for striking and killing his slave. The idea here is that vengeance was to be taken. The penalty is not specified, but would probably be left to the discretion of the authorities involved. Since a slave was a man's valued property, it would not be likely that a man would willingly kill his slave. This is probably referring to a case of a master unintentionally killing his slave.

Verse 22 in the NASB looks at the case of a woman who has a miscarriage due to being struck while men are fighting. However the translation "miscarriage" is in question. The Hebrew may simply indicate a premature birth. It just means that her offspring comes out. It does not necessarily mean that the child is dead. In fact, the verse specifies that if there is no injury, then there would be no penalty except for a fine that the husband would require. The WEB translation reads this way, "If men fight and hurt a pregnant woman so that she gives birth prematurely, and yet no harm follows, he shall be surely fined as much as the woman's husband demands and the judges allow." This verse cannot be used to support the idea that the unborn are not fully human. It just means there is no harm done if a baby is born prematurely and yet survives. The next verses go on to say that if there is an injury then the penalty shall be appropriate to the injury, "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." If a baby were lost due to violence against the mother, I presume it would then be a "life for life" kind of situation. The death penalty would be appropriate for the one responsible for the death of the child. The Lord does value the life of the unborn.

Jesus commented on this famous "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" passage in Matthew 5:38-42, "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 "And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." Note that Jesus was talking about the application of this law in interpersonal relationships and

not about civil justice. Civil justice demands an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and rightly so. But in their personal relationships with others disciples of Jesus are not to follow this rule. That is to say, we are not to seek vengeance or revenge in our personal relationships. Instead, we are to extend grace to those who harm us. We are not to resist the one who is evil, but in fact we are to “turn the other cheek.” We are to give our coat to the one who sues us for our shirt, in addition to our shirt. We are to voluntarily go two miles with the one who forces us to go one mile. We are to give to those who ask and not turn away from borrowers. This is what it means to respond with grace instead of vengeance.

Slaves who were injured by their masters, losing an eye or a tooth for example, were to be set free. Their freedom was the compensation for their loss and the penalty for the injury. A master would want to take care of his slaves and not abuse them for the sake of retaining their service. Abusive leaders will eventually find themselves with no one to lead.

#### Exodus 21:28-36

"And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. 29 "If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. 30 "If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. 31 "Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. 32 "If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his *or her* master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

33 "And if a man opens a pit, or digs a pit and does not cover it over, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34 the owner of the pit shall make restitution; he shall give money to its owner, and the dead *animal* shall become his. 35 "And if one man's ox hurts another's so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide its price equally; and also they shall divide the dead ox. 36 "Or *if* it is known that the ox was previously in the habit of goring, yet its owner has not confined it, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead *animal* shall become his.

We turn here from human violence to animal violence. If a man's ox gored someone and killed them, the ox was to be killed by stoning and its flesh was not to be eaten. The owner was not to be held responsible for the act of his ox unless he knew that it had a habit of goring and failed to confine it. If the owner had been warned about his ox and its violent nature, and then it had killed someone, then the owner was responsible for the death and faced the death penalty himself. In this case, though, a man might pay a ransom for his own redemption. If the ox gored a slave, then the owner of the ox was to compensate the owner for the loss of his slave, and again the ox was to be stoned. We must know the nature of our animals and be responsible for their behavior. If we know that our livestock or pets are dangerous to other people, we must take measures to assure that they cannot harm others.

Men are also responsible for the pits they dig. A pit is a dangerous thing, and if a man doesn't manage it correctly he is responsible for the injuries and losses it causes. An ox or a donkey may fall into his pit and die. If this was the case, then the owner was to make restitution for the lost animal, and the dead animal would become his.

Not only were men to be responsible for any injury their animals might cause to other people, but also the injury they might cause to other animals. If one man's ox killed another

man's ox, then the live ox was to be sold and the money divided equally between the men, and the dead ox was also to be divided between them. However, if the man knew that his ox was dangerous and he did not confine it, then he was to pay the other man for his dead ox and take possession of the dead animal. These penalties provided an incentive for a man to make sure that his animals were under control.

Exodus 22:1-15

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. 2 "If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account. 3 "But if the sun has risen on him, there will be bloodguiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 4 "If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double. 5 "If a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed *bare* and lets his animal loose so that it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.

6 "If a fire breaks out and spreads to thorn bushes, so that stacked grain or the standing grain or the field *itself* is consumed, he who started the fire shall surely make restitution.

7 "If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep *for him*, and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. 8 "If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, *to* determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. 9 "For every breach of trust, *whether it is* for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, *or* for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.

10 "If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep *for him*, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, 11 an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them, that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept *it*, and he shall not make restitution. 12 "But if it is actually stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner. 13 "If it is all torn to pieces, let him bring it as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been torn to pieces.

14 "And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution. 15 "If its owner is with it, he shall not make restitution; if it is hired, it came for its hire.

It's interesting that we read nothing here about thieves being sent to jail or prison. Instead, they were to make restitution for what they had stolen. They were not only required to restore what they had stolen, but to pay a penalty. They were to pay five oxen for one ox they had stolen, and four sheep for one sheep. The Hebrew word for restitution is *shâlam*, which carries the idea of making peace. By recompensing the victim for his loss, the thief would make peace between them. When it comes to justice in matters of theft, the Lord is not just concerned with punishment, but with restoration of relationships. He is concerned that peace be restored. The victim's property needs to be restored and he needs to be assured that the thief will not victimize him again.

If a thief were caught while he was breaking in and struck and killed, the man defending his property would not be guilty of murder. However there would be guilt on the man who strikes him if it were day, if the "sun" had "risen on him." The idea is, I think, that the thief was to make restitution for his theft and was not to be killed. I think verses 2 and 3 are making a

distinction between striking the thief while he is in the act of breaking in and striking him after the fact, after the sun had risen on his deed. The victim was not to go seek out the man after the theft and strike him and kill him. Instead, he was to seek restitution from him, and the thief could be sold as a slave if he had nothing.

Restitution was required when a man's animals grazed in another man's field and when a man started a fire and it consumed someone else's crops. If my negligence or irresponsibility causes a loss for someone else, I owe him restitution. I need to compensate him for his loss.

In the case of someone giving his neighbor something to watch and guard for him, money or goods, if those things are stolen the thief may or may not be caught. If the thief is caught, he is to pay back double what he took. If the thief is not caught the question is, did the neighbor take the things entrusted to him? Is he lying about the things being stolen? In this case the judges were to get involved to investigate the matter. If he was found guilty and condemned by the judges he was to pay double back to his neighbor. I imagine that the process of investigation by the judges would involve taking testimony from people involved and perhaps going to the scene and making a search to gather physical evidence. It may be in this process that the one who left something with his neighbor might say, "This is it!" (verse 9) and claim that his property had been found still in his neighbor's possession.

If a man left an animal with a neighbor and that animal died, was hurt or driven away, then that called for an oath before the Lord. The neighbor was to swear an oath that he had not laid hands on his neighbor's property. He was to swear before the Lord that he was not responsible for the loss of the owner's animal, and the owner was to accept his word. In this case no restitution was required. If it is stolen, then he was to make restitution. If it were torn to pieces by a wild animal, then no restitution was required.

If an animal were borrowed from a neighbor, and it is injured or dies, then he was to make restitution, but if the owner was with the animal at the time, no restitution was required. The owner would then hold the responsibility. He would be aware of the circumstances and would understand the risks involved.

Exodus 22:16-20

"And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife. 17 "If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the dowry for virgins.

18 "You shall not allow a sorceress to live.

19 "Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.

20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed.

Responsibility was laid upon the man for premarital sex. If a man seduced a virgin and got her to have sex with him, he was to pay a dowry for her and take her for his wife. Her father was to be compensated for the exploitation of his daughter. It's clear here that the sexual relationship was to be a marital relationship. Sexual involvement was not meant to be recreational and casual. The Lord never intended the "one-night stand." Men have largely lost sight of this responsibility that they hold before God in this area. I think many men will be surprised to find that most of the responsibility for the corruption of the sexual relationship is placed on their shoulders.

A woman who was a "sorceress" or witch was not to be allowed to live (verse 18). The word here for "sorceress" in the Hebrew is *kâshaph*, "A primitive root; properly to *whisper* a

spell, that is, to *inchant* or practise magic.”<sup>17</sup> These are people who are actively involved with evil spirits. They try to manipulate the spirit world to achieve their ends. Leviticus 20:27 says, “Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them.” This kind of person was not to be tolerated in Israel because they would be a source of corruption and idolatry. They provided an open door to the influence of Satan in the nation.

There was zero tolerance for bestiality and for sacrificing to any god other than Yahweh alone. Both of these things called for the death penalty. Our “tolerant” age allows things that are an absolute abomination in God's sight.

Exodus 22:21-24

"And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. 23 "If you afflict him at all, *and* if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; 24 and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Strangers who happened to come into contact with Israel and stay among them were not to be wronged or oppressed. Strangers and foreigners were not to be seen as targets for exploitation. The reason for this is that they also had been strangers in Egypt. They had been in the place of being foreigners in a strange land. Often newcomers and strangers are seen as those who can easily be exploited. Since they may not know the language, customs, currency and so forth of the nation, they can easily be cheated. God says that they are not to do this. We are not to exploit the ignorance of strangers.

The Lord especially looks out for widows and orphans, and issues a strong warning against afflicting them in these verses. The Hebrew word for “afflict” is *’ânâh*, which the Keil and Delitzsch Commentary says means “to humiliate,” and “includes not only unjust oppression, but every kind of cold and contemptuous treatment.” A chain of events would be set off by afflicting a widow or an orphan. The Lord says, “If you afflict him,” and “if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry.” Widows and orphans were among the most needy people of the nation because their husbands and fathers had died. Their means of support had passed away and they were dependent upon the help of other family and friends and community members. The Lord would listen to their cries. To look after them and care for them brought blessing and favor from the Lord. In Deuteronomy 24:19-22 the Lord says:

“When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 "When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. 21 "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. 22 "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.”

Aliens, orphans and widows depended on this sort of thing. They retained the dignity of being able to gather their own food, but also the people who had crops were to deliberately leave some of it behind to be available to these people. If they would do this then the Lord would bless the work of their hands. There was no government tax-supported welfare program to provide for such people, but instead their neighbors were to look out for them in

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17 Strong's Hebrew Dictionary

these ways. They were to be allowed to glean in their neighbor's fields and orchards to provide for themselves. We see an example of how this worked in the book of Ruth as Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz (see Ruth 2).

The consequences of afflicting widows and orphans were dire. The Lord would hear their cries and His anger would be kindled. His anger would begin to burn against the oppressor. As a result of His anger the Lord would kill the oppressors with the sword and their wives would become widows and their children would become orphans.

Exodus 22:25-27

"If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest. 26 "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, 27 for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear *him*, for I am gracious.

The poor were not to be charged interest. When they lent money to the poor it was to be for their help and not for profit. Loans were to be made person-to-person in order to help the needy and were not to be made as a business proposition. Today we have many "Payday" loan businesses that as a matter of course violate this command and prey on the poor. Sue Kirchhoff, writing in USA Today says:

Payday lenders offer short-term loans to consumers to be repaid with their next paycheck. Many strapped borrowers, unable to repay, repeatedly roll the loans over, incurring fees of 300% to 1,000% on an annual basis. The industry has grown into a \$40 billion annual business, with more payday outlets than McDonald's fast-food restaurants.

The industry says the fees reflect the risk of its product. But state and federal regulators, in response to consumer complaints, are starting to crack down. Congress set a 36% annual interest cap on payday loans to the military. Oregon recently passed a rate cap on loans in that state. Credit unions are offering lower-cost alternatives to payday loans, and federal regulators want commercial banks to develop small-loan products.<sup>18</sup>

The poor and needy need to have personal friends and family who can help them through tough times without having to submit to greedy and usurious loan companies. We need to beware of these kinds of businesses that pretend they are helping people when in fact they are exploiting them.

It was common then to take a valuable possession from someone to secure a short-term loan. This is still the practice in pawn shops. If it should be that the poor person's cloak were taken, it was to be returned before sunset. This cloak served as a blanket as well as an outer covering, and was vital. If it were not returned and the person cried out to the Lord, the Lord would hear them. The Lord is gracious and cares for the poor. He listens to their cries.

Exodus 22:28-31

"You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

29 "You shall not delay *the offering from* your harvest and your vintage. The first-born of your sons you shall give to Me. 30 "You shall do the same with your oxen *and* with your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me. 31 "And you shall be holy men to Me, therefore you shall not eat *any* flesh torn to pieces in the

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/banking/2007-02-22-payday-loans-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/industries/banking/2007-02-22-payday-loans-usat_x.htm)

field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

Though verse 28 in the NASB uses the word “curse” twice, there are really two different Hebrew words used in the original text. When he prohibits cursing God, the word is *qâlal*, which expresses the idea of making light of something, of treating something with contempt or dishonor. The second word when he prohibits cursing a ruler is *'ârar*, which means to curse or lay a curse on someone.<sup>19</sup> Therefore we see that the Lord is saying that we are not to treat Him lightly. We are to take Him seriously and not scoff at Him or disrespect Him. He is to be respected and honored. It is a dangerous thing to make fun of the Lord. Comedians who have made light of holy things may well regret it on the day of judgment.

Rulers were to be respected and not cursed. David observed this command when he refused to overthrow Saul. Paul quoted this as he realized he had erred in calling Ananias the high priest a “whitewashed wall” in Acts 23:1-5. Paul writes in Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Rulers are established by God and are servants of God. They bear the sword in order to “bring wrath upon the one who practices evil.” Rulers are there to punish misbehavior and reward good behavior. Because of this we are to be subject to them and render them the honor that is due them.

Offerings of the firstfruits of the harvest and vintage were not to be delayed. That is, a man was not to procrastinate when it came to the firstfruit offering. When we delay and procrastinate it becomes easier to simply bypass it. Offerings that are put off are often not offered at all! We should give first because if we wait we may consume it all and then there will be nothing left for an offering. This is the problem with waiting to see if there's anything left over to give to the Lord. There usually isn't. We give off the top and not off the bottom. We give the first and not the last, the best and not the leftovers.

The Lord reminded them in verses 28b and 29 that the first-born were to be given to Him. He had talked about this in chapter 13. It was in memory of the fact that the Lord had killed the first-born in Egypt so that they might be released. The first-born son was to be redeemed, the first-born of the livestock was to be given as an offering on the 8<sup>th</sup> day.

Eating something that had died of itself or had been killed by a wild animal would make them unclean. Leviticus 17:15-16 says, “And when any person eats *an animal* which dies, or is torn *by beasts*, whether he is a native or an alien, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he will become clean. 16 But if he does not wash *them* or bathe his body, then he shall bear his guilt.” Avoiding this kind of thing would enable them to continue to be holy men to the Lord. Presumably there was a danger of disease or contamination in such meat, so they were prohibited from eating it.

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<sup>19</sup> [Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions](#)

### Exodus 23:1-9

"You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 2 "You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert *justice*; 3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. 5 "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release *it* with him. 6 "You shall not pervert the justice *due* to your needy *brother* in his dispute. 7 "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty. 8 "And you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the just. 9 "And you shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you *also* were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Lord is perfectly just and righteous and is concerned about justice. Here He prohibits things that are unjust and subvert justice. A false report is something that is unfair and unjust. A false rumor or accusation is not to be passed on. A false report is a malicious thing, intended to do harm to someone. We may unwittingly repeat a false report if we don't know that it's false, but if we repeat something that we know is false, then we are guilty of misleading others and harming those against whom the report is being spread. The internet makes the spreading of false reports very easy these days, and these things tend to take on a life of their own.

Sometimes injustice is carried out by a crowd. The majority is not always right. A crowd of people can have a powerful influence for wrongdoing. We must beware of the crowd mentality and the influence it can exert on us. Crowd pressure can tempt us to pervert the truth and deny what is right.

Partiality toward the poor can also pervert justice. There are many today who think that it is evil to be wealthy and virtuous to be poor. They will always advocate for the poor against the rich regardless of the circumstances. Disputes between men must be judged fairly without partiality on the basis of economic standing. The poor are not always right and the rich are not always wrong.

When we have people who are our enemies or people who hate us there is always a temptation to be glad when misfortune befalls them. In verses 4 and 5 the Lord commands His people to be kind to their enemies and to help those who hate them. He gives two specific examples. If your enemy's ox or donkey is wandering away, you are to return it to him. You are to be gracious and not allow him to suffer loss. This kind of thing could reconcile an enemy. If his donkey has collapsed under its load, you are to help him to release it. You are not to ignore these problems because the person hates you. Even when someone is an enemy we are to help him out and not ignore his needs. Love is a practical thing in this sort of context and does not depend on feelings. Even if we hate a man we can decide to help him with his need.

Justice is not to be perverted. When we know what is just in the case of a needy brother we are not to pervert it, to twist it or turn it. A double evil is done when justice is denied to the needy. The original crime or issue against him is not resolved and he is penalized again by the system that is meant to rectify these things.



If we condemn the innocent we must know that God will not acquit the guilty. He will not make a mistake in His judgment. Those who killed Jesus directly violated verse 7. They found false witnesses and killed the only man in history who was truly and completely innocent and righteous. This is the definition of injustice, to condemn the innocent and acquit the guilty. The Lord does not do this in His court.

Bribes blind and subvert, according to verse 8. A bribe will make a clear-sighted man blind. A judge may plainly see what is right and what is wrong, and a bribe will make him close his eyes to what is right. Bribes are used by the unjust to corrupt the justice system. It can happen on a small scale, as when a police officer is bribed to “look the other way” and let someone who has violated the law go free, or on a large scale, where perhaps an entire city or county court system is corrupted. Where bribery is commonplace there can be no assurance of justice. Corruption will be the rule.

Those who have been oppressed should be the last ones to oppress others. God commands them not to oppress strangers, because they knew what it felt like to be oppressed as strangers in Egypt. Those who have felt oppression can sympathize more deeply with the oppressed. The Lord calls on them to recall how it felt to be oppressed so that they could avoid oppressing others. One of the advantages of traveling and living for a time in a foreign country is this aspect of learning what it is like to be a “stranger.” In a foreign country you are the odd person. You are the one with a strange language and strange customs, strange clothing and appearance. You are awkward because you don’t always know how to behave. People may take advantage of you because of your ignorance of the ways and customs of the land you’re visiting.

Exodus 23:10-12

"And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, *11* but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove. *12* "Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* in order that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.

Israel was to observe a sabbath year as well as a sabbath day. Every 7<sup>th</sup> year their land was to be allowed to lie fallow. Why? So that the needy might eat of it and the beasts of the field might eat of it. They were not to sow nor harvest in the 7<sup>th</sup> year. The implication is that the Lord would provide enough for them during the 6 years they were to work their fields. Trust in the Lord was required. If they would be faithful and obedient, He would meet their needs.

The Sabbath law was repeated again in verse 12. The seventh day was to be a day of rest for everyone. The word for “refresh” is *nâphash* and means “to take breath.”<sup>20</sup> Everyone, including livestock, was to get a “breather” on the Sabbath. It was a day to look forward to and enjoy, a day of refreshment for all. We err when we make the Sabbath a burden.

Exodus 23:13-19

"Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth.

*14* "Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. *15* "You shall observe the Feast

<sup>20</sup> Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions.

of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. 16 "Also *you shall observe* the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors *from* what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in *the fruit of* your labors from the field. 17 "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. 18 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning. 19 "You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother.

The Israelites were to guard all the things that they had heard from the Lord through Moses. Especially they were to be on their guard against idolatry. In fact, they were not even to mention the names of other gods. John echoes this in 1 John 5:21, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." When we are not on guard we can be taken by surprise by the enemy. We can be overwhelmed and we can fall just because we weren't paying attention. We need to realize that we are like soldiers in a combat zone and the enemy is all around. We need to be constantly on the alert against the enemy's attacks. We can too easily allow ourselves to make other things priorities before our relationship to the Lord.

The men of Israel were required to celebrate three feasts each year to the Lord. The first was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, tied to the Passover, remembering how the Lord delivered them from Egypt. The second was the Feast of the Harvest of the First Fruits, and the third was the Feast of the Ingathering. The first thing we must not overlook is that they are *feasts*, they are special times of rejoicing and celebrating, and not sad obligatory times of mourning. The Hebrew term here for "feasts" is *châgag*, a verb which Brown-Driver-Briggs defines this way, "1) to hold a feast, hold a festival, make pilgrimage, keep a pilgrim-feast, celebrate, dance, stagger. 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to keep a pilgrim-feast. 1a2) to reel." These feasts were a time to come together and whoop it up and celebrate the goodness of the Lord. They were to celebrate how He had delivered them from Egypt, how He had saved them and brought them out of slavery. We also should often look back and celebrate and rejoice over how the Lord has saved us out of death and has brought us into life and light through Jesus Christ. Christians should be celebrating people.

The feasts of the firstfruits and the ingathering celebrated the Lord's provision for them. They were to rejoice over how the Lord had provided for their needs. Besides celebrating our salvation we need to celebrate the daily sustenance of the Lord. God does not just save, but He also sustains. He saved Israel from Egypt, brought them out of there, brought them into the land He had set aside for them, and provided for them there. The Lord does not purchase us and save us and then let us go. We are not born again and then abandoned. The Lord provides for us and holds us forever!

God loves to celebrate. He is a God who loves a party! Jesus illustrated this in His parable of the dinner in Luke 14:16-24:

"A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' 18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 "And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen,

and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' 21 "And the slave came *back* and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' 22 "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23 "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'"

The problem is not with God, but with us. He has prepared His party and has invited us, but we make excuses. We have other things that are distracting us and taking us away from His blessings! We disqualify ourselves from enjoying His party because of our petty excuses.

The men of Israel were not to come to the feasts empty-handed. They were to bring their offerings with them. These feasts were not a time to mooch off of others who had brought their offerings, but a time to share the blessings and bounty of the Lord.

Verse 18 refers to the Passover sacrifice. The repetition of these commands in Exodus 34:25 makes this clear, "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning." At the Passover they were to remove all leaven from their households, and none of the passover lamb was to remain until the next morning, it was to be completely consumed.

At the feast of the first fruits they were to bring the best to the Lord. Numbers gives us more detail as the Lord says this to Aaron:

"All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the LORD, I give them to you. 13 "The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. (Numbers 18:12-13.)

The first fruits benefited the priests, who had no inheritance in the land and could not raise their own food. The priests relied on the offerings from the people for their sustenance. At the first fruits they were to bring the first and the best of the first fruits and present them to the Lord. They were not to wait and bring leftovers or the poorer portion of the harvest. The Lord and His priests were to get the best.

The final command here, "You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother." Is a bit puzzling. It is repeated in Exodus 34:26 and Deuteronomy 14:21. Obviously it appears that taking a young kid from its mother and then cooking it in her milk is a cruel thing to do. The [Jamieson-Faussett-Brown](#) commentary says that this is, "A prohibition against imitating the superstitious rites of the idolaters in Egypt, who, at the end of their harvest, seethed a kid in its mother's milk and sprinkled the broth as a magical charm on their gardens and fields, to render them more productive the following season." The [Keil and Delitzsch](#) commentary says:

Very different explanations have been given to the command. In the *Targum*, *Mishnah*, etc., it is regarded as a general prohibition against eating flesh prepared with milk. *Luther* and others suppose it to refer to the cooking of the kid, before it has been weaned from its mother's milk. But the actual reference is to the cooking of a kid in the milk of its own mother, as indicating a contempt of the relation which

God has established and sanctified between parent and young, and thus subverting the divine ordinances.

Though we may not understand the practice, it is obvious that Moses and the Israelites understood what was being commanded and were expected to obey it.

Exodus 23:20-33

"Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him. 22 "But if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. 23 "For My angel will go before you and bring you in to *the land of* the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will completely destroy them. 24 "You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them, and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces. 25 "But you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst. 26 "There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. 27 "I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you. 28 "And I will send hornets ahead of you, that they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. 29 "I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate, and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. 30 "I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land. 31 "And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. 32 "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. 33 "They shall not live in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

The Lord promises to send an angel before them. He would send a messenger, an envoy, who would do two things. He would guard them all along the way. As they journeyed the angel would provide protection to them. This doesn't mean that they did not need to arm themselves and fight against their enemies when the time came, but it does mean that their protection was assured as long as they were right with the Lord. With this angel guarding them they did not need to worry about their enemies.

The second thing the angel would do would be that he would bring them into the place which the Lord had prepared for them. He had led them out of Egypt, He had and would protect them along the way, and then He would bring them into the place prepared for them. Once again there is a preview here of Jesus' words in John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." As God prepared a place in Canaan for Israel, so He has gone ahead to prepare a place for us in the Father's house. Jesus has saved us out of the world and has promised to bring us to this place that He has prepared for us.

The responsibility of the Israelites was to obey the angel that the Lord would send before them. They were to be on their guard against rebellion and disobedience and were to listen to Him and obey Him. The Lord warns them not to be rebellious toward this angel because He would not pardon their transgressions since Yahweh's name was in Him. This may indicate that this "angel" was to be a "Christophany," a manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ. There is support for this idea in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." Christ Himself was the "rock which followed them" in the wilderness. I think this is a strong suggestion that the angel who went before Israel was Christ Himself.

Verse 22 confirms that the voice of the angel would be the voice of the Lord, "But if you will truly obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries." To obey the voice of the angel was to do what the Lord says. As Jesus did not speak on His own initiative, "but the Father Himself who sent Me has given me commandment, what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49), so this angel would speak the words of the Lord. His commands would be the commands of God, His words would be the words of God. To obey Him would be to obey God and to rebel against Him would be to rebel against God. The Lord promised that if they would obey the voice of the angel, then He would be the enemy of their enemies and the adversary of their adversaries. The Lord is on the side of the obedient. He supports those who listen to Him and follow His leading. We cannot expect the Lord to support us and our cause if we refuse to listen to Him and follow His commands. He supports those who are loyal to Him and not those who rebel against Him.

The angel would go before them and bring them into the land occupied by the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites and He would completely destroy them. This He would do if they were obedient to Him. The land was already theirs, they just needed to move forward in faith and obedience and claim the land. There should be a holy boldness among the people of God as they move forward in obedience. As we move forward to make disciples among the nations, there should be a confident, even audacious boldness to our actions, knowing that Christ has already authorized us to act in His name in the world. We should not cower before the intimidation of the world and of the bluster of the enemy. He is a toothless lion. The enemy has already been defeated and disarmed.

The Lord has a "you shall not" command in verse 24, and a "you shall" command in verse 25. God's commands are positive as well as negative. Regarding the peoples of the land, they were not to adopt their practices. They were not to worship their gods or serve them, they were not to "do according to their deeds." The gods of these peoples were to be utterly destroyed and wiped out. Their sacred pillars were to be broken into pieces. All traces of idolatry were to be erased. The Lord will not co-exist peacefully with other gods. He is not a member of a pantheon. He will not tolerate us trying to worship Him and other things. When we give our lives to Him, we are to turn our backs on other gods and objects of worship.

What they were to do was to "serve the Lord your God." The word for "serve" means to work, to toil, to labor. They were to work for the Lord, they were to be His servants and not the servants of another. If they would serve Him, then He would bless their food and water, and sickness would be removed from them. God's blessings and our prosperity and health are tied to our loyalty to the Lord. We can't expect God's blessings if we are rebellious toward Him. If we are not His loyal children we must not expect Him to take care of us. Today it

seems that many people expect God to take care of them and meet their needs and make life smooth and easy for them when they do not honor Him, follow Him or serve Him. There is an attitude of entitlement from God regardless of how we live our lives. But God is under no obligation to care for those who are not His.

The Lord promises that if they will serve Him they will have no problems with fertility (verse 26). Fertility was a huge concern for the people of that day, and the people of the land to which they were going worshiped gods and goddesses of fertility. The goddess Asherah was worshiped as a goddess of fertility. The Lord is saying that if they worship Him and are loyal to Him they won't need to be concerned about fertility. They won't miscarry and they won't be infertile.

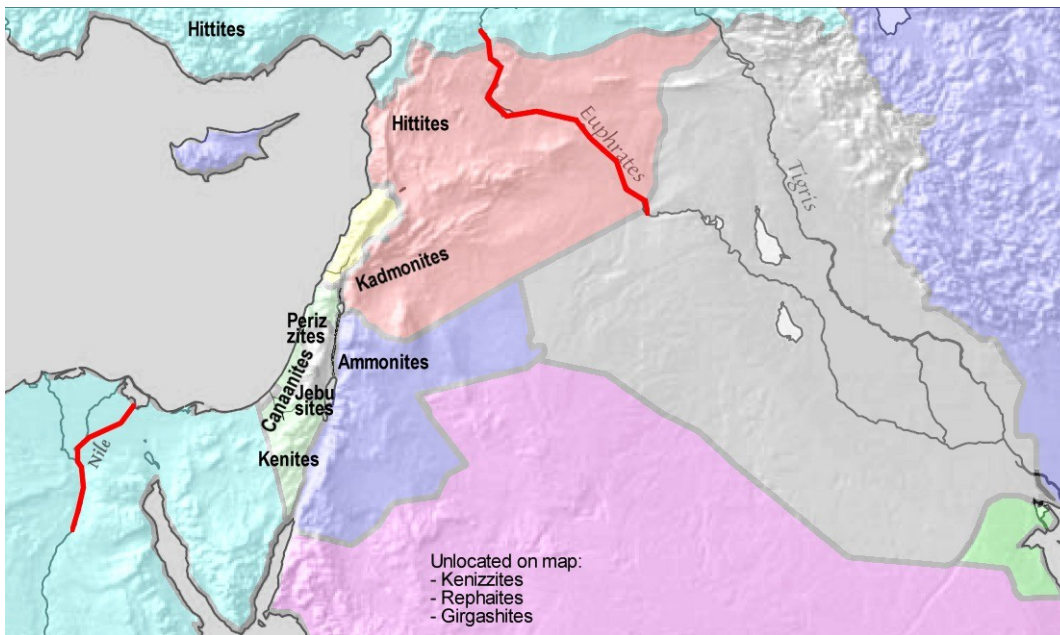
The Lord promised to send His terror ahead of them and to send hornets ahead of them (verses 27 and 28). His terror would cause confusion among their enemies and cause them to flee from Israel. The hornets would drive out the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites. The reference to hornets is probably not to be taken literally, especially in light of Joshua 24:12, "Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, *but* not by your sword or your bow." This is in a context where the Lord is recounting how He had led them in victory over their enemies. The Lord means that it was His spiritual forces that defeated the enemy and not the military might and prowess of Israel. There is no record that any literal hornet infestation drove out any of these people.

The defeat of the people of the land would be gradual and not instantaneous. If God wiped them out swiftly there would be two problems. First the land would be desolate with no people to care for the fields and crops. Second, the beasts of the field would multiply and would become too numerous for the Israelites. God does not always defeat the enemy quickly. Sometimes it's a long process, and there are reasons for that. When we become followers of Christ we find that God does not instantly solve all of our problems and take away all of our sinful inclinations. We are like enemy held territory. The Lord deals with issues in our lives gradually, item by item, in the process of sanctification. If He showed us all at once all the problems that we have that we must deal with, we would probably be overwhelmed and give up. We would conclude that holiness, for us in practice, is impossible. God gradually prunes the dead wood out of our lives (see John 15) and enables us to become more fruitful and more righteous in practice as we grow.

The Lord marks out the territory that He had intended to give them in verse 31, "And I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates." This corresponds to the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

A contributor on Wikipedia created the following map to illustrate the territory that may have been included in this promise.



Of course, Israel never occupied this entire area due to their unfaithfulness to the Lord. They disobeyed the Lord and allowed some of the people of the land to live among them. We read in Judges 2:1-3:

Now the angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you, 2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done? 3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become *as thorns* in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"

Because Israel had not done their part in totally destroying the inhabitants of this land and had allowed some of them to continue and had not destroyed their altars, the angel of the Lord said that He would no longer drive the people out before them. We must not compromise with the evils in our lives. We must not allow them to "live among us." Evil habits, evil thoughts, evil motives, evil words and evil deeds must be driven out or they will cause us to be less fruitful and less effective than God wants us to be. I doubt that anyone except Jesus has ever lived up completely to the full potential that God had for them, that anyone has ever fully taken all the blessings that God had intended to give them. We need "zero tolerance" for evil in our own lives.

The Israelites were to have "zero tolerance" for the people of the land and for their gods. They were not to make a covenant with them. They were not to allow these people to live among them, because they would become a stumbling block to them. They would make Israel sin against the Lord by serving other gods. Israel would be snared into idolatry if they allowed these people to influence them to serve their gods. Compromising with these pagans and being merciful to them would ultimately and inevitably lead to sinning against the Lord. Jesus tells us that we must be ruthless in dealing with those things that cause us to sin in Matthew

5:29-30, "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell." Those things that cause us to stumble are to be torn out and cut off. They must be identified and eliminated from our lives.

#### Exodus 24:1-11

Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. 2 "Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." 3 Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!" 4 And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 And he sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. 6 And Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" 8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

9 Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. 11 Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

When God invites you to "come up" and to "come near" to Him, then you may come near. We come to Him at His discretion and not on our own. In Mose's day he was the only one invited to come near. Others had to stay at a distance to worship the Lord. Moses had the privilege of coming near as the mediator and advocate for Israel. Today anyone may draw near to the Lord through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:19-22 says, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." We may draw near to God, but only through Jesus Christ the Son, as God has prescribed. We can do this because of the blood of His sacrifice and because He is our great High Priest.

The reason that the Lord called Moses up to Himself was so that he could receive the words of the Lord (verses 3 and 4a). Moses recounted these words to the people and also wrote them down. The people committed themselves to doing all the words which the Lord had spoken. This was the formal adoption of the covenant between Yahweh and His people. The Lord gave Moses His words which became the "book of the covenant" (verse 8), Moses read it to the people, and the people agreed to observe the words of the covenant. They agreed unanimously and unequivocally. All of them said they would do all that the Lord had



spoken. They did not say, "Well, we will give it a try," or "We will do most of these things...". They did not argue or try to revise the terms of the covenant. They just accepted what God had said and committed themselves to obedience.

After recounting the words of the Lord to the people and getting an initial commitment to obey them, Moses wrote down the words of the Lord in a book (verse 4). Then he built an altar at the foot of the mountain with 12 pillars that represented the 12 tribes of Israel. Young men, probably Levites, were sent to offer the burnt offerings and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. This was messy and bloody business. Half of the blood of the sacrificed animals was put into basins and half of it was sprinkled on the altar. The blood that they collected in basins was used to sprinkle on the people after they had promised to be obedient to the Lord. Moses said as he sprinkled the people, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." The book of Hebrews tells us that all things are cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). It was necessary that these animals should die in order that they might approach God. The blood of Jesus is the blood of the new covenant that truly atones for our sins once for all time. Luke 22:20 says, "And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.'" The blood of bulls and goats was inadequate to take away our sins (Hebrews 10:4), but the blood of Jesus, the Son of God is the final and fully sufficient sacrifice for our sins (see Hebrews 9).

After this ceremony, after the words of the Lord had been read to the people and they had committed themselves to be obedient to the covenant, and after Moses had sprinkled them with the blood of the covenant, then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders were allowed to come near to the Lord. They actually saw the God of Israel. Under him was a pavement that looked like sapphire and was absolutely clear. This pavement was "under His feet." We don't know if He was sitting or standing. All we know is that they saw some sort of representation of their God. This passage seems to contradict what the Lord says later in Exodus 33:20-23, "But He said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!' 21 Then the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; 22 and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.'" Evidently when Moses and the elders saw the Lord, they did not see His face, since it was impossible to see His face and live. Nevertheless, these men were allowed to come up to God and to see Him and to eat in His presence and they were not put to death. Verse 11 seems to have a note of something remarkable. These nobles of Israel came up to the Lord, saw Him, and He did not stretch out His hand against them! One would expect that a man could not do this and live, but the Lord allowed these men to do so. Thank God that in Christ anyone may come by faith and approach Him without fear.

#### Exodus 24:12-18

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." 13 So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14 But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them." 15

Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. *16* And the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. *17* And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. *18* And Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Again the Lord invites Moses saying, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets..." He says, "Come and stay, and I will communicate with you." Moses had to come and then had to take the time to stay with the Lord. Often the problem with us is that we won't take the time to stay with the Lord, we won't "remain" with Him. Moses was up there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights. Most of us have trouble giving the Lord forty minutes! It takes time to listen to the Lord and to hear from Him. This is what the Lord wants. He wants us to come to Him, stay with Him and listen to Him. He loves it when we do what Mary did, when we sit with Him and listen to Him (Luke 10:38-42). Too often we are like Martha, too busy and too distracted to take time to listen to Him.

The Lord had written the law and the commandment on stone tablets and He told Moses to come up to Him to receive them. The tablets were "for their instruction." These tablets were to be used to teach the people God's law. Everyone was expected to know these ten commandments well. God made it clear that His intention was that His commands should be taught and learned. Jesus said that we were to keep them and teach them (Matthew 5:19). The knowledge of God's commands will do away with much of our moral and ethical confusion. God's word left sitting on a shelf gathering dust is of no value. God has given us His word for our instruction, and He expects us to pay attention to it.

As Moses and Joshua left to go up on the mountain, Moses delegated the legal responsibilities to Aaron and Hur. They were to be the judges while he was absent. Joshua was privileged to be the only other man to accompany Moses up on the mountain to meet with God. This, no doubt, was part of Joshua's preparation to later succeed Moses in leading the nation.

Moses is careful here to describe the appearance of the glory of the Lord on the mountain. When he went up on the mountain, there was a cloud that covered it. The glory of the Lord was either manifested by the cloud or shrouded by the cloud. We recall that when they were leaving Egypt the Lord went "before them in a pillar of cloud by day" (Exodus 13:21-22). In either case the cloud said to Moses and Israel, "The Lord is here in person." What Moses saw as a cloud the Israelites saw as a "consuming fire on the mountain top." It looked like the top of the mountain was on fire. Exodus 13:21 and 22 tells us that at night the pillar of cloud became a pillar of fire to give them light and lead them. When the Lord first spoke to Moses, He appeared to him in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2). In Deuteronomy 4:23-24 Moses warned the people about idolatry and said, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." In Deuteronomy 9:3 Moses reassures them about the defeat of their powerful enemies and says that the Lord "is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you." The author of Hebrews repeats, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). The idea that God is a consuming fire speaks of His jealousy and His judgment. Those who will not give Him first place will be consumed by His wrath. The burning bush and the burning mountain also illustrate that God can burn without

consuming. He can provide His own fuel. He can “burn” in a man without destroying Him. Fire not only destroys but it also provides light. The pillar of fire at night provided light to guide God's people on their way. The Lord is “my light and my salvation” says David in Psalm 27:1.

Moses waited on the mountain for six days, and then on the seventh the Lord called to Moses from the cloud. When God called him, then Moses went up the mountain and entered into the midst of the cloud. I'm not sure why God made Moses wait for 6 days before allowing him to enter the cloud. God has His own protocols for these things. We wait for His invitation. Moses was with God in the cloud for forty days and forty nights. This was the first of two occasions where he spent 40 days and nights with the Lord without eating or drinking (Deut. 9:18). Obviously Moses was sustained supernaturally by the Lord for this period of time. A man may go 40 days without eating, but not without drinking.

There must be some special significance to 40 days and 40 nights. During the flood, God sent rain on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights (Genesis 7:4-12). In addition to this incident in Exodus 24, Moses spent another 40 days and 40 nights with the Lord in Exodus 34 (verse 28). The twelve spies from Israel spent 40 days spying out the land (Numbers 13:25). Elijah spent 40 days and 40 nights going to Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings 19:1-8). Forty days was the period given to Nineveh to prepare for their destruction (Jonah 3:4). Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-2). Jesus also appeared to the disciples for 40 days following His resurrection before His ascension (Acts 1:3). A writer on WikiAnswers.com says, “A 40-something time period, whether days, months, or years is *ALWAYS* a period of testing, trial, probation, or chastisement (but not judgment) and ends with a period of restoration, revival or renewal.”<sup>21</sup> This seems too simplistic and categorical in view of our current passage. Moses spent 40 days on the mountain to listen to God and to receive His commands. It may have been a time of “testing” for the nation in a sense while they waited, but it was not necessarily a period of “probation” or “chastisement.”

An interesting article at <http://creation-answers.com/forty.htm> points out that in ancient times 40 day cycles of time were carefully counted out:

A very effective method of measuring and metering out each passing solar year can be recognized from a number of early sources. Ancient writings and artifacts (including certain monuments) make it clear that a cycle of 40 days was once carefully time tracked.

As the subsequently presented paragraphs will attempt to show, early astronomers appear to have once time tracked a cycle of 40 days for calendric purposes. The ancients appear to have also revered and celebrated this cycle in the practice of religion.

Why track 40th days?

It is most remarkable that each passing solar year can very effectively (even perfectly!) be measured and metered out by keeping track of every 40th day. Essentially, the annual transit which completes every 365.24219 days can just about EXACTLY be cross-referenced to a tally of those days that make up a 40-day cycle!

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<sup>21</sup> [http://wiki.answers.com/O/What\\_significance\\_does\\_the\\_number\\_40\\_have\\_in\\_the\\_Bible](http://wiki.answers.com/O/What_significance_does_the_number_40_have_in_the_Bible)

So Moses spent a 40 day period on the mountain with the Lord – one ninth of a year. If the time period has a significant spiritual meaning I'm not sure what it is.

Exodus 25:1-9

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. 3 "And this is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, 4 blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goat *hair*, 5 rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, 6 oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones and setting stones, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 8 "And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. 9 "According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*.

From this passage through chapter 31 we find an account of the commands and instructions that the Lord gave to Moses on the mountain. Most of it deals with the construction of the ark, the tabernacle and its implements, and the service of the tabernacle to be performed by Aaron and his sons. The general overview of what is to be done is given to Moses in this paragraph.

The first thing was that the people of Israel were to raise a contribution for the Lord. He calls it "a contribution for Me" and, "My contribution." This was to be an offering to the Lord and would be His. He initiated the idea. This was not something Moses cooked up and imposed on the people, but this came right from the Lord. This contribution was to be raised "from every man whose heart moves him." It was a voluntary contribution and not a tax. It was not enforced or required, but an optional offering. The Lord wants us to voluntarily get on board with His projects.

God expected the resources for the building of the tabernacle and the ark and the implements of the tabernacle to be contributed by the people. These things were to come from them. He was not going to rain down the raw materials out of heaven for this project, nor was He going to build the whole thing for them and then say, "Here it is!" God gave them the dignity and responsibility of doing this for Him. He gave the directions and expected Moses and the nation to carry them out. God gives us our marching orders and then says, "Go do it!" He will provide the resources to carry out His directions through His people.

The Lord specified what He wanted from the people. He was specific in asking for certain resources. He needed them to contribute metals, gold silver and bronze. He needed cloth-like materials like linen, goat hair, rams skins and so forth. He needed acacia wood. He needed oil and spices. He needed precious stones for the ephod and breastpiece. The Lord had worked out a bill of materials that were needed for the tabernacle and gave the list to Moses. When you're asking people to give, it works best if you know exactly what you need. Tell people specifically what you want them to do. Too often we are too vague when we ask for contributions. We should tell people what we need and be specific.

Not only did God ask for a contribution from the people, but He also commanded them to do the work of the construction of the sanctuary for Him (verse 8). They would take the materials and do the construction. Many would give and some would do the work of construction. This is how we accomplish the things that God wants us to do. All can give and then some who are gifted can carry out the work. Of course, we are all given spiritual gifts to enable us to do something to minister to the needs of others (see 1 Corinthians 12), but

sometimes there are special assignments like this that some are specially gifted to do while the rest contribute.

The reason for constructing the sanctuary was so that the Lord might dwell among them. The tabernacle would be the place where the presence of God would live among the Israelites. God did not tell them to build a statue or an idol like the other nations had, but to build this portable tent and courtyard with the ark in the midst of it that would be a place for His Holy presence. There was to be no representation of Him made of gold or wood or anything else. This would be the place where He would meet with them and it was to communicate some very important truths, which is why it was to be built in a certain way. The important point is that God wanted to live with them. He wanted to be with them. God is a relationship-seeking God. He pursues us because He wants to know us and wants us to know Him.

The Lord is going to be very specific about how the tabernacle and its furniture were to be constructed. He is going to describe to Moses the exact dimensions and patterns that were to be followed for everything involved. He ordered Moses to follow the pattern carefully in the construction of the tabernacle.

#### Exodus 25:10-22

"And they shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. 11 "And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. 12 "And you shall cast four gold rings for it, and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it. 13 "And you shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 14 "And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them. 15 "The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. 16 "And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. 17 "And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. 18 "And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 "And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim *of one piece* with the mercy seat at its two ends. 20 "And the cherubim shall have *their* wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be *turned* toward the mercy seat. 21 "And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. 22 "And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

An "ark" is simply a box or a chest. God told Moses to build a box two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits high and wide. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says "The original cubit was the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the end of the middle finger, as is implied from the derivation of the word in Hebrew and in Latin (*cubitum*)." The cubit came to be standardized at about 18 to 20 inches. Assuming a cubit of 18 inches the ark of the covenant would have been 45 inches long, 27 inches high and 27 inches wide.

The acacia wood was to be overlaid with pure gold, both inside and outside the ark. It would appear to be a solid gold box, but since it was overlaid with a veneer of gold, it would not be too heavy. God also told Moses to make a gold molding around the ark – I presume

around the top of the box. Cast gold rings were to be fastened to the feet or legs on the four corners so that the poles could be put through them for carrying the ark. This was so that the priests carrying the ark would never have to touch the ark itself.

Inside the ark would be the “testimony” which the Lord would give to Moses. He is referring to the tablets with the ten commandments written on them. The tablets were a “witness,” a “testimony” to the fact that God had given them His law. He had communicated His requirements and the tablets were objective evidence of this. Israel could never plead ignorance of His law. They could not say that God had not told them what He wanted. The tablets were the tablets of the covenant, the agreement between the Lord and Israel. It was a formal and legal arrangement, and the obligation of Israel was to observe the terms of the covenant spelled out on the tablets.

The mercy seat was made of pure gold, the same length and width as the ark. The words “mercy seat” translate the Hebrew word *kappôreth*, which Strong's Hebrew Dictionary defines this way, “a lid (used only of the cover of the sacred Ark): - mercy seat.” The word comes from *kâphar*, which means “to cover” and can carry the idea of “covering” our sins. It was here at this spot each year, on the day of atonement, that the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled and atonement for the sins of the people was made (see Leviticus 16). It is the place of propitiation for the sins of the people, the place where they obtained mercy from the Lord, and hence the name “mercy seat.” This communicates a very important truth, that the mercy and grace of God covers the Law and its requirements. It says that the wrath of God against our violations of His Law must be propitiated or satisfied by a sacrifice of an innocent victim.

The Lord tells Moses that it is at this very spot, the mercy seat, right between the cherubim, that He will meet with him and speak to him. It is at the place of mercy, of forgiveness and atonement of our sins that God meets with us. Today the place where we find mercy, grace, atonement and forgiveness is in Christ Himself. He Himself is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2). He is our “mercy seat.” If we want to draw near to God, we must draw near through Jesus Christ.

#### Exodus 25:23-30

"And you shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. 24 "And you shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it. 25 "And you shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth around *it*; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it. 26 "And you shall make four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four feet. 27 "The rings shall be close to the rim as holders for the poles to carry the table. 28 "And you shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried. 29 "And you shall make its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls, with which to pour libations; you shall make them of pure gold. 30 "And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.

This table for the showbread, the “bread of the Presence” was about 36 inches long, 18 inches wide and 27 inches high. Like the ark it was acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, having a border and a rim around it, with rings on the four corners and acacia wood poles overlaid with gold for carrying it. Associated with this table were dishes, pans, jars and bowls made of pure gold. Verse 30 gives the purpose of this table, “And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.” Leviticus 24:5-9 gives us more information

about this bread, how it was to be prepared and handled:

"Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths *of an ephah* shall be *in* each cake. 6 "And you shall set them *in* two rows, six *to* a row, on the pure *gold* table before the LORD. 7 "And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, *even* an offering by fire to the LORD. 8 "Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. 9 "And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, *his* portion forever."

No doubt these 12 "cakes" or loaves of bread represented the 12 tribes of Israel. They were laid out on the table in two rows of six cakes each. In each row frankincense was also put out as "a memorial portion for the bread, an offering by fire to the Lord." Each sabbath new bread was to be put out on the table, and then the old bread could be eaten by the priests in a holy place. This was the bread that Ahimelech gave to David and his men when they were in need in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus referred to this event in Matthew 12:1-3,

At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads *of grain* and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?"

Jesus shows us here that sometimes human need outweighs religious ceremony. There was important symbolism in the showbread that was to be maintained before the holy of holies, but when David and his men were in great need, it was more important to feed them and meet their needs at that time.

#### Exodus 25:31-40

"Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand *and* its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be *of one piece* with it. 32 "And six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side, and three branches of the lampstand from its other side. 33 "Three cups *shall be* shaped like almond *blossoms* in the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond *blossoms* in the other branch, a bulb and a flower-- so for six branches going out from the lampstand; 34 and in the lampstand four cups shaped like almond *blossoms*, its bulbs and its flowers. 35 "And a bulb shall be under the *first* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *second* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *third* pair of branches *coming* out of it, for the six branches coming out of the lampstand. 36 "Their bulbs and their branches *shall be of one piece* with it; all of it shall be one piece of hammered work of pure gold. 37 "Then you shall make its lamps seven *in number*; and they shall mount its lamps so as to shed light on the space in front of it. 38 "And its snuffers and their trays *shall be* of pure gold. 39 "It shall be made from a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. 40

"And see that you make *them* after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

The King James Version renders the word for "lampstand" (*menorah*) as "candlestick," which I think has given people a mistaken impression about this lampstand for hundreds of years. This was a big oil lamp, not a stand for holding wax candles. In Exodus 27:20 the Lord tells Moses to order the Israelites to bring him clear olive oil "for the light, to make a lamp burn continually." I don't think they even had any concept of the thing that we call a candle.

The lampstand was decorated with an almond blossom motif. We have a lot of almond farms around the area of California where I live and they are among the first trees to put forth blossoms in the spring. Aaron's rod was a rod from an almond tree. When it was brought in before the Lord with the rods of the other leaders of the other tribes, it was Aaron's rod that budded and blossomed and bore ripe almonds, indicating that it was the tribe of Levi that the Lord had chosen as His priests (see Numbers 17).

The seven churches to which Jesus wrote letters in the book of Revelation were symbolized by golden lampstands (Revelation 1:20). Jesus walks among these lampstands (Revelation 2:1) and threatens their removal if they do not maintain their love for Him (Revelation 2:5). Our light goes out if we do not continue to love the Lord and put Him first. Jesus said that He is the Light of the world in John 8:12, and He also said that His followers were the light of the world in Matthew 5:14. We have the same purpose in the world that Christ had, that is, to bring light into it. Collectively, we are a lampstand shining the light of Christ to a dark world.

#### Exodus 26

"Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet *material*; you shall make them with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. 2 "The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall have the same measurements. 3 "Five curtains shall be joined to one another; and *the other* five curtains *shall be* joined to one another. 4 "And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the *first* set, and likewise you shall make *them* on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set. 5 "You shall make fifty loops in the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite each other. 6 "And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and join the curtains to one another with the clasps, that the tabernacle may be a unit.

7 "Then you shall make curtains of goats' *hair* for a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains in all. 8 "The length of each curtain *shall be* thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains shall have the same measurements. 9 "And you shall join five curtains by themselves, and the *other* six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the front of the tent. 10 "And you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the *first* set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain *that is outermost in* the second set. 11 "And you shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and you shall put the clasps into the loops and join the tent together, that it may be a unit. 12 "And the overlapping part that is left over in the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that is left over, shall lap over the back of the tabernacle. 13 "And the cubit on one side and the cubit on the other, of what is left over in the length of the curtains of the tent, shall lap over the sides of the



tabernacle on one side and on the other, to cover it. 14 "And you shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of porpoise skins above.

15 "Then you shall make the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing upright.

16 "Ten cubits *shall be* the length of each board, and one and a half cubits the width of each board.

17 "There *shall be* two tenons for each board, fitted to one another; thus you shall do

for all the boards of the tabernacle. 18 "And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle:

twenty boards for the south side. 19 "And you shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards, two sockets under one board for its two tenons and two sockets under another

board for its two tenons; 20 and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side,

twenty boards, 21 and their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board and two

sockets under another board. 22 "And for the rear of the tabernacle, to the west, you shall

make six boards. 23 "And you shall make two boards for the corners of the tabernacle at the

rear. 24 "And they shall be double beneath, and together they shall be complete to its top to

the first ring; thus it shall be with both of them: they shall form the two corners. 25 "And there

shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver, sixteen sockets; two sockets under one

board and two sockets under another board.

26 "Then you shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the boards of one side of the

tabernacle, 27 and five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars

for the boards of the side of the tabernacle for the rear *side* to the west. 28 "And the middle

bar in the center of the boards shall pass through from end to end. 29 "And you shall overlay

the boards with gold and make their rings of gold as holders for the bars; and you shall

overlay the bars with gold. 30 "Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which

you have been shown in the mountain.

31 "And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted

linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. 32 "And you shall hang it

on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks *also being of* gold, on four sockets of

silver. 33 "And you shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the

testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy

place and the holy of holies. 34 "And you shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony

in the holy of holies. 35 "And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand

opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table

on the north side.

36 "And you shall make a screen for the doorway of the tent of blue and purple and scarlet

*material* and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver. 37 "And you shall make five pillars of

acacia for the screen, and overlay them with gold, their hooks *also being of* gold; and you

shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.

Verses 1-6 describe the inner curtains or tapestries of the tabernacle covering. These were to be made of the finest materials. There were ten of them, sewn together into two groups of five each. They were woven of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet material with cherubim worked into the pattern. Each curtain was 28 cubits long and 4 cubits wide, about 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. So these were long and fairly narrow curtains.

These are the curtains you would see from inside the tabernacle, the first layer of curtains laid over the frame of the tabernacle. Some have seen all sorts of symbolism in the various colors and components of these curtains, such as the red representing the blood of Christ, and the white linen representing His purity, and special significance in the number and length of the

curtains and so on. Such things seem highly speculative and inventive to me without an explicit word in Scripture about them. I think certainly we can observe that these curtains would have been very beautiful and artistic. I think it demonstrates that God loves beauty and art. He wanted the interior of the tabernacle to be beautiful and majestic, yet at this point it also needed to be portable.

The goats' hair curtains would have been draped over the top of the inner curtains. There was one more of the goat's hair curtains than the linen curtains and they were to be 2 cubits longer than the inner curtains. They were longer and one curtain wider so that they would completely cover the inner curtains and protect them. There was one extra curtain so that it could be doubled over at the front of the tent (verse 9) and overlapped at the back of the tabernacle (verse 12).

Over the first two layers of curtains would go two more layers, one of rams' skins dyed red, and another of porpoise skins. It seems that the origin of the skins of this top layer is uncertain. The NASB here has "porpoise skins," but the KJV renders it "badgers' skins" and the WEB Bible has "sea cow hides." The Hebrew word is *tachash*, which [Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions](#) says is "a kind of leather, skin or animal hide, perhaps of the animal yielding the skin, perhaps the badger, or dugong, dolphin or sheep." Whatever the material was, it was probably waterproof, so that the lower layers and the interior of the tabernacle would stay dry in a storm. With all these layers, the tabernacle also would have been very dark, with only the light from the lampstand to give light to the interior.

The tabernacle needed a framework over which to drape the curtains, and so God specified vertical boards, ten cubits in length and one and a half cubits wide. Some have argued that these were not solid boards, but were actually rectangular acacia wood frames with these dimensions. This makes sense, since if the boards were solid, the artwork on the inner curtain could not be seen along the walls of the tabernacle. They were to make 20 boards for the south side, and 20 for the north side, and six for the rear which was on the west side. Two additional boards were required for the corners of the back of the tabernacle which would be "double beneath." Each board had two silver sockets that would mate to the tenons on the bottom of the boards and hold the boards upright.

To hold the vertical boards together the Lord told Moses to make five bars of acacia wood overlaid with gold for each side of the tabernacle and for the back. These bars would pass through rings on each of the boards. The boards were also to be overlaid with gold and the rings were to be made of gold. The bars would make sure that everything remained upright and square.

The tabernacle was to be erected according to the plan God showed Moses on the mountain (verse 30). I think God must have given Moses a visual representation of how all of this was to be done. With the description of the bars for the boards of the tabernacle, the last part of the outer walls for the holy place had been specified, so now God cautions Moses to put the tabernacle up according to plan.

The next item to be specified was the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies. It was to be made of the same material as the first layer of curtains, blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen with a motif of cherubim. The veil was to be hung on four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The veil was the partition that defined the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was to be placed. Once the ark was in place, the mercy seat was to be placed on top of the ark. These were the only things in the holy of holies. This was the place where only once a year the High Priest was allowed to enter in order to make atonement for the sins of the people. Aside from that one day this most holy

place was strictly off limits. But when Jesus breathed His last on the cross, this veil in the temple was torn in two (Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45). God was saying that this partition was no longer necessary. When Jesus died, the veil closing off the most holy place to men was destroyed. This means now that through Jesus, because of His death, we may approach the most holy God. The author of Hebrews points this out:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Through the death of Jesus we have confidence to enter the holy place into the presence of God Almighty. Therefore we are exhorted to draw near in fullness of faith to be cleansed and washed. The veil has been destroyed through the death of Christ that truly pays for our sins, and now we may approach God through Him and know Him.

Outside the veil but still inside the tabernacle, went the table of showbread and the lampstand. The table was right outside the veil, and the lampstand was opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south. Another curtain or "screen" woven of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen was to be made for the entrance of the tabernacle and hung on five pillars. This curtain evidently did not include the cherubim motif. The five pillars for the doorway curtain are described in verse 37. They were of acacia wood overlaid with gold. The sockets for the base of these pillars were made of bronze. This completes the description of the tabernacle itself and its contents.

#### Exodus 27:1-8

"And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. 2 "And you shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. 3 "And you shall make its pails for removing its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. 4 "And you shall make for it a grating of network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. 5 "And you shall put it beneath, under the ledge of the altar, that the net may reach halfway up the altar. 6 "And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. 7 "And its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. 8 "You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make *it*.

This bronze altar was about 7 and a half feet square and 4 and a half feet high. The frame was acacia wood overlaid with bronze. It had horns on each corner. This was an altar for burnt offerings, so it was kind of like a big barbecue. It had a bronze grating half way down in the center on which the offerings would be burned. They needed utensils for managing the burnt offerings, so they were to make pails, shovels, basins, forks and firepans of bronze for handling the offerings and the ashes. The altar also had rings and poles for carrying it. The horns of the altar were for binding the animal for sacrifice to the altar. Psalms 118:27 says,

“The LORD is God, and He has given us light; Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.” The animal was killed and then burned on the altar, so there had to be a means of securing the animal to the altar.

#### Exodus 27:9-19

"And you shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side *there shall be* hangings for the court of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for one side; *10* and its pillars *shall be* twenty, with their twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *shall be* of silver. *11* "And likewise for the north side in length *there shall be* hangings one hundred cubits long, and its twenty pillars with their twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *shall be* of silver. *12* "And *for* the width of the court on the west side *shall be* hangings of fifty cubits *with* their ten pillars and their ten sockets. *13* "And the width of the court on the east side *shall be* fifty cubits. *14* "The hangings for the *one side of the gate shall be* fifteen cubits *with* their three pillars and their three sockets. *15* "And for the other side *shall be* hangings of fifteen cubits *with* their three pillars and their three sockets. *16* "And for the gate of the court there *shall be* a screen of twenty cubits, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver, *with* their four pillars and their four sockets. *17* "All the pillars around the court shall be furnished with silver bands *with* their hooks of silver and their sockets of bronze. *18* "The length of the court *shall be* one hundred cubits, and the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits of fine twisted linen, and their sockets of bronze. *19* "All the utensils of the tabernacle *used* in all its service, and all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, *shall be* of bronze.

The court of the tabernacle, defined by the linen curtains, measured 100 cubits on the north and south sides, about 150 feet, and the width on the west and east sides was 50 cubits, or about 75 feet. There were 20 pillars to support the curtains on both the north and south sides, and 10 pillars for the east and west ends. The sockets to support the pillars were made of bronze, and the hooks and bands of the pillars were silver. The height of the curtain wall around the courtyard was to be 5 cubits, about 7.5 feet.

The gate of the courtyard was on the east end, with two curtains of 15 cubits each on each side of the gate, then the gate itself of 20 cubits. The gate was a “screen” of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen woven together. Four pillars would support the gate.

#### Exodus 27:20-21

"And you shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. *21* "In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

The lamp inside the tabernacle was to be kept burning continually, and so the Israelites were to continually bring olive oil to fuel the lamp. The oil was to be the highest quality clear olive oil, obtained by beating and not by pressing. It was, therefore, a lot of work to keep the lamp burning. It took daily maintenance to keep the light from going out. This command is repeated in Leviticus 24:2-4, “Command the sons of Israel that they bring to you clear oil from beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. Outside the veil of testimony in

the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD continually; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations. He shall keep the lamps in order on the pure *gold* lampstand before the LORD continually.” It takes some work on our part to keep our “lamp” burning, to keep the light shining in our lives, as Jesus mentioned in Matthew 5:14-16. The light of the Lord shines in our lives as we engage in good deeds that men can see. We maintain our light by cultivating our love for the Lord (Revelation 2:4-5) and by walking in consistent fellowship with Him.

#### Exodus 28

“Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me-- Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. 2 "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 3 "And you shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me. 4 "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me. 5 "And they shall take the gold and the blue and the purple and the scarlet *material* and the fine linen.

6 "They shall also make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman. 7 "It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two ends, that it may be joined. 8 "And the skillfully woven band, which is on it, shall be like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen. 9 "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, 10 six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. 11 "As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree *settings* of gold. 12 "And you shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for a memorial. 13 "And you shall make filigree *settings* of gold, 14 and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cordage work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree *settings*.

15 "And you shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen you shall make it. 16 "It shall be square *and* folded double, a span in length and a span in width. 17 "And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row *shall be* a row of ruby, topaz and emerald; 18 and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; 19 and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; 20 and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. 21 "And the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be *like* the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes. 22 "And you shall make on the breastpiece chains of twisted cordage work in pure gold. 23 "And you shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. 24 "And you shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece. 25 "And you shall put the *other* two ends of the two cords on the two filigree *settings*, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it. 26 "And you shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the

edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod. 27 "And you shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. 28 "And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, that it may be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece may not come loose from the ephod. 29 "And Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. 30 "And you shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually.

31 "And you shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. 32 "And there shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, as *it were* the opening of a coat of mail, that it may not be torn. 33 "And you shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: 34 a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe. 35 "And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its tinkling may be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the LORD, that he may not die.

36 "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the LORD.' 37 "And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. 38 "And it shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD. 39 "And you shall weave the tunic of checkered work of fine linen, and shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of a weaver.

40 "And for Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make caps for them, for glory and for beauty. 41 "And you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him; and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests. 42 "And you shall make for them linen breeches to cover *their* bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. 43 "And they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It *shall be* a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him.

Chapter 28 is devoted to the "holy garments" that Moses was to have made for Aaron and his sons so that they could serve as priests before the Lord. A priest is a mediator, a "go-between," representing the people before God and God before the people. Up to this point Moses has been acting as the one priest of Israel, but now the task will be given to Aaron and his family. To come into God's presence, they had to be properly clothed.

In verses 2-4 the Lord gives a summary of the garments that were to be made for Aaron and his sons. They were holy garments. They were set aside for the priestly function alone. These garments were not to be worn while Aaron was out shopping or wandering around the community. They were "for glory and for beauty." The garments were not just for utilitarian purposes, but were to be glorious and beautiful. The Lord loves beauty, and He wanted Aaron to be clad in beautiful clothing when he ministered in the tabernacle.

The Lord had given certain "skillful persons" the wisdom and ability to make these

garments for Aaron. The gifts of God do not only extend to things we might consider to be “spiritual,” but the Lord also gives practical skills for this kind of thing. Our ability to conceive of things and build them is a God-given ability. It is part of the image of God in humanity, that we can bring into being things that have not existed before. A person who designs and makes garments is displaying the image of God. A person who designs and builds a building is displaying the image of God. An artist creating a painting is displaying the image of God. Moses was to speak to these specially gifted people and tell them to make these garments for Aaron and his sons. These people were probably already well known as garment makers. Their gifts were probably already obvious to all, and people probably went to them when they needed something made or mended.

These garments would serve to consecrate Aaron and his sons so that they could serve as priests. To consecrate means to make something clean, to set it aside as holy, to set something apart for sacred use. Aaron and his sons would be consecrated, in part, by these holy clothes they would wear as they served as priests. No one who was not properly clothed and authorized could serve as a priest. The garments would enable Aaron to “minister as priest to Me.” Note that the Lord says this twice in verses 3 and 4.

The garments are listed in verse 4. They would include a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban and a sash. They were to be made of “gold and the blue and the purple and scarlet material and the fine linen.” This is the same sort of thing used for the inner curtain of the tabernacle and the curtain for the gate of the tabernacle.

The ephod is the subject of verses 6-14. It sounds like it was a sort of apron that hung down in the front and in the back and was joined by pieces or straps at the shoulders. It was made of this same gold, blue, purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen that was used in the tabernacle. It also included a belt, a “band” made of the same material. Two onyx stones set in gold filigree settings were to be engraved with the names of the 12 sons of Israel, six on one stone and six on the other. These stones were to be affixed to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. These served as “stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on His two shoulders for a memorial.” It was a reminder to Aaron and to the Lord and to the nation that as High Priest Aaron represented all the sons of Israel before the Lord. Aaron served not just on his own behalf, representing himself, but on behalf of all of the people and all of the tribes of Israel. As he entered into the presence of the Lord in the holy place, all Israel entered with him. The ephod also had two pure gold chains which were attached to filigree settings, possibly also attached to the shoulders.

The “breastpiece of judgment” is described in verses 15-30. It was to be made skillfully of the same material as the ephod, and was to be a “span” wide and a “span” long. A span was the width of a man's hand from thumb to the tip of the little finger, about 8 or 9 inches. So the breastpiece was about 8 or 9 inches square. It was folded double, so it made a kind of pocket into which was put the urim and the thummim (verse 30). On the breastpiece were to be placed 12 precious stones in filigree settings, four rows of 3 stones each. These stones again represented the 12 tribes of Israel. The first row was ruby, topaz and emerald. The second row was turquoise, sapphire and diamond. The third row was jacinth, agate and amethyst, and the fourth was beryl, onyx and jasper. The name of each tribe was engraved on the stone that represented him. The breastpiece was attached to the ephod with blue cords tied to the gold rings on the ephod and breastpiece. The Lord talks about the purpose of the breastpiece in verses 29 and 30. Aaron would be carrying the names of the sons of Israel over his heart as he entered the holy of holies. This would be a continual memorial before the Lord. The

families of Israel were precious to the Lord and as Aaron appeared before Him the nation would be appearing before Him.

In addition to the names of the sons of Israel being over the heart of Aaron in the breastpiece, the Urim and Thummim would also be there. With the Urim and Thummim he would “carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord.” No one seems to know today what the Urim and Thummim actually were. Obviously they were objects placed into the breastpiece that had something to do with the judgment of the Lord. They were used in discovering the will and counsel of the Lord. The Lord mentioned these things again when He told Moses that Joshua would succeed him in Numbers 27:21, “Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” The Urim and Thummim were used to inquire of the Lord, to ask Him questions and discover His direction. Sometimes the Lord would not answer, however, as when Saul tried to inquire of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, even by the use of the Urim (1 Samuel 28:6). On two occasions we are told that David called for the ephod and used it to inquire of the Lord. The first is in 1 Samuel 23:9-12:

Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10 Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. 11 "Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Thy servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Thy servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down." 12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you."

The second example is in 1 Samuel 30:7-8:

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. 8 And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them, and you shall surely rescue *all*."

It is likely that David made use of the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece of the ephod to ask the Lord these questions and obtain these answers. When the Lord answered, David then knew what course of action to take. Whatever these objects were, it is clear that they were used to inquire of the Lord and to obtain His “judgments” on things.

The robe is the next article of clothing that is mentioned in verses 31 to 35. It was made of blue material with an opening for the head in the top center. On the hem were pomegranates made of blue, purple and scarlet material alternating with gold bells. The bells were to be heard tinkling as Aaron went in and out of the holy place “so that he will not die.”

A pure gold plate was to be made and the words “Holy to the Lord” were to be engraved on it. It was to be attached to the turban on Aaron's forehead. When he had his priest's garments on, everyone would see that he was set apart as such. This was another thing that was required to make his service acceptable before the Lord and to enable him to bear, or take away, the sin and iniquity associated with the “holy things” because of their contact with



sinful humans. Aaron would be the one man on earth so labeled and therefore the only man on earth qualified to enter the most holy place to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Under the ephod and robe went the tunic and the turban of checkered linen. So essentially when Aaron was doing his duties as high priest, he wore three layers of clothing, the tunic, the robe and then the ephod.

Aaron's sons were also to wear special tunics and headbands. Moses was to dress these men and then anoint them and sanctify them for their work as priests. They were also to wear linen "breeches" to cover their nakedness. These reached from the waist to the thighs and were the underwear. These breeches would serve to prevent their nakedness from being exposed as they went about their duties.

#### Exodus 29:1-9

1 "Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to minister as priests to Me: take one young bull and two rams without blemish, 2 and unleavened bread and unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; you shall make them of fine wheat flour. 3 "You shall put them in one basket, and present them in the basket along with the bull and the two rams. 4 "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. 5 "You shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod and the ephod and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod; 6 and you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. 7 "Then you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. 8 "You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. 9 "You shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and bind caps on them, and they shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute. So you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

Here the Lord describes the ceremony to consecrate Aaron and his sons to carry out the offices of the priesthood. This ceremony was actually carried out later, described in Leviticus 8. This was done to "consecrate" them. The Hebrew word means to make something clean. Aaron and his sons, as they were, were not qualified to be priests. They had to be cleansed, to be forgiven and washed and purified, before they could serve before the Lord. The first thing required was a sacrifice and an offering. A young bull and two rams without blemish would be sacrificed to the Lord and also unleavened bread and cakes and wafers made of fine wheat flour would be offered to the Lord. They would be washed with water at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and then dressed in their priestly garments. Moses was to do all of this, since he was the mediator at that time. He was to anoint Aaron's head with oil, a symbol of being set apart for a special purpose and a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

#### Exodus 29:10-28

10 "Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. 11 "You shall slaughter the bull before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 12 "You shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; and you shall pour out all the blood at the base of the altar. 13 "You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, and offer them up in smoke on the altar. 14 "But the flesh of the bull and its hide and its refuse, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

15 "You shall also take the one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram; 16 and you shall slaughter the ram and shall take its blood and sprinkle it around on the altar. 17 "Then you shall cut the ram into its pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head. 18 "You shall offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD: it is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD.

19 "Then you shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram. 20 "You shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of his sons' right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet, and sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar. 21 "Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments and on his sons and on his sons' garments with him; so he and his garments shall be consecrated, as well as his sons and his sons' garments with him. 22 "You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail, and the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), 23 and one cake of bread and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer from the basket of unleavened bread which is set before the LORD; 24 and you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons, and shall wave them as a wave offering before the LORD. 25 "You shall take them from their hands, and offer them up in smoke on the altar on the burnt offering for a soothing aroma before the LORD; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

26 "Then you shall take the breast of Aaron's ram of ordination, and wave it as a wave offering before the LORD; and it shall be your portion. 27 "You shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering which was waved and which was offered from the ram of ordination, from the one which was for Aaron and from the one which was for his sons. 28 "It shall be for Aaron and his sons as their portion forever from the sons of Israel, for it is a heave offering; and it shall be a heave offering from the sons of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, even their heave offering to the LORD.

Once Aaron and his sons were dressed in their holy garments, there were some offerings that needed to be offered as part of the consecration ceremony. First there was a bull offered as a sin offering (verses 10-14). This bull was to be slaughtered at the doorway of the tent of meeting. Before slaughtering it, Aaron and his sons were to lay their hands on its head, symbolic of their sins and guilt being transferred to the bull. For our sin and guilt God provides a substitute who is innocent of our transgressions. The bull had done nothing to deserve to die, but it was killed in place of Aaron and his sons, for their guilt. Jesus did nothing deserving of death, as Pilate observed (Luke 23:14-15), yet He was condemned and killed for our transgressions (Isaiah 53).

The Lord is very specific about what is to be done with certain parts of the bull. Some of the blood was to be put on the horns of the altar. Moses was to do this with his finger. He was to dip his finger in the blood of the bull and then put it on each of the four horns of the altar. I presume this would symbolize that the altar was now cleansed and considered holy. Moses was to personally touch it with his blood-covered finger. He was not told to use any kind of instrument to transfer the blood to the altar horns. I think I would prefer to use a brush or a syringe or something, but Moses was to use his finger. The bull's blood was used in place of the blood of Aaron and his sons. Its blood was put on the altar in place of their blood. Its blood

was poured out at the base of the altar instead of their blood. His life was given for their lives. When Jesus instituted the Lord's supper with His disciples, He said, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The blood of the bull prefigured the blood of Jesus, poured out as a sacrifice for all people. The fat and entrails of the bull were to be burned on the altar, and the flesh, hide and refuse were to be burned outside the camp. No part of this bull was to be eaten because it was a sin offering. It was to be completely consumed by fire as a full offering to the Lord.

The second offering was a ram. Again, Aaron and his sons were to lay their hands on its head and then they were to slaughter the ram and sprinkle its blood on the altar. The ram was then to be cut into pieces and the innards and legs washed and then replaced with the other parts and head, then the whole ram was to be burnt on the altar. It was a fire offering to the Lord that would be a soothing aroma before Him. The Hebrew word for "soothing" means "a quieting, soothing, tranquilizing"<sup>22</sup>. This word is used many times, especially in Leviticus and Numbers, in reference to burnt offerings. This word is first used in Genesis 8:20-21, "Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" Clearly the one being "soothed" is the Lord Himself. The smell of a burning sheep would probably not be too soothing to most people, but for the Lord it was a soothing aroma. His wrath was quieted by this offering.

The third offering was the "ram of ordination." Verses 19-28 describe this offering. Again, Aaron and his sons were to first lay their hands on its head, and then it was slaughtered. Some of its blood was to be put on Aaron and his sons, on the lobes of their right ears, on their right thumbs, and on the big toes of their right feet. I'm not sure of the significance of this, but might speculate. The ear is the organ of hearing, so the blood on the earlobe may symbolize the sanctification of the hearing. It may have to do with the need to listen to the Lord and hear His word. The blood on the thumb of the right hand may have to do with the sanctification of their work. The right hand is the hand of power and of work, so it may be indicating that the work of Aaron was to be holy. The right big toe was crucial to walking, and so it may have to do with sanctifying the path of Aaron and his sons. The road they were to walk was to be a holy road. Your actions and the path you take are guided by your hearing. Working for the Lord and following His path depends on listening to Him.

Some of the blood on the altar was to be taken, along with some anointing oil, and it was to be sprinkled on Aaron and his sons. The purpose was "so he and his garments shall be consecrated, as well as his sons and his sons' garments with him." The blood of the ram of ordination would cleanse and make holy the garments of Aaron and his sons. You would think that this would actually make a mess of their clothing, but from a spiritual perspective it was a cleansing thing.

Parts of this ram were to be waved as an offering before the Lord and then offered up as a burnt offering on the altar. This included the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat covering the entrails and the lobe of the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right thigh. This was to be combined with a cake of bread, a cake of bread with oil, and a wafer of the unleavened bread from the bread that was set before the Lord. All of this was to be given to Aaron and his sons, and they were to wave them before the Lord. Then Moses was to take all of this and

offer it up as a burnt offering on the altar. It also would be a soothing aroma to Him.

The breast and thigh were to go to Aaron and his sons. Finally there is a portion of this offering that they were allowed to eat. It was a "heave offering" to the Lord. When the Israelites brought peace offerings, heave offerings, these parts of the ram were for the priests for their sustenance.

Exodus 29:29-46

29 "The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him, that in them they may be anointed and ordained. 30 "For seven days the one of his sons who is priest in his stead shall put them on when he enters the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place.

31 "You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. 32 "Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 33 "Thus they shall eat those things by which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration; but a layman shall not eat them, because they are holy. 34 "If any of the flesh of ordination or any of the bread remains until morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire; it shall not be eaten, because it is holy. 35 "Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you; you shall ordain them through seven days. 36 "Each day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement, and you shall purify the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to consecrate it. 37 "For seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it; then the altar shall be most holy, and whatever touches the altar shall be holy.

38 "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two one year old lambs each day, continuously. 39 "The one lamb you shall offer in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; 40 and there shall be one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering with one lamb. 41 "The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it the same grain offering and the same drink offering as in the morning, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. 42 "It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. 43 "I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. 44 "I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. 45 "I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. 46 "They shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.

The ordination of Aaron and his sons took seven days, a full week, with a bull being offered as a sin offering each day, to make atonement for the altar and to consecrate it. Each day two lambs were also to be offered, one in the morning and one in the evening. These offerings of lambs were to be given continually throughout Israel's history (verse 42). All these sacrifices and offerings were part of the process of consecrating the altar and the priests who served at the altar. They were set apart as holy. The offerings were holy, the garments were holy, the altar was holy and the priests were holy. Ultimately all these things were set apart and consecrated by the presence of the Lord Himself and by His glory (verses 43-46). All these things had to be consecrated because it was there, at the doorway of the tabernacle, that the Lord would meet with them and speak to them. God's intention was to meet with them there, and to dwell with them and be their God. God wants to meet with His people and speak

to them. He wants to have fellowship with them. God does not want to send us away but to draw us close. He wants to live with us and speak to us and share with us. We are the ones who draw away from Him. Jesus said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matthew 23:37). What the Lord wants is to gather us to Himself, but we are unwilling to allow Him to do so.

Exodus 30:1-10

"Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 "Its length shall be a cubit, and its width a cubit, it shall be square, and its height shall be two cubits; its horns shall be of one piece with it. 3 "You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold molding all around for it. 4 "You shall make two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make them on its two side walls--on opposite sides--and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. 5 "You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 "You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. 7 "Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. 8 "When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. 9 "You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. 10 "Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

One other piece of furniture was needed for the tabernacle, the altar of incense. This was a small table, one cubit by one cubit, and two cubits high. Its only function was for burning incense. It was, like the ark, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, with a gold molding, horns and rings for the poles used to carry it. The incense offered on it was symbolic of the prayers of God's people. In Psalm 141:2 David says, "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering." Revelation 5:8 says, "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Revelation 8:3 says, "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand." There, right before the place where God said He would meet with them, was the place where the incense was burned. God is saying He meets us at the place of prayer. He is there to speak and He is there to listen. God is not just a God who speaks, but also a God who listens. He wants to hear our prayers. The incense altar is a reminder of this.

Exodus 30:11-16

The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. 13

"This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. 14 "Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD. 15 "The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves. 16 "You shall take the atonement money from the sons of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves."

A census would be taken in the future, but when that census was taken, it was necessary that each man pay a ransom for his life to the Lord. The threat of a plague among the people was there unless each man paid this ransom. The purpose of the census was to discover their military strength in numbers. God commanded this be done in Numbers 1:1-3. The grand total was given in Exodus 38:26 and Numbers 2:32 – 603,550 men. Each of these men was to pay the half shekel ransom for himself. There was no requirement for a rich man to give more, nor was there an allowance made for a poor man to give less. This ransom would make atonement for them (verse 15).

It is interesting to note the words that describe this payment. It is called a "ransom," in Hebrew *kopher* – the price of a life. It is called a "contribution" in verse 13. The Hebrew term is *terumah*, an offering. It is called "the atonement money." Atonement is *kaphar*, "to cover over, to pacify, to appease."<sup>23</sup> It is also called "a memorial" (verse 16), a *zikkaron*, a remembrance.

#### Exodus 30:17 -21

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. 19 "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; 20 when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the LORD. 21 "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."

The Lord commands that Moses make a bronze laver, a basin, with a bronze base that was to be used by Aaron and his sons for washing their hands and feet when they entered the tent to begin their work of ministry. This was necessary to keep them from dying in the performance of their tasks. They were to have no dirt from the outside on their hands and feet as they ministered in the tabernacle.

#### Exodus 30:22-33

Moreover, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred *shekels*, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, 24 and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. 25 "You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

26 "With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, 27 and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, 28 and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand. 29 "You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy. 30 "You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me. 31 "You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. 32 'It shall not be poured on anyone's body, nor shall you make *any* like it in the same proportions; it is holy, *and* it shall be holy to you. 33 'Whoever shall mix *any* like it or whoever puts any of it on a layman shall be cut off from his people.'"

Like everything related to the tabernacle and its service, this anointing oil that the perfumers were to make was to be exclusive, holy and special. The Lord specified the ingredients and their proportions very clearly. It was set aside for the anointing of the priests, the tent, the ark, the lampstand and everything else used in the service in the tabernacle. This oil was not to be used by anyone else for any other purpose. No one was allowed to make any like it. If anyone did so they were to be "cut off from his people."

#### Exodus 30:34-38

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each. 35 "With it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, *and* holy. 36 "You shall beat some of it very fine, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you. 37 "The incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be holy to you for the LORD. 38 "Whoever shall make *any* like it, to use as perfume, shall be cut off from his people."

The incense also had a specific formula and was to be exclusive to the service of the tabernacle. No one was to make any like it for personal use. The gifted perfumer was to make this incense. The entire atmosphere of the place where they were to meet with God was dictated by the Lord, the sights, the surroundings, and even the smells. All of it was holy. All of it said, "this is no ordinary place."

#### Exodus 31:1-11

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3 "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, 5 and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. 6 "And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you: 7 the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat upon it, and all the furniture of the tent, 8 the table also and its utensils, and the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, 9 the altar of burnt offering also with all its utensils, and the laver and its stand, 10 the woven garments as well, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, *with which* to carry on their priesthood; 11 the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for the holy place, they are to make *them* according to all that I have

commanded you."

When we talk about God's call upon a man, we usually think of God's call to "spiritual" things, His "call to the ministry" and to "full-time service." We don't usually think of God's call to carpentry or craftsmanship. But in Bezalel and Oholiab we see just such a call. These were men who were filled with the Spirit of God to perform the work of producing the things that God had commanded regarding the tabernacle. Because of the Spirit of God Bezalel had the wisdom, understanding and knowledge he needed to design and make the things that God had commanded. He could work in gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood to produce the things God wanted.

These two men were called and appointed by God Himself to this task. He knew them by name. The Lord did not tell Moses to go find some men who could carry out the work, but the Lord Himself both equipped these men and called them. When God gives us a task to do that will require a lot of specialized work, He will also call and equip people who can do it. He knows those who are the best people for the job. We can trust Him to bring those people to us as well, as we prayerfully wait and look for the right people, He will indicate them to us.

Besides Bezalel and Oholiab, the Lord had given many other skillful people the skills they needed to help do the work of the tabernacle. The creative skills we possess are an aspect of the image of God in us. Ultimately these skills come from Him, He puts them in our hearts.

#### Exodus 31:12-18

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **13** "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. **14** 'Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. **15** 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. **16** 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' **17** "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed."

**18** When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

These are the last formal words of the Lord to Moses during this meeting on the mountain. He will have some more words of anger in the next chapter, but this is the official end of the meeting. His last instructions are a reiteration of the importance of observing His sabbaths.

The Lord seems to underline this requirement, "You shall surely observe My sabbaths." Of course, the question comes, "Why? What's so crucial about the sabbath?" So the Lord provides a reason, "for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you." Again, in verse 17 He says, "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor and was refreshed." The sabbath is a "sign" for Israel and is part of the covenant God made with Israel. Of course, I have commented on the sabbath law at length earlier, when we covered the ten commandments in Exodus 20, so I



don't feel that I need to say much more about it here. I will observe that the death penalty is prescribed for those who profane the sabbath (verses 14 and 15). I don't think this was actually enforced very often, but it shows how serious God is about this. Everyone who deliberately and needlessly works on the sabbath deserves to die and has violated the covenant of God. Clearly God wants His people to take a break from work one day a week.

We don't read very often of God actually writing things Himself, but here we find that God Himself wrote on the two tablets He gave to Moses. God had told Moses that He was going to give him these tablets when He commanded him to come up on the mountain, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction" (Exodus 24:12). The meeting on Mount Sinai had come to a conclusion, and God gave Moses the tablets. When Moses reminded the people of the ten commandments that God had spoken to all the people in front of Mount Sinai, he then said, "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain from the midst of the fire, *of* the cloud and *of* the thick gloom, with a great voice, and He added no more. He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me" (Deuteronomy 5:22). And again he says in Deuteronomy 9:9-11:

9 "When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10 "The LORD gave me the two tablets of stone written by the finger of God; and on them *were* all the words which the LORD had spoken with you at the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly. 11 "It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.

It appears that the primary reason for calling Moses up to the meeting on the mountain was to give him these tablets. The tablets were the covenant that God had made with Israel. They were the core laws that they were to observe. We know from Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13 that it was the ten commandments God had written on the tablets, the same words He spoke to the entire nation before the mountain in Exodus 20. The ten commandments embodied the legal agreement between Yahweh and Israel. They summarized the legal obligations of the Israelites in their relationship with the Lord.

#### Exodus 32:1-6

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." 2 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. 4 He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5 Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the LORD." 6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

I don't know how long it was that the people of Israel waited while Moses was on the

mountain before they came to Aaron with this demand. We know that Moses was on the mountain for forty days. Obviously Aaron had the time to fashion the calf and build the altar, so it may have been at least a few days before Moses returned to them. The people saw that Moses was delayed, and they were getting impatient. They said of Moses, "we do not know what has become of him." They assumed that he was dead or gone and they gave up on him.

We should recall that in Exodus 24:3 they had said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" Included in this commitment was an agreement to make no idols (Exodus 20:4-6 and Exodus 20:23). They had heard God Himself give them the ten commandments and they had been terrified (Exodus 20:19). But their commitment to obedience was quickly cast aside in their demand that Aaron make a god for them. The strong and powerful leader associated with Yahweh had disappeared, so now they concluded that his God was gone as well and they needed to make their own god to worship. This is what can happen when our faith depends on the influence of a strong leader or a beloved mentor. When that person is out of the picture or disappoints us, we may quickly abandon the faith we professed. We must be careful to see that our faith is our own and does not depend on the faith, influence or leadership of someone else.

I get the feeling from this passage that when the people came to Aaron they did not come with a humble request. They did not come to ask Aaron's permission to make their own god. They didn't come saying, "Hey Aaron, what do you think about making a god?" They came with a demand and an implied threat. They were not giving Aaron an option. They were saying "Make us a god or else!" Virtually the whole nation was behind this idea. The popular movement was that they needed to give up on Moses and his God and come up with their own religious system that wasn't so restrictive. They wanted a god of their own making who would allow them to behave as they pleased.

What is popular is not always right. In fact, we might go so far as to say that what is popular is often wrong. The polls and surveys may say that more than half the population believes a certain thing to be true, but it could be a complete deception! Our culture approves of many things that God condemns, sexual immorality, abortion, covetousness, violence, injustice and many other things. It takes courage to stand up against an overwhelming majority and say, "This is what God says!" Aaron did not have that courage. Aaron did not remind them of the commandments they had agreed to obey. He did not rebuke them, but simply acquiesced to their demand.

The people were happy to supply the gold for the fabrication of the god. Aaron told them to give him their gold earrings to supply the material for the calf. Aaron made the calf from this gold and presented it to the people. The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary says, "This idol seems to have been the god Apis, the chief deity of the Egyptians, worshipped at Memphis under the form of a live ox, three years old. It was distinguished by a triangular white spot on its forehead and other peculiar marks. Images of it in the form of a whole ox, or of a calf's head on the end of a pole, were very common; and it makes a great figure on the monuments where it is represented in the van of all processions, as borne aloft on men's shoulders." The people said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." This god had not existed until this day, because they had made it themselves, and yet they said this was the god who brought them out of Egypt. They said that this gold calf was the god who had acted on their behalf to deliver them out of bondage. G.K. Chesterton reportedly said, "The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything." Israel quickly turned from faith in the real, living God who had actually and miraculously delivered them from Egypt and led them out to faith in a gold calf of their own making.

Aaron went further, and perhaps tried to fix things a bit, by taking God's covenant name, Yahweh, and attaching it to the gold calf. He built an altar in front of it, and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to Yahweh." So now this calf is supposed to be a visible representation of Yahweh! What a ridiculous notion that a gold calf is Yahweh! Whenever we try to make a physical representation of the infinite God we will always mess it up!

Aaron proclaimed the feast to Yahweh for the next day, and so on the next day the people got up early for the special feast. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to this newly made god. They sat down to eat and drink, and then they "rose up to play." The word means to laugh, to mock, to make sport of. Verses 18 and 19 indicate that singing and dancing were part of the celebration before this false god. Paul quotes this passage in 1 Corinthians 10:7 as he points to Israel at this time as a negative example and says, "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.'" Israel and Aaron show us what not to do at this point. Here is an example we are not to follow.

#### Exodus 32:7-14

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*. 8 "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" 9 The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

11 Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people. 13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.'" 14 So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

It's interesting to see that the Lord here does not refer to the idolatrous Israelites as His people. He says to Moses, "your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." They are not "My people, whom I brought up from Egypt." As they have turned away from Him now He turns away from them. We disown Him before He disowns us. Mankind has taken the initiative to turn away from God and because of it we face all the miseries we experience. When we turned away from Him, He turned away from us.

The Lord spelled out clearly to Moses what his people had done. They had "corrupted themselves." They had ruined themselves. They hadn't been corrupted by others, but they had done it to themselves by their own volition. No one from the outside had come along and suggested that they should turn away from Yahweh and worship a gold calf. They had decided to do this themselves. They were responsible for their own corruption.

They had "quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them." They turned off

the right road onto the wrong road. He had shown them the way He wanted them to think and behave, and they had quickly turned from it. The way that God commands is always the right way. He will not command us to go the wrong way because that would violate His holy nature. He had commanded them to have no other gods besides Him, and they had turned aside from this first command. He had commanded them to make no idols or worship them, and they had turned aside from this second command. The two top, most important commandments had been quickly abandoned.

God observed that they had turned aside "quickly." There is no mention of any debate concerning this course of action or of any dissent. If there were people who didn't agree with the idea of making their own god there is no record that they spoke up or resisted. Probably they were intimidated like Aaron was and capitulated without a fight. This is a major problem for us. Those who are loyal to God and His word have a responsibility to speak up in the face of those who propose turning away from God and His law. We must be those who speak up for what God has said even if we are in the minority. We must always call ourselves and others to faith and obedience.

The Lord told Moses specifically what the people had done, and how they had turned aside by making a molten calf. They had worshiped it and sacrificed to it and had said that it was their god who had brought them up from Egypt (verse 8). We can begin to understand what this must feel like for God if we imagine our accomplishments being attributed to someone else. Imagine writing a best-selling novel and then having it attributed to someone else who had nothing to do with it. Imagine them receiving the accolades as if they had done it. Imagine them profiting from your work. Imagine standing up and saying, "Hey! I wrote that novel!" and being ridiculed and rejected. God tells us many times that He is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, 32:16, 32:21, Joshua 24:19, Nahum 1:2). Some may think that this is unworthy of God, that He should be jealous, but really He is jealous for our sake. He does not want us to run after falsehood and deception. He does not want to see us wasting our time and spiritual energy on things that are worthless. He wants to see us recognize the truth of who He is and what He has done for us. He doesn't want us to put our confidence in false "gods" and religions that we have dreamed up for ourselves.

The Lord's evaluation of the character of the people of Israel in verse 9 is that "they are an obstinate people." The King James and World English Bibles translate the word literally as "stiff-necked." The [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#) has this entry:

## STIFF-NECKED

stif-nekt (*qesheh`oreph*, literally, "hard of neck"): As it is figuratively used, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the word means "stubborn," "untractable," "not to be led." The derivation of the idea was entirely familiar to the Jews, with whom the ox was the most useful and common of domestic animals. It was especially used for such agricultural purposes as harrowing and plowing (Judges 14:18 1 Corinthians 9:9).

The plow was usually drawn by two oxen. As the plowman required but one hand to guide the plow, he carried in the other an "ox-goad." This was a light pole, shod with an iron spike. With this he would prick the oxen upon the hind legs to increase their speed, and upon the neck to turn, or to keep a straight course when deviating. If an ox was hard to control or stubborn, it was "hard of neck," or stiff-necked.

Hence, the figure was used in the Scriptures to express the stubborn, untractable spirit of a people not responsive to the guiding of their God (Exodus 32:9; Exodus 33:3 Deuteronomy 9:6 2 Chronicles 36:13 Jeremiah 17:23, etc.). See also the New Testament where *sklerotrachelos*, is so translated (Acts 7:51), "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit."

People who are "stiff-necked" are those who will not cooperate with the Lord. They will not bow to Him and to His leading. They resist Him at every point. Any obedience they give is grudging and resentful obedience. They turn away from Him whenever they feel they have the opportunity.

The Lord said to Moses, "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation" (verse 10). The Lord implies here that He cannot destroy the people as long as Moses stands in the way. He can't fully allow His anger to burn against them and He can't destroy them as long as Moses intercedes for them. Moses has to decide whether he will say, "OK, Lord – let 'em have it!" or will continue to intercede for them and mediate for them.

This reminds me of the parable of the fruitless fig tree that Jesus told in Luke 13:6-9:

And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; 9 and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'"

Those who are fruitless face the wrath of God and deserve to be cut down and destroyed. The wrath of God against the unbelieving and disobedient is a real thing. Yet this parable shows that there is an advocate, a mediator, who deflects the judgment for a while and tries to work with the tree to help it bear fruit. At this point Moses was acting as the "vineyard-keeper," the mediator who stood up for the "fig tree", the people of Israel. We also have a mediator. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 tells us, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time." Jesus is the ultimate mediator who stands between us and the wrath of God. Because of Him we are spared so that we may become fruitful. We see also that God is gracious and patient. He will give people time to repent and turn to Him and become obedient.

This account also reminds me of the parable of the vine-growers from Luke 20:9-19:

9 And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. 10 "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. 12 "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. 13 "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 "But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with

one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' 15 "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 "He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" 17 But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*'? 18 "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

19 The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

There comes a time when the patience of God is exhausted, and He will act to remove those who refuse to recognize His ownership and His authority. There will be a time when the unrighteous and unworthy are removed and the vineyard is given to others. This idea is seen also in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13. The wheat and tares are allowed to grow together until the harvest, but then the worthless tares are removed and burned, but the wheat is gathered into the barn. We must not think that the doctrine of God's wrath against the wicked and rebellious is strictly an "Old Testament" concept, or that it is unworthy of a loving God.

Fortunately for Israel Moses did not leave God alone. He did not step aside, but continued to exercise his role as mediator. He entreated the Lord and begged for His favor. He pointed out that Israel was "Your people, whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt." The Lord had called them "your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt" in verse 7, and now Moses turns it around and says, "No, they are Your people! You brought them out of Egypt!" He throws the responsibility back on Yahweh.

Moses begins with two questions to the Lord, both "why" questions. First he asks, "Why does your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?" This seems an odd question since God has just told Moses what these people had done that had provoked Him. It seems like the Lord had already answered this question. God had said, "Let My anger burn" and then Moses asks "Why does your anger burn?" Even though they had quickly turned away, and even though they had made their own god and worshiped it and violated the commands of God they said they would obey, still they were God's people. He had chosen them. He had gone to the trouble of rescuing them from Egypt. He had heard their cries and had compassion on them. He had fulfilled His promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 that after 400 years He would lead them out. I don't think that Moses is saying here that God shouldn't be angry or that He has no reason to be angry. His question is "Why does your anger burn?" When God's anger burns, it brings terrible consequences against the objects of His anger. When a fire burns, it consumes and destroys. On a human level when our anger "burns" we may say and do things impulsively that we will later regret. We will lash out at people we love and hurt them, and then know that we have gone too far. From a human perspective it seems that the Lord Himself has gotten to this point.

The second question of Moses points to the effect that the burning anger and destruction of Israel would have on the Egyptians, "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of

the earth'?" The Egyptians would come to the conclusion that Yahweh had not saved them from Egypt in order to bless them, but in order to destroy them. They would attribute evil motives to God. There is a sense in which God does care about what people think of Him. Again, this is not because He is insecure and needs affirmation, but because He wants people to rightly understand His nature and does not want them to think wrongly of Him. He does not want us to think that He is driven by evil motives. He does not want us to think that He is impatient and capricious.

Moses then exhorts the Lord to turn from His burning anger and to change His mind about doing harm to His people. He reminds Him of Abraham, Isaac and Israel and about His promises on oath to them to multiply their descendants and give them the land as an inheritance. He summarizes the promises made to Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 12, 13, 15 and 26. Moses calls on the Lord to remember and to fulfill His promises. His intent in sending them to Egypt was to grow them into a great nation, and He had fulfilled that purpose. Why would He now erase that accomplishment and start all over again?

The Lord listened to Moses and "changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people." Now this is a problem, because we are talking about the Lord here. We are talking about the all-knowing, all-powerful God of the universe. How does He "change His mind"? When Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel, Balaam said, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). Similarly, when Samuel told king Saul that the Lord had removed the kingdom from Saul, he said, "Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29). On the other hand, Jonah was angry that the Lord did not destroy Nineveh because, as he said, "I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2). The word translated "relents" in Jonah is the same word translated "changed His mind" in Exodus 32:14. The same word is used and translated "relent" and "think better" in Jeremiah 18:1-10:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. 4 But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 6 "Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter *does*?" declares the LORD. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel. 7 "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; 8 if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will **relent** concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. 9 "Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; 10 if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will **think better** of the good with which I had promised to bless it."

Naturally at this point we must ask, "So which is it? Does God change His mind and relent or doesn't He?" The answer seems to be bound up with the human response to the divine threat. What God does depends on what the threatened humans do. We see this in the example of Jonah and Nineveh. The message Jonah proclaimed in Nineveh was a flat-out,

straightforward message of doom and judgment. He went through the city crying out, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" It appears that he did not mention that there was any option or hope of escape. But when the people of Nineveh believed in God and turned from their wickedness, the king said, "both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8-9). The next verse says, "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it" (Jonah 3:10). The people of Nineveh had no assurances that if they turned from their wickedness and called on God that He would "change His mind" or relent, but we see that because they did so, God turned away from His intent to destroy them. God, in a sense, "backed off" from His threat. If they had not listened to Jonah and had not responded to the word of God, they would have been destroyed; God would not have "relented." We should note that if there had been no possibility that God would "change His mind", then there would have been no point in sending Jonah to issue the warning in the first place. If the overthrow of Nineveh was inevitable and unavoidable and there was no possibility that God would relent, then why did He send Jonah to them? God is gracious in sending His warnings. He is gracious in making His threats, because it informs us that we are on the verge of destruction if we do not turn around.

So then, God relenting depends on man repenting. You might say, "But the Israelites did not repent!" In their case it was Moses who stood in for them. He turned the wrath of God away and then dealt himself with the people.

#### Exodus 32:15-35

Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. 16 The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. 17 Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." 18 But he said, "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; But the sound of singing I hear." 19 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.

21 Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?" 22 Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. 23 "For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24 "I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

25 Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control--for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies-- 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. 27 He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man of



you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor." 28 So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29 Then Moses said, "Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD--for every man has been against his son and against his brother--in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today."

30 On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31 Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. 32 "But now, if You will, forgive their sin--and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" 33 The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. 34 "But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin." 35 Then the LORD smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made.

The Lord had ordered Moses to go down the mountain, so Moses went down, carrying the two tablets of the testimony. These tablets were the work of God. He Himself had made them and had engraved on them the ten commandments. He had spoken these same commandments to them verbally, as recorded in chapter 20, and now He gives them to the people in writing, His own writing. These commandments are so significant and so important that God Himself had both spoken them and written them. We mustn't miss the obvious point that we need to pay attention to these commandments. They are called "the tablets of the testimony." They are the testimony, the witness of God, regarding His requirements for man. They prescribe how we are to live and reveal His will.

As Moses and Joshua neared the camp, they could hear the people making all kinds of noise. Joshua thought it was the sound of war, but Moses pointed out that he heard singing. It was not the sound of triumph, nor the cry of defeat that they heard. It was the sound of a party. It was the sound of a festival or celebration. They were celebrating the work of their hands in making a new god. Worship services with singing are not always good and godly things. Sometimes people sing to false gods. Sometimes people celebrate falsehood.

Moses not only heard the celebrating but as he got near the camp he saw it as well. He saw the calf and the dancing, and instead of delighting him it enraged him. As the anger of the Lord had burned, so now the anger of Moses burned. The emotional reaction that drove the Lord to threaten these people with destruction was now fully felt and shared by Moses. As God was provoked so Moses was provoked. The man who is in step with God will find that he shares the emotions and reactions of God against the sins of men. He will love what God loves and hate what God hates. He will not think that idolatry is harmless or amusing. He will abhor what God abhors. When Paul was walking through Athens he saw all of their idols and Acts 17:16 says, "his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols." It irritated him that these people did not worship the Lord but worshiped worthless idols. This irritation prompted him to preach the truth of the gospel to them. It should bother us that people turn away from God to give the honor and glory due to Him to other things. It is a misuse of our humanity to honor something as God that is not God.

Driven by his burning anger, Moses acted. He threw the tablets of the covenant and they shattered at the foot of the mountain. He burned the gold calf, ground it to powder, scattered it

over the water and made the people drink it. I think there's more than just uncontrolled rage in evidence here. I don't think that Moses is simply acting impulsively. There is symbolism here. The people had turned away from God's fundamental commands quickly and had abandoned their covenant with Him, and so Moses shattered the tablets as an indication that the covenant had been broken. God had not abandoned the covenant, but Israel had. The idol they had made was now powder floating on the water, and they were made to drink it, which was probably not a pleasant thing. Their so-called "god" became dust that they could consume. There is a clear lesson here about man-made "gods" and religions, that they can be destroyed very easily. Their worthlessness easily becomes apparent. To trust in man-made religion is folly.

Moses then turned to Aaron for an explanation. Aaron was at fault; he was culpable. He had brought this sin upon them (verse 21) and had "let them get out of control" (verse 25). Moses first question, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?", reveals that he understood the situation. He understood that Aaron would not have done this unless he had been pressured to do so. Moses assumed that there was probably a threat on Aaron's life unless he had complied with their wishes. Moses had seen how volatile these people could be as they had argued with him about water and about food and had falsely accused him. He had seen how fickle they were about trusting the Lord. So his first question is, "What did they do to you?" The folly of the congregation will often flow to the elders and leaders. A pastor will often feel pressured to turn away from what he knows is right and true in order to please a popular sentiment in the congregation, and congregations are often strongly influenced by the world and popular culture. This is why biblical teaching is so important. This is why a pastor or church leader needs a strong backbone, faith in the Lord and strong biblical convictions.

Aaron feared the anger of Moses. He appealed to Moses that he not allow his anger to burn. He called Moses "my lord." Facing the wrath of Moses was a scary thing, but how much more the wrath of God! Then Aaron pointed out to Moses that he was aware of the character of the people, that they were prone to evil. He seems to be saying, "Moses, you know these people! Why are you asking me about this? You already know why I did this!" Moses was fully aware of the wickedness of the people and of their rebellious nature. He knew how threatening they could be.

Aaron went on to explain what happened. He quoted what the people had said to him when they demanded he make a god for them. He said that he had asked them to tear off their gold and give it to him. He threw the gold into the fire, and out came the calf! He left out the part in verse 4, "He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf." Aaron made it sound like some kind of miracle that the calf emerged from the fire. But this calf was not the product of some supernatural event. It had been shaped and formed by Aaron and whoever helped him. Aaron did what we all tend to do when we are caught in a misdeed, he tried to minimize his guilt. He tried to make it seem that what he had done was not really that bad, or that he was a hapless victim of powers beyond his control. He left out the key part of his wrongdoing, that he himself had participated in the forming of the calf idol.

Moses saw something; he perceived something. He saw that the people were out of control. They were out of control because Aaron had let them get out of control (verse 25). The Hebrew word translated "out of control" here is *para*, which means "let go, let alone"<sup>24</sup>.

The word is translated “naked” in the King James Version, and “broken loose” and “let loose” in the World English Bible. I suppose it's possible during this party that some of the people may have been naked. They were unrestrained. They had been allowed to go the way they wanted to go. This seems to indicate a fundamental idea – that people need to be controlled. Sinful, fallen humanity must be controlled in some way, they have to be restrained, and that restraint has to be imposed upon them because they are not self-restrained. Total freedom in the sense that everyone is free to do whatever they want whenever they want is not possible for a fallen race because of their wickedness and evil desires. Some want to kill their noisy neighbors. Some want to drive 200 miles per hour on the freeway. Some don't want to pay any attention to traffic signals. Some want to rape women. Some want to shoplift. In a fallen world such total “freedom” would be total anarchy and there would be no such thing as safety and peace. Woe to the leader of a group of people who lets them get out of control! Aaron lost his authority when he caved in to the demands of the people and did not restrain them. They then knew that they could demand anything and get what they wanted. It's difficult to re-assert authority when once you have given it up.

Moses also saw that this would be an occasion for derision of Israel among their enemies. Their enemies would mock them because of this folly. Israel was now supposed to be the human army of Yahweh, but they had turned away from Him and lost their credibility as such. Their enemies should have feared them, but instead now they had reason to make fun of them.

Moses went to the “gate” of the camp and cried out, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” The gate, I presume, was the entry of the camp. I doubt that they had built some sort of fort or enclosure while they were camping there. The gate was typically a gathering place for the people of a city where business was conducted and meetings were held (see Ruth 4:1 and 2 Samuel 19:8). It would be the place to gather the people together. Moses called for those who were still loyal to Yahweh, and the Levites responded. Levi was the tribe to which Moses and Aaron belonged. They gathered the courage to stand with Moses against the idolaters. Sometimes there is a need to challenge people to declare their loyalties and to make a decision about whether they are going to follow the Lord or not. Joshua issued this challenge in Joshua 24:14-24:

14 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." 16 The people answered and said, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; 17 for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. 18 "The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God." 19 Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. 20 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good

to you." 21 The people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." 22 Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses." 23 "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." 24 The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice."

It's very sad that there is no mention that people from any of the other tribes joined Moses and said, "Yes, we are for Yahweh as well!" There was probably still great social pressure to stick with their god they had made and were worshiping.

Moses told the Levites to arm themselves with their swords and pass through the camp and kill the idolaters, even their friends, brothers and neighbors. This is what the Lord had told them to do. This is how serious this sin was in God's sight. Those who did not declare loyalty to Him were subject to summary execution. There is no record that Moses gave them a warning or any subsequent chance to turn away from their false god. Moses mobilized the Levites in obedience to God's command and had them pass through Israel cutting people down, and about 3,000 men died that day. These were the people whom God had saved out of Egypt, whom He had brought to Himself at Sinai, who had said that they would listen to Him and do as He said. They were His covenant people and were to be loyal to Him. But they had quickly abandoned their faith in Him. This was a serious sin!

There is no mention here that anyone fought back against the Levites. I'm not sure why this is, but I might speculate that there was such a fear of Moses that had come upon the people that they were afraid something worse might happen if they resisted. They had seen the power of God that came with Moses and his staff, and it may be that they realized that to fight against him was to fight against the mighty Yahweh!

Moses then spoke to the Levites and said, "Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord – for every man has been against his son and against his brother – in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today." The Levites had dedicated themselves to the Lord in following Moses, and he exhorted them to continue in this commitment. Even if it meant that they would be against their own sons and brothers, they needed to continue to be consecrated to the Lord. This reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-38, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 for I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Sometimes when we commit ourselves to the Lord our own family members become our enemies. If they are committed to other things they will not tolerate our commitment to the Lord. Their ways will be at odds with our ways as we follow the Lord, and we must not compromise our dedication to the Lord in order to please them. The Lord wants to "bestow a blessing" on us, but it depends on our cooperation with Him.

Blessing from the Lord depends upon commitment to the Lord, faith in Him, and obedience to Him. God made this clear later when He spelled out the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:1-14:

1 "Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 "All these blessings will come upon you

and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God: 3 "Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country. 4 "Blessed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. 5 "Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. 6 "Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out. 7 "The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways. 8 "The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 9 "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. 10 "So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you. 11 "The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. 12 "The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. 13 "The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe *them* carefully, 14 and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them."

The rest of Deuteronomy 28 spells out the curses that will come upon them if they do not listen to Him and obey Him. Jesus also taught that blessing depends upon obedience (Matthew 7:24-27 and John 13:17). As individuals and as groups and as nations God blesses those who believe in Him, listen to Him and obey Him. If our lives are in a downward spiral and everything seems to be wrong and getting worse, we may want to examine whether we are really listening to the Lord and doing as He says. If we are not in step with Him we should not expect His blessings. If we are living in proud, self-sufficient unbelief we should not expect God's blessings, because He opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5).

The day after his initial reaction to the idolatry, Moses spoke to the nation. He said, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (verse 30). He pointed the finger at them and pronounced them guilty of committing a great sin. This was a deliberate act and not a small thing. Today people would be critical of Moses for being judgmental and intolerant. But this was an objective truth. They had forsaken the true God and had made their own god, their own religion. This is a great sin! Paul talks about this very thing in Romans 1:18-32, and says that God's wrath is upon those who do this, and that they are worthy of death. This practice of turning away from the truth to falsehood is the root of all of the evils we battle in the world! These people had refused to acknowledge God and to honor God as God.

Moses told the people what he was going to do. He was going back to meet with the Lord again and hoped that there would be a way that he could make atonement for their sin. To

“make atonement” is *kaphar* - to cover over, pacify, make propitiation.<sup>25</sup> The wrath of God aimed at these people needed to be covered and pacified. God is a God of jealousy and wrath and He will bring the disobedient and rebellious into judgment. Thankfully, He Himself, in Christ, has provided atonement for our sins. 1 John 2:1-2 says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world.*”

Moses went back up the mountain and confessed the sin of the nation to the Lord. They had committed a great sin and they had made a god of gold for themselves. They were guilty. Then Moses asked the Lord to forgive their sin. This was the only hope for them, that God would forgive their sin. There was nothing they could do to reverse what they had done. There was no human solution to their guilt, but they had to rely on the grace of God and His forgiving nature. There is no hope for any of us apart from this. This is why the scriptures urge us over and over to turn from our sins, to confess them, and to seek God's forgiveness.

As Moses requested forgiveness for the nation he said a startling thing, “But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” (verse 32). Moses exemplified the same spirit as Paul who wrote, “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:3-5.) If God was not going to forgive them and was going to blot them out of His book, then Moses wanted to be blotted out as well. Moses exhibits a great love for these people even though they were so troublesome to him.

The Lord replied that He would blot out of His book those who have sinned against Him. It is not up to Moses to decide whether or not his name was in God's book. God does not give us the option of having our names blotted out on request. If He has redeemed us and recorded our names in His book, we will not be blotted out.

What is this book to which Moses refers? This is the first mention of it in scripture, but plainly Moses understood that there was such a thing. Clearly this is a book that belongs to God, written by Him, that already exists. Probably it is not a literal book in the sense that we understand books, but is symbolic of the record that God keeps of those who belong to Him. Clearly God says that some people are “blotted out” of this book, those who have sinned against the Lord. Some names are erased from God's book, deleted from His database. We need to look at some other passages to learn more about this book. Psalm 139:16 says, “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them.” David says that the days ordained for him by God were written by God in His book. Before he lived one day, God had ordained all the days that he should live. Psalm 69:28 says, “May they be blotted out of the book of life And may they not be recorded with the righteous.” This parallelism expresses the same idea in two ways. It is an “imprecatory psalm” where David is asking the Lord to destroy his enemies. He asks that their names be blotted out of the book of life. He requests that their names not be recorded along with the righteous. He does not want his enemies to be numbered by God among the righteous. It appears that the “book of life” is a book listing all those who are alive and are righteous, that is, who are in a right or just relationship with God,

whom God does not consider to be wicked or unrighteous.

Paul writes of the book of life in Philippians 4:3, "Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life." Paul expresses confidence that his fellow workers in the gospel have their names recorded in the book of life. The book of Revelation mentions this book several times:

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Revelation 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Revelation 17:8 "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Revelation 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The book of life belongs to Jesus. Jesus implies that He has the power to erase names from the book, and those who overcome will not be erased. It's interesting that the names in the book were written "from the foundation of the world." Clearly, if we know the Lord and are right with Him, our names are in the book of life and will not be erased. But if we do not know Him, are unbelieving and rebellious against Him, our names will not be recorded there. You want your name in the book of life! Those who are not recorded there will be thrown into the lake of fire. But if our names are there, Jesus Himself will confess our names before the Father and His angels.

God will blot out of His book all of those who have sinned against Him (verse 33). This would seem to encompass everyone, since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). So how is it that anyone's name appears in the book of life? It's because of Romans 3:24 and 25, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." God satisfied His own wrath against our sins through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ so that those who believe might be declared "not guilty" (justified) as a free gift of His grace. If our names are recorded in God's book of life, it is because of His grace which we receive through faith in Christ. It is through faith in Him that we become "overcomers" (Revelation 3:5 and 1 John 5:4-5).

The Lord commands Moses to go ahead and lead the people to the land He had

promised, and promises that His angel will go before him. He defers their punishment until “the day when I punish.” The Lord had listened to Moses and would not at this point wipe them all out, but a day would come when He would punish them. There is a day coming, the “Day of the Lord”, “the Day of Judgment”, when God will judge everyone for their deeds. There are many references to this great day in scripture and many lesser “days” that point to it. Here are just a few examples.

Isaiah 13:6-12 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. 8 They will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. 9 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. 10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. 11 Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. 12 I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold And mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Joel 2:1 Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near.

Joel 2:11 The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?

Joel 2:31 The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Joel 3:14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

Obadiah 1:15 For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. 15 A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. 17 I will bring distress on men So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust And their flesh like dung. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the



inhabitants of the earth.

Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Matthew 11:21-24 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you. 23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you."

2 Peter 3:7-10 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

Clearly, then, the Lord tells us that one day there will be a great day of judgment, when all people and all nations will be judged for what they have done. Jesus described that day in Matthew 25:31-46. He is the one who will sit on His glorious throne judging all the nations.

Chapter 32 ends by saying, "Then the Lord smote the people, because of what they did with the calf which Aaron had made." I'm not sure what, specifically, the Lord did to them at this point. The Hebrew word means to strike someone. The KJV translates it, "The Lord plagued the people..." The Contemporary English Version takes it further into an interpretation by translating it, "So the LORD punished the people of Israel with a terrible disease for talking Aaron into making the gold idol." Whether it was a disease or not, I'm not sure. In any case, God further punished these people for their sin. He did this because of what they had done with the calf. Aaron had submitted to their demand and made the calf, but it was what they did with it that made them guilty. They were the ones who said, "This is your god!" (verse 4). They ascribed godhood to this lifeless gold statue. They gave the glory due Yahweh to a gold calf.

#### Exodus 33:1-6

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 "I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way."

When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.'" 6 So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

As Moses stood before the Lord on Mount Horeb, the Lord told him to depart from there to go to the land which He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Several times God had made this promise. He said to Abraham in Genesis 12:7, "To your descendants I will give this land." In Genesis 13:14-15 He again said to Abraham, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever." In Genesis 15:18 He said, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite." Later, the Lord said to Isaac, "Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham (Genesis 26:3). In Genesis 28:13-15 the Lord again repeated the promise to Jacob, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." So God had spoken this promise to all three of these men. He had sworn that He would give this land to them, and what God swears He accomplishes.

The Lord assured Moses that He would send an angel before them to drive out the inhabitants of the land. God's messenger would give them the victory over the people of the land. They would be protected and have the victory because of God's supernatural provision and power. They would not have to rely on their own strength, but God would fight for them. They were to trust in this promise as they moved forward. This angel would go before them, in front of them. This is a fundamental principle of leadership, that a leader goes first. A leader does not drive from the rear, but goes first to show the people where to go.

This land was a land "flowing with milk and honey." Three times previously in Exodus the Lord and Moses have referred to the land in this way, in Exodus 3:8, 3:17 and 13:5. In all, this phrase is used 20 times to describe the land God had promised them. Ezekiel 20:6 says, "on that day I swore to them, to bring them out from the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands." The phrase is, I think, both literal and metaphorical. In Numbers 13 we read of the experience of the spies who went into the land to see what it was like there. In verses 23-27 it says:

23 Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two *men*, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. 24 That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there. 25 When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, 26 they proceeded to

come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

The spies found that the milk and honey description of the land was literally true in the sense that they found abundant food there. The huge cluster of grapes and the pomegranates and the figs proved that the land was a fertile and productive land. It was a land where they would thrive and all of their needs would be met in abundance.

They will go into the land, but the Lord says, "I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way" (verse 3). Again in verse 5 He says to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you.'" He moves from "I might destroy you" to "I would destroy you." He moves from possibility to certainty. He had just come close to doing this. He could not be "in their midst", that is, He could not be close to them because it would be too dangerous for them. He could not have an intimate relationship with them or He would destroy them. Why was this? He explained that it was because they were "an obstinate people." The King James Version translates this Hebrew idiom literally, "thou art a stiff-necked people." They were stubborn in their refusal to submit to Him and believe in Him and obey Him. They were uncooperative.

A close relationship with the Lord is impossible if we are stiff-necked. If we refuse to trust Him, obey Him and cooperate with Him, He will not be close to us. We can't expect Him to favor us if we oppose Him and insist on going our own way. God is close to those who are humble and yield to Him, who listen to Him and do as He says.

As a sign of mourning, God commanded them to remove their ornaments, their jewelry. It was a "sad word" they had heard from the Lord. The word translated "sad" actually means "bad, evil".<sup>26</sup> God Himself had indicted them. He had spoken evil of them and had issued a harsh evaluation of their character. We don't want God to declare us obstinate. We want Him to say that we are good and faithful.

#### Exodus 33:7- 11

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. 9 Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

As God had said, He stayed at a distance from the Israelites. Moses met with the Lord in

this tent outside the camp, “a good distance from the camp.” Verse 7 seems to emphasize this fact, that the tent of meeting was outside the camp. The Lord was remote from them. Those who wanted to seek the Lord, to inquire of Him, had to go outside the camp to this tent. They had to go to Him.

God took the initiative to call these people to Himself, to save them and redeem them and bring them out of Egypt. Now they had the opportunity to seek the Lord. They had the option of drawing near to Him if they would. They could go out to the tent and seek Him. He was there, near them and available to them. Isaiah writes, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:6-9). Once God has called us we may and must respond. He wants us to seek Him. We do this by forsaking our wicked ways and our unrighteous thoughts. Seeking the Lord requires repentance and turning away from our evil. We must recognize that we need Him and that our ways and thoughts need to be conformed to His.

When Moses went out to the tent of meeting, it was a public event, watched by all of the people. They would all stand up and watch until Moses entered the tent, and then the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and then the Lord would speak to Moses. We may perhaps infer that the pillar of cloud stood at the entrance of the tent to guard it from those who might attempt to enter after Moses, but this is a supposition. It may be that the pillar of cloud barred the way into the tent and secured the meeting. Alternatively it could be that it was simply a visible representation of what was taking place, that the Lord Himself really was there meeting with Moses. All the people could see that He was out there with Moses, and so they stood at the entrances of their tents and worshiped.

The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Moses was uniquely privileged to speak the Lord just as any of us speaks to a friend. He could meet with the Lord and discuss whatever was happening and whatever was on his mind. The Jews said to the man whom Jesus had healed of blindness, “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from” (John 9:29). The Jews had confidence that Moses had spoken to God and had heard from God, but they were skeptical of Jesus and did not believe that He had come from God. They knew of the many accounts of Moses speaking to God, and so they trusted his writings.

Really, though, we as followers of Jesus are privileged beyond that of Moses! We are privileged to have the Spirit of God Himself living in us, who is always with us! We don't have to go out to a special place in order to speak with the Lord. In John 16:7-15 Jesus said this to His disciples:

7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. 12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. 13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak

on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. 15 "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you."

Jesus promised them that He would send the Helper, the Holy Spirit to them. He promised that He would guide them into the truth, speak to them and disclose what is to come. What He heard from the Father and the Son He would speak to them. They would have the great privilege of having the Spirit of Christ Himself in them, and this is true of us today as well. We ought to always speak with the Lord as Moses did, and converse with Him. We probably won't see a visible manifestation of God's presence, but Jesus assured us that He would abide with us and be in us (John 14:17).

After Moses left the tent of meeting there was a man who stayed behind, Joshua, the servant of Moses. Joshua was there observing all that was happening. I don't know if there is an implication here that Joshua also spoke with the Lord, but at least he was there as Moses spoke with the Lord. Later it would be Joshua who would step into Moses' place as the leader of Israel, and he would be the one who would hear from the Lord and lead the people. It seems clear that Joshua was being trained and mentored for the position he would later inherit.

Exodus 33:12-23

Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' 13 "Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people."

14 And He said, "My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest."

15 Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here. 16 "For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?"

17 The LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name."

18 Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!"

19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" 21 Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; 22 and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. 23 "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Here is an example of the kind of dialog Moses had face to face with the Lord, and it sets the stage for one of the foundational passages of all the Bible regarding the character of God. Moses sounds frustrated and desperate. His requests are pointed, and it sounds as if he is trying to tell God what He must do.

The Lord had just said, "I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way" in verse 3. Moses is now desperate for

assurance that the Lord will go with them. He may not be “in their midst” in a close and intimate way with the whole nation, but Moses feels very acutely that they must have the presence of the Lord with them as they proceed. He starts by quoting a couple of things the Lord has said to Him. “You said, 'Bring up this people!' But you haven't let me know whom You will send with me.” Moses feels the need for someone to accompany them. Now, God had said He would send His angel with them, but I guess that wasn't specific enough for Moses. He also quotes the Lord as having said, “I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.” Moses was a specially chosen servant of the Lord who was known by the Lord and favored by the Lord. It's always a good feeling to be “known by name” to people who are important to you. When someone you esteem sees you and greets you enthusiastically by name it is a special feeling. To have the Lord know you this way is the greatest blessing! To know that He knows you and favors you is essential in our walk with Him.

In verse 13 Moses makes his request based on the things the Lord has said. He says, “If I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know you, so that I may find favor in Your sight.” It's interesting how many times the subject of finding favor in Yahweh's sight is mentioned here. It occurs five times, once in verse 12, twice in verse 13, once in verse 16 and again in verse 17. Moses had found favor in God's sight, and is concerned that he might continue to find favor with Him, both he and the people. In order to achieve this, Moses felt he needed to know the ways of the Lord in order to know Him. His request is “let me know your ways.” He's asking the Lord to teach him His ways, His path, His manner, His habits. To know the Lord we must understand His nature, His ways of working, to know what the Lord is all about. So he asked the Lord to let him know His ways. When we say that we “know” someone, we're saying that we know what they are like, how they operate, what they think and what they value. The more we know about another person, the better we know them, and the more likely we are to find favor with them. It is the same with the Lord. We find favor with the Lord when we learn His ways and thereby know Him.

Moses exhorted the Lord as well, “Consider too, that this nation is Your people.” These people were not just the people of Moses, but they were the people of Yahweh. They were His people. He had chosen them and redeemed them.

The Lord responded and said, “My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.” At this point we need to reflect on the fact that the word translated “presence” in this passage in the Hebrew is literally the word “face” (*pānîym*). This was the word used in verse 11 when we are told that Moses spoke to the Lord “face to face”. This word is translated “presence” in verses 14 and 15, and then again it is translated “face” in verses 20 and 23. Clearly the “face” of the Lord is an important theme in this passage. Moses wants the “face” of the Lord to go with them to the land. In Numbers 6:22-27 we find the great blessing that the Lord commanded Aaron to speak over the sons of Israel:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:  
The LORD bless you, and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine on you,  
And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,  
And give you peace.'  
"So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I *then* will bless them."

Part of this blessing is the desire that the Lord might make His face shine on them, that is, that He might be gracious to them, that they might be the objects of His favor. God wants to look on them with a smile on His face and say, "I'm pleased that these are My people." When God's face shines on you it means His favor rests on you and He is looking over you; His eyes are upon you. We are told several times in scripture to "seek the face" of the Lord.

- 1 Chronicles 16:11 - Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.
- 2 Chronicles 7:13 - "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.
- Psalm 27:8-9 - *When You said, "Seek My face,"* my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek." 9 Do not hide Your face from me, Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation!
- Psalm 105:4 - Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.

In essence, this is what Moses was doing. He was seeking the face, the presence, the favor of the Lord for himself and for the nation of Israel.

The Lord promised Moses that His presence would go with them and that He would give them rest. Moses and the nation were not at this point "at rest." They were in the wilderness living in tents. They had not yet come to rest in the land God had promised them. They still had many trials to face and enemies to overcome. We find in Joshua 21:43-45 that God fulfilled this promise and did indeed give them rest in the land of promise.

So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

For the nation of Israel, receiving rest from the Lord meant being settled and at peace in the land, having defeated their enemies. This promise God fulfilled. But the rest they received in the land was not ultimate rest. It was a kind of temporal rest, but there is another sort of rest that is true rest and is eternal rest. Jesus talked about it in Matthew 11:28-29, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." As we come to Jesus and put our confidence in Him and follow Him and learn from Him we find true rest for our souls. The yoke we take upon ourselves in Him is easy. The burden He places on us is light. Rest in this sense is not sitting around doing nothing, but is working in tandem with Jesus where He carries all the weight and does the hard work. We simply go along with Him. I think the "yoke" of Jesus here is meant to be understood in contrast with the Law of Moses, which is a heavy yoke and actually impossible to bear. When the church came together in Acts 15 to debate the issue of whether

the Gentiles should be required to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved, Peter said, "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are" (Acts 15:10-11). The Law places a burden on us that we cannot bear not because there is anything wrong with the Law, but because there's something wrong with us. Paul discusses this in Romans 7. He says in Romans 7:12-14, "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin." Because of our sinful nature, we are incapable of keeping the Law. To require people to keep the Law in order to be saved is to require the impossible. This is what Peter was saying in the Jerusalem council.

There is more about entering the true rest of God in Hebrews 4. There the point is made that we enter the rest of God through faith in the good news of Christ. Those who are unbelieving and disobedient do not enter the rest of God which is in Christ. Hebrews 4:1-3 says, "Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, 'AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,' although His works were finished from the foundation of the world." When we hear the good news we must believe it and embrace it in order to enter into God's true rest.

Moses responded to God's promise that His face would go with them and He would give them rest by saying, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (Verses 15-16.) Moses again underlines the fact that Israel was "Your people". He keeps throwing the responsibility for these people back on the Lord, pointing out that they are His people whom He has chosen and called and redeemed. For this reason they are a unique nation among all the nations of the earth. Moses does not simply want the promise of verse 14 to apply to himself individually, but also to the whole nation. He wants the presence of the Lord to be with the nation as well as himself. He wants rest for the nation as well as himself. Moses sees that the thing that will make the nation of Israel distinct and separate from all other nations is the real presence of the Lord with them. This is what made Joseph stand out among his brothers and in Egypt. Genesis 39:2-4 says, "The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3 Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and *how* the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge." And in verses 21-23 it says, "But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible *for it*. 23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper." When God's presence is with you it sets you apart from others and



makes you stand out. He gives you success and causes you to prosper.

The Lord replied, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name" (verse 17). Moses' request would be granted because he had found favor in the sight of the Lord. Because Moses had favor with the Lord he was able to speak to Him face to face. He was able to be bold in his requests, and his requests were often answered. His familiarity with the Lord also helped him to be "on the same page" with the Lord, so when he made a request it was usually for something the Lord was pleased to do. The Lord was pleased to cause His presence to go with the nation so that it would be known that they were His special possession among the peoples of the earth. I think this is the key to making requests of the Lord to which He says "yes". You must find favor (grace) in His sight and He must know you and you must know Him. We find favor by listening to Him and believing in Him and in what He says, and then following His instructions.

Moses then makes another bold request in verse 18, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" At first it seems strange that he would make this request. Hadn't Moses seen the glory of the Lord many times already? He saw the glory of the Lord when He spoke to him through the burning bush. He saw the glory of the Lord manifested in the signs God had given him to perform in Egypt. He saw the glory of the Lord through the plagues brought upon Egypt. He saw the glory of the Lord manifested in the parting of the Red Sea and the healing of the waters and in bringing water out of the rock and in the provision of the manna. He saw the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He had seen the smoke and fire and lightning on the mountain. Why does Moses now want more than these things? I think we've touched on the reason already. He had seen manifestations of the glory and presence of God, he had seen effects of His presence, but he hadn't really seen the Lord. He hadn't seen the true essence of the Lord, and this is what he wants to see. The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary points this out:

When God talked with him face to face, or mouth to mouth, he merely saw a "similitude of Jehovah" (Num\_12:8), a form which rendered the invisible being of God visible to the human eye, i.e., a manifestation of the divine glory in a certain form, and not the direct or essential glory of Jehovah, whilst the people saw this glory under the veil of a dark cloud, rendered luminous by fire, that is to say, they only saw its splendour as it shone through the cloud; and even the elders, at the time when the covenant was made, only saw the God of Israel in a certain form which hid from their eyes the essential being of God (Exo\_24:10-11). What Moses desired, therefore, was a sight of the glory or essential being of God, without any figure, and without a veil.

Writing of Jesus, John says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Those who were privileged to see Jesus were seeing the glory of the Father in human form. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The face of the Father has been seen in the face of the Son, Jesus Christ.

As far as He could, the Lord granted this request of Moses as well. He explains what He will do in verses 19-23. Moses had asked to see the glory of Yahweh, and the Lord replied that He would make His goodness pass before him in verse 19, and then in verse 22 He says that it is His glory that will pass by. Evidently these are equivalent things. God's goodness is His glory and vice-versa. It is the good person who receives glory and honor. Those who are

good at what they do, whether playing football or baking cakes, are honored for their achievements. The Lord is comprehensively and perfectly good in all He is and in all He does. Therefore He is completely glorious and due honor in everything. Moses is about to get a glimpse of the goodness and glory of God, and it is going to be an overwhelming experience. The more we grasp the goodness and glory of God, the more we will fall on our face and worship Him.

The Lord will make his goodness and glory pass before Moses, and He will also proclaim His name before him. He will tell Moses what being Yahweh is all about. When He does this in the next chapter, He speaks His name and then lists outstanding characteristics about Himself, beginning with the next two things that He mentions here, that He is gracious and compassionate. This is like what we do when we are called upon to introduce a special speaker at a significant event. We find out not only their name, but also the significant things about them, the things that make them an appropriate or qualified speaker at the event. We highlight their credentials and achievements and build them up so that the audience will pay attention to them and believe they are credible. This is what the Lord is about to do. He is going to say, "Here's who I am and what I am like, and why you should listen to me and follow my instructions."

I must confess to being a little puzzled as to why the Lord says next, "and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." It seems a bit out of context. It may be that the Lord is saying to Moses that in doing this He is demonstrating grace and compassion to Moses. Moses has found favor with the Lord, but it is because of this principle. He is an object of the Lord's grace and compassion because the Lord decided it, not because Moses decided it. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:15 while he discusses how Esau and Jacob illustrate the principle of God's choice among men on the basis of His will rather than on the basis of their works. Paul writes:

10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived *twins* by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though *the twins* were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to *His* choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." 13 Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." 14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." 16 So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Romans 9:10-16)

Receiving God's mercy, grace and compassion does not depend on the will or performance of man but the will of God. He bestows His grace and compassion on whom He will. This is the point. Both Moses himself and the nation of Israel as a whole are not objects of His favor because of their choice or their performance, but because He unilaterally decided that He would favor them.

The Lord would pass by Moses and cause His goodness to pass before him and would proclaim His name to Moses, but there was a limit. Moses could not see His face. He says, "No man can see me and live." We have already touched on this a bit when we looked at the time when Moses and the elders of Israel "saw the Lord" in Exodus 24:9-11 on page 129. The Lord wanted Moses to go on living so that he could carry out his purpose of leading the

nation, so the Lord explained that He had to protect him by limiting what he would see. The Lord would have him stand on a rock, would cover him with His hand as He was passing by and as His glory was passing by, and then He would remove His hand so that Moses might see His back. The Lord uses anthropomorphic language here to explain what is going to take place. There was no other language or analogy for Him to use that Moses would understand. Jesus told us that "God is spirit" in John 4:24 and reminded us that "a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" in Luke 24:39. Contrary to Mormon doctrine that says that God is an exalted man who has a literal physical form, Jesus teaches us that God is a spirit. In fact John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." So even in this instance in Exodus we might say that Moses did not fully "see" the Lord in all His glory. He was allowed a little glimpse, but even he could not stand fully in the presence of the glory of God.

#### Exodus 34:1-4

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered. 2 "So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. 3 "No man is to come up with you, nor let any man be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds may not graze in front of that mountain." 4 So he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and he took two stone tablets in his hand.

It was important that Israel have the two stone tablets with the ten commandments written on them. They were the formal written words of the covenant between the Lord and Israel. They spell out the agreement between the Lord and Israel and make clear the obligations of God's people. Moses would provide the blank tablets, and the Lord Himself would write the words on the tablets. They would be the same words as those on the original tablets that Moses had shattered. There would be no revisions or modifications.

In the morning Moses was to be ready, to come up to the Lord and to meet Him on top of the mountain. He had preparation to do in getting the tablets ready. We must prepare ourselves in any manner necessary to meet with the Lord. He had to come up at the right time. He had to get up and go to the place where the Lord designated. He did not say, "No, Lord, You come down here." God designated the place. To meet the Lord was the purpose. God is waiting for us to come meet with Him. He is there, and wants us to come to Him. If we trust in Christ we are prepared because our sins are covered by His blood.

Once again Moses was the only man allowed to come up to the Lord on the mountain. Everyone else was excluded, and no livestock were to be allowed to graze in front of the mountain. Moses was the one mediator. Under the new covenant as well there is one mediator, one superior to Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:5-6, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time." He is the one who has entered into the true holy place and has really atoned for our sins with His own blood (see Hebrews 9).

#### Exodus 34:5-8

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the LORD. 6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." 8 Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.

Moses went up on the mountain with the blank tablets and then "called upon the name of the Lord." He went up and called out to Yahweh. Yahweh descended in the cloud and stood with Moses. Then the Lord did as He said he would. He "passed by in front of" Moses and proclaimed His name. He was saying "Here is who I am and what I am like." He was telling Moses what kind of person He is. He was telling Moses the essential things that he and the people needed to know about Him. I believe this is a pivotal passage when it comes to understanding God and who He is. Moses had asked the Lord to let him know His ways so that he might know Him, and to show him His glory, and the Lord grants his request here. We would do well to meditate on this passage often. We will find that this passage is quoted a number of times in the scriptures.

The Lord begins by proclaiming His name, Yahweh, "I Am." He is Yahweh God, the mighty one. He is not any of the so-called "gods" of Egypt or of any other nation. He is the God who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush.

There are many things that Yahweh could have said about Himself as He proclaimed His name to Moses. He could have talked about His omnipotence, His omnipresence, His omniscience, His eternal nature, His immutability, His sovereignty and might and so on. It's very interesting to read what He does say here about Himself. What do we really need to know about the true God? What aspects of His character do we really need to understand? The characteristics He mentions are what we might call relational characteristics, that is, His character relative to us as His flawed and sinful creatures. He emphasizes here His loving, compassionate and forgiving nature, and yet does not say that He is "soft" on sin. He is quick to mention that He doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. It is a balanced statement of both His love and His justice, which are not antithetical, but complementary.

The first thing He says about Himself is that He is compassionate. The Hebrew word is *rachûm*, and Strong's Concordance, the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance, and the Brown-Driver-Briggs definitions all define the word as compassionate or merciful. But what is compassion? If you look it up on Google the definition that comes up says, "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others". This is compassion, to be concerned for the sufferings of others and to have the desire to help. It was because of His compassion toward His people and their sufferings in Egypt that He took note of them and determined to release them from their slavery. He said to Moses in Exodus 3:7, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings." This is compassion. This, along with the promises He made to their patriarchs, moved Him to deliver them from Egypt.

Another illustration of God's compassion toward His people is in Ezekiel 16. We read in verses 4-14:

4 "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor

were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. 5 "No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born. 6 "When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you *while you were* in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you *while you were* in your blood, 'Live!' 7 "I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments; *your* breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare. 8 "Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord GOD. 9 "Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10 "I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. 12 "I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13 "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14 "Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord GOD.

He pictures the people as a baby girl who at birth was rejected and thrown out into a field to die. No one showed compassion on her or cared for her. But the Lord saw her and had compassion. He made her live and made her numerous. Later when she reached maturity He came by and saw her again and "spread His skirt" over her and made her His own. He pictures it as a marriage. He entered into a covenant with Israel and she became His spouse. He goes on in Ezekiel to describe her unfaithfulness, but at the beginning He demonstrated great compassion in seeing her need and caring for her.

Jesus gave us a great illustration of compassion in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37.

30 Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. 31 "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, 34 and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" 37 And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

The Samaritan saw the need of the injured man, and instead of passing by and going his way, he was motivated by compassion to help. He got involved. It cost him time and money and inconvenience, but he illustrates what compassion means and what it looks like. Compassion is a feeling that motivates action. We can't say we are truly compassionate if we have a feeling but do nothing. Real compassion motivates us to do something to help relieve suffering.

The Lord even has compassion on those who suffer because of their own foolishness and evil. Psalm 107:17-20 says, "Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." Much of our suffering is caused by our own bad choices, rebellion and wickedness. Thankfully the Lord has compassion on us nonetheless.

The second characteristic the Lord mentions about Himself is that He is gracious. We may think of grace as a New Testament concept, but the Old Testament is full of it as well. Grace is favor that is undeserved and unearned. Jesus illustrated the meaning of grace in the Sermon on the Mount when He talked about loving our enemies. Matthew 5:38-48 says,

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus gives us a picture of what it is to be gracious to someone. Faced with an evil person who slaps you, who deserves to be slapped in return, the gracious response is to turn the other cheek. When faced with a litigious person who wants to take your shirt, the gracious thing is to give him your coat as well. When forced by a powerful person to go one mile, the gracious response goes two miles. Not only does grace refuse retaliation, but grace gives what is undeserved to one who is an enemy and opponent. This is the way that God behaves. He gives graciously even to those who are evil and unrighteous. He gives to those who deserve nothing from Him but death. In this way grace goes beyond mercy. Mercy withholds punishment due the guilty, but grace not only withholds punishment, but also gives good to the guilty and undeserving.

The Lord next says that He is "slow to anger". The King James Version has "longsuffering". The words are 'arék 'aph in the Hebrew. The word arék means "long", and 'aph has to do with the nose or the face. So the idiom is "long of nose" or "long of face". The word 'aph comes

from a root meaning “to *breathe* hard, that is, *be enraged*: - be angry”<sup>27</sup>. The word is often translated “anger” or “angry” in the New American Standard (Genesis 49:7, Exodus 4:14, 11:8, 22:24, 32:10, etc.). The Lord is apparently saying that it takes a lot to stir up His anger, that He puts up with quite a bit of human resistance and noncooperation before His anger is kindled. God’s anger is not out of control, it is not capricious. If the Lord becomes angry, there is good reason for it. There is a capriciousness about our anger and often it is uncontrolled, but with God it is always under control. The Lord never “flies off the handle” in an uncontrolled and unreasonable rage.

The next thing about the Lord is that He is “abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands.” He has an abundant supply of lovingkindness and truth. Here we have a very important word that we need to try to understand, the Hebrew word *chesed*, translated “lovingkindness”. It’s an important word that occurs 251 times in the Old Testament. I found a good discussion of the word at bible-researcher.com where the article on the word from A Theological Word Book of the Bible is reproduced. Part of the article is quoted below.

Biblical scholars have often complained that the word  $\text{חֶסֶד}$  in the Hebrew Bible is difficult to translate into English, because it really has no precise equivalent in our language. English versions usually try to represent it with such words as "loving-kindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," and sometimes "loyalty," but the full meaning of the word cannot be conveyed without an explanation, such as the one given in the article below. This article, by Norman H. Snaith, is reproduced from *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: MacMillan, 1951), pp. 136-7.

God's loving-kindness is that sure love which will not let Israel go. Not all Israel's persistent waywardness could ever destroy it. Though Israel be faithless, yet God remains faithful still. This steady, persistent refusal of God to wash his hands of wayward Israel is the essential meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated loving-kindness. In Jeremiah 2:2 the word *chesed* is rendered 'kindness,' the reference being to 'the kindness of thy youth,' and this phrase is paralleled by 'the love of thine espousals.' The meaning is not that Israel was more tender in her attitude towards God or in her affections, but that in the first days after the rescue from Egypt she was faithful to the marriage-covenant with God. The charge of the prophets is that Israel's loyalty to her covenant with God (Hosea 6:4, 'goodness' in the English versions) is 'as the morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away,' a regular feature of the Palestinian climate when once the spring rains are past.

The entire article can be found at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chesed.html>.

God’s lovingkindness, His *chesed*, then, is His loyal covenant love. Several times we are told that His lovingkindness is toward those who love Him and keep His commandments (Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 5:10 and 7:9, Nehemiah 1:5, Daniel 9:4). When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple he began by saying, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart.” His loyal love is

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27 Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

especially manifested to those who are devoted to Him, who love Him, listen to Him, walk with Him and keep His commandments. In Deuteronomy 7:9-12 Moses explained that the *chesed* of the Lord was contingent on His people loving Him and keeping His commandments:

"Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. 11 "Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them. 12 "Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers."

Moses is saying, "Here's why you, as God's specially chosen people, need to listen to Him, love Him and keep His commandments. If you do, He will keep His covenant with you and His loyal love will be on you and He will bless you." Those who hate Him and turn away from Him will not experience His lovingkindness, but rather will be repaid with destruction.

How is His lovingkindness manifested toward His people? How is it expressed in practical ways? Let us consider some of the things God says are manifestations of His lovingkindness.

Lot told the angels who came to rescue him from Sodom that they had shown their lovingkindness by saving his life (Genesis 19:19). They had come to take him out of Sodom and deliver him and his family from the destruction which was about to come upon Sodom. It was a gracious act of lovingkindness that the Lord spared his life, probably more for Abraham's sake than for his own!

In Genesis 24 we find the account of the servant of Abraham whom Abraham sent to his family in Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac. When the servant arrived at the city of Nahor, the brother of Abraham, he prayed, "O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'- may she be the one whom you have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that you have shown lovingkindness to my master" (Genesis 24:12-14). At that moment Rebekah came to the well and did exactly as the servant had asked. She gave him water and then offered to water his camels as well. She was the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The servant bowed down and worshiped the Lord and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers" (Genesis 24:27). The Lord's unmistakable guidance and His answer to prayer for this servant of Abraham on his errand to find a wife for Isaac was clear evidence of His lovingkindness toward Abraham. God had shown lovingkindness to Abraham in making this mission successful. His covenant with Abraham would continue through Isaac and Rebekah and their children.

Because of His lovingkindness the Lord had led His people and guided them. Moses acknowledged this in Exodus 15:13, "In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided *them* to Your holy habitation." Whom the Lord loves He leads and protects and puts them in the place where He wants them.



God's lovingkindness is seen in His forgiveness. When the people rebelled at the threshold of the land God had promised them because of the bad report by ten of the twelve spies, the Lord again threatened to wipe them all out and start over with Moses (see Numbers 14). Moses again interceded for the nation and appealed to the Lord for them. He quoted the things the Lord said of Himself here in Exodus 34:6 and 7, and then said, "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now" (Numbers 14:19). The Lord then said, "I have pardoned them according to your word." Moses cited the precedent that the Lord had set in forgiving the people in the past and asked Him to do it again. It is God's character to forgive, and He can be counted on to do so when we ask it because of His lovingkindness. Despite Israel's repeated, even continual rebellion and refusal to trust Him and obey Him, the Lord still forgave them and relented from destroying them due to His lovingkindness.

The Lord showed His lovingkindness to His people when He moved Cyrus the king of Persia to allow the Israelites to return to Jerusalem. Ezra recognized that He had been the recipient of the lovingkindness of the Lord when the Lord gave him favor before king Artaxerxes. Ezra wrote, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the Lord my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me" (Ezra 7:27-28). Later, in his prayer of confession, he says, "But now for a brief moment grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:8-9). Despite their unfaithfulness, the Lord, in His *chesed* was still mindful of them, fulfilled His promise and restored them to the land.

Again we should look at Psalm 107, a song about the lovingkindness of the Lord. Note the ways that the author says the lovingkindness of the Lord is manifested.

- 1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary
- 3 And gathered from the lands, From the east and from the west, From the north and from the south.
- 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desert region; They did not find a way to an inhabited  
bled and there was none to help.
- 13 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses.
- 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death And broke their bands apart.
- 15 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons  
of men!
- 16 For He has shattered gates of bronze And cut bars of iron asunder.  
city.
- 5 *They were* hungry and thirsty; Their soul fainted within them.
- 6 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses.
- 7 He led them also by a straight way, To go to an inhabited city.
- 8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons

of men!

9 For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

10 There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, 11 Because they had rebelled against the words of God And spurned the counsel of the Most High.

12 Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; They stum

17 Fools, because of their rebellious way, And because of their iniquities, were afflicted.

18 Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, And they drew near to the gates of death.

19 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses.

20 He sent His word and healed them, And delivered *them* from their destructions.

21 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!

22 Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, And tell of His works with joyful singing.

23 Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters; 24 They have seen the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep.

25 For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea.

26 They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in *their* misery.

27 They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, And were at their wits' end.

28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, And He brought them out of their distresses.

29 He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed.

30 Then they were glad because they were quiet, So He guided them to their desired haven.

31 Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness, And for His wonders to the sons of men!

32 Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, And praise Him at the seat of the elders.

33 He changes rivers into a wilderness And springs of water into a thirsty ground;

34 A fruitful land into a salt waste, Because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it.

35 He changes a wilderness into a pool of water And a dry land into springs of water;

36 And there He makes the hungry to dwell, So that they may establish an inhabited city,

37 And sow fields and plant vineyards, And gather a fruitful harvest.

38 Also He blesses them and they multiply greatly, And He does not let their cattle decrease.

39 When they are diminished and bowed down Through oppression, misery and sorrow,

40 He pours contempt upon princes And makes them wander in a pathless waste.

41 But He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction, And makes *his* families like a flock.

42 The upright see it and are glad; But all unrighteousness shuts its mouth.

43 Who is wise? Let him give heed to these things, And consider the lovingkindnesses of the LORD.

Notice that Psalm 107:43 challenges us if we are wise to consider the lovingkindnesses of the Lord. His lovingkindness is manifested in the ways that He saves and delivers those who are in trouble and afflicted. He comes to the rescue of those who cry out to Him in their trouble. Lovingkindness comes to the aid of those who need salvation and cry out to Him for

it.

We could go on and on citing passages that mention the Lord's lovingkindness. Psalm 136 repeats the phrase, "For His lovingkindness is everlasting" 26 times while mentioning the marvelous works of God. Lovingkindness is a major theme in Psalm 86, 89, 103 and others. In answering prayer, in deliverance and salvation, in His forgiveness, and myriad other ways we are recipients of the abundant lovingkindness of the Lord.

In addition to being abundant in lovingkindness, the Lord says He also abounds in truth. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions has this entry for the word:

*'emeth*

**BDB Definition:**

- 1) firmness, faithfulness, truth (noun feminine)
  - 1a) sureness, reliability
  - 1b) stability, continuance
  - 1c) faithfulness, reliableness
  - 1d) truth
    - 1d1) as spoken
    - 1d2) of testimony and judgment
    - 1d3) of divine instruction
    - 1d4) truth as a body of ethical or religious knowledge
    - 1d5) true doctrine

I like the idea that the word carries the idea that God is firm and stable. The fact that there is such a thing as real, objective truth and that the Lord abounds in it is a thing that brings with it firmness and stability. We can rely on the Lord to tell us the truth and to lead us into the truth. We can trust in what He says because He is sure and reliable and faithful. He is truth, knows the truth, and speaks the truth. The servant of Abraham acknowledged this fact alongside the lovingkindness of the Lord in Genesis 24:27 cited above. The servant had seen not only that the Lord had not forsaken His lovingkindness toward Abraham, but had also manifested His truth, His reliability and faithfulness, to Abraham.

The Lord "keeps lovingkindness for thousands." He abounds in it and keeps it. He maintains His lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is His preferred way of dealing with humanity, so He guards it and watches over it. I think the next thing is the evidence or manifestation of how the Lord "keeps lovingkindness for thousands", He "forgives iniquity, transgression and sin."

The compassion, grace, patience and lovingkindness of the Lord culminates in forgiveness for sinners. This is what He does because of who He is and what He is like. Our iniquity, transgression and sin must be forgiven or judged, and the Lord in His compassion, grace and lovingkindness will forgive if we will turn to Him and request it of Him. This is what Moses had done in behalf of the people in 32:32-33, he confessed their sin and asked the Lord to forgive them.

The things the Lord forgives are described with three words, iniquity, transgression and sin. There are nuances to these words that we should examine. They are sort of synonymous, but are also three ways of looking at the same thing.

Iniquity is the Hebrew word *'âvôn*. The Brown-Driver-Briggs definition is "perversity,

depravity, iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity". A related or root word is *'âvâh*, "to bend, twist, distort". Something that is "bent, twisted or distorted" is something that is not as it should be. If it is bent when it should be straight it is broken and useless. An axle is supposed to be straight, but if it is bent, the vehicle will not drive the way it should. I work in radio, and one of the things we try hard to avoid is distorted audio. If something is recorded at a volume level that is too high it can cause distortion that sounds very bad. Human nature and human behavior has been twisted, bent and distorted by the fall. Our sinful nature means that we are not as God intended us to be in the beginning. We are perverse and depraved, but God forgives us when we turn to Him.

Transgression is *pesha'*. Brown-Driver-Briggs defines it as "transgression, rebellion". Strong's says it comes from a root meaning "to break away" and therefore means "a revolt". The Israelites had rebelled against God in the wilderness. They had tried to overthrow His rule over them and break away from Him. During the Civil War the southern states tried to rebel against the federal government and break away from the union, which of course caused a massive amount of death, destruction and misery. As I write this, civil war is going on in Syria, where people are trying to overthrow the rule of Bashar al-Assad. Rebellion against unjust and oppressive rule can be a good thing, but rebellion against the living God is never a good thing. The reason we revolt against God and against His rule is that it is in our fallen nature to do so. We rebel because we have a rebellious nature.

Sin is *châtâ'*. Brown-Driver-Briggs says this means "to sin, miss, miss the way, go wrong, incur guilt". I think Romans 3:23 gives the sense of it when Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." To sin is to "fall short", to "miss the mark," to miss the target you are trying to hit. Again, the reason we sin and fall short is because we have a sinful nature. Often Paul calls it "the flesh" in his epistles, and the NIV in fact translates it as "sinful nature." Because we are sinners we are incapable of hitting the target of righteousness. James wrote, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). The standard required by the law is complete obedience at every point throughout our lifetime, and this standard is impossible for anyone to keep. Thank God that He forgives sin!

Now we get to a turning point in the second half of verse 7, "yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." The emphasis has been on the loving, compassionate, gracious and forgiving nature of the Lord, but now He points out that those who are guilty will be punished. When He says He will not leave the guilty unpunished, the Hebrew verb means to "be empty, to be clear, to be pure" (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions). The Lord does not clear the guilty who refuse to repent. The guilty who stand stubbornly in their guilt are not acquitted, are not justified. The Lord does not want us to misunderstand what He is saying. He is not saying that He is "soft" on sin or that sin will have no consequences. He does not want us to think that His forgiving nature gives us the green light to indulge in any and every kind of sin imaginable. He is a perfect and just judge and because of His holy nature He cannot simply overlook sin. He must punish the guilty; they must face the penalty for their sin. In fact, He says that the sin of the guilty has consequences for the children and grandchildren of the sinner down to the third and fourth generations.

Again the Lord makes this declaration that He "visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." The Lord had said this before in Exodus 20:5 as He gave the command prohibiting the worshiping of idols. He said, "for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children,

on the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.” I have commented on the meaning of this statement on pages 94 and 95 when we considered Exodus 20:5, so I won’t add much to that here. It is the “iniquity” that is “visited” on the children and grandchildren. As we noted above, “iniquity” has to do with perversity, depravity, the twisted nature of the sinner. I think the Lord is saying that the twisted and perverted nature of the parents is “visited” or passed on to the children and grandchildren, and therefore they are punished for the same sins because they commit the same sins.

This passage is foundational to a proper understanding of the character of Yahweh, and is quoted many times in the Old Testament. I’ve mentioned already that Moses himself quoted these words of the Lord later in Numbers. In Numbers 14 we read of the people turning away from faith in the Lord and grumbling against Moses and Aaron because of the evil report about the land from ten of the twelve spies who went through the land. The people accused the Lord of bringing them to this land to fall by the sword and to make their wives and children become plunder (Numbers 14:3). When Joshua and Caleb tried to reason with them, the people wanted to stone them. In verses 11-24 we read the dialog between the Lord and Moses:

11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? 12 "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, 14 and they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 "Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, 16 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' 17 "But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*.' 19 "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

20 So the LORD said, "I have pardoned *them* according to your word; 21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. 22 "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, 23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. 24 "But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it.

Again the Lord threatened to destroy the people and start all over with Moses. Moses again pointed to how this would be perceived by the Egyptians and the other nations and what they would say about it. They would say that the Lord was incapable of bringing the people into the land and therefore slaughtered them in the wilderness. In verse 17 Moses asks that the “power of the Lord be great” and then quotes what the Lord had said in Exodus 34:6-7. He wants the Lord to manifest His power in His forgiveness rather than His wrath. Moses again fulfilled his role as intercessor and advocate for these people and again turned away the wrath of the Lord. Based on what the Lord revealed about Himself, Moses again requested pardon and forgiveness for the nation, and the Lord granted it. He remembered what the Lord had said about Himself and stood on that revelation. He reminded the Lord of what He had said. This is something we can do as well when we have sinned and grieved the Lord, we can quote His own words back to Him and claim His forgiveness on that basis.

We find another quote of this passage later on in book of Nehemiah. This was after the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon when they had been allowed to return to Jerusalem and Nehemiah had been given permission to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. After the wall was completed in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, all the people gathered for an assembly and had Ezra the scribe read the book of the Law to them (chapter 8). The people grieved because when they read the Law of Moses they realized that they had suffered the consequences of their unfaithfulness and disobedience to the Lord. In chapter 9 the prayer of the leaders is recorded. They recounted the history of Israel and how the Lord had chosen Abraham and how He had delivered them from Egypt, led them to Sinai, spoke to them and gave them His commandments, fed them with manna and gave them water from the rock. Then they said, "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them. Even when they made for themselves A calf of molten metal And said, 'This is your God Who brought you up from Egypt,' And committed great blasphemies, You, in Your great compassion, Did not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, To guide them on their way, Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go" (Nehemiah 9:16-19). As they continued to recall their history, they again alluded to Exodus 34:6-7 in verses 31 and 32. In listening to the Law and hearing what the Lord had said about His compassionate and gracious nature, and in considering their history, they could see how this had worked out in the nation. They could see the truth they confess in verse 31, “Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God.” He could justly have “made an end” of them and forsaken them, but He did not because of His grace and compassion. Seeing this, Nehemiah and Ezra and all the people renewed their commitment and covenant with the Lord.

This passage is quoted several times in Psalms. In Psalm 86:14-16 we read, “O God, arrogant men have risen up against me, And a band of violent men have sought my life, And they have not set You before them. But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth. Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Your strength to Your servant, And save the son of Your handmaid.” Psalm 103:7-8 says, “He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel. The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.” In Psalm 145:6-8 it says,

“Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.” When we think of the Lord meditate on His greatness, these words should come to mind. When we are in trouble and need His intervention, we should recall these words and call upon the Lord.

The prophet Joel quoted Exodus 34:6-7 as he warned the nation that a day of judgment was coming and called upon them to repent. He said, “‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping and mourning; And rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent And leave a blessing behind Him, *Even* a grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?” (Joel 2:12-14). Joel knew from Exodus that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and that He relents of evil. He knew that on that basis the people could repent and return to Him and He might turn from His wrath.

We've already mentioned Jonah (pages 158-159), who quoted Exodus 34:6-7 when he explained why he was angry that God had not destroyed the city of Nineveh. He knew the nature of God because he was familiar with Exodus. He said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my *own* country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jonah 4:2). Jonah wanted to see his enemies destroyed, not forgiven. He wanted to see the wrath of God against them rather than His compassion and grace. Jonah's spirit was not in harmony with the Spirit of God and the will of God. The last words in Jonah are a rhetorical question from the Lord, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know *the difference* between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:11). The Lord wants to have compassion on people. He wants to be gracious and forgive. If we want to see fire fall to consume our enemies, we are not of the same spirit with Him. (See Luke 9:54-56.)

Seeing the Lord and hearing Him proclaim His name and His nature, Moses quickly bowed down to the earth and worshiped Him (Exodus 34:8). When you see and hear the glory of the Lord and the goodness of the Lord this is the only proper response. Worship is something that is prompted by the activity of God. When we see Him work and manifest His glory and power and majesty, we are prompted to worship.

#### Exodus 34:9-27

He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

10 Then God said, "Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.

11 "Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the

Jebusite. 12 "Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. 13 "But *rather*, you are to tear down their altars and smash their *sacred* pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 --for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God-- 15 otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you might take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons *also* to play the harlot with their gods. 17 "You shall make for yourself no molten gods.

18 "You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.

19 "The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. 20 "You shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed.

21 "You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. 22 "You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. 23 "Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. 24 "For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.

25 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.

26 "You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

27 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel."

28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Moses was up on Mount Sinai for another 40 days in this instance, again meeting with the Lord. As he bowed down in worship after the Lord had passed by in front of him, Moses again talked about finding favor with the Lord and having the Lord go with them. He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, Let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession" (verse 9). Yes, the people are stiff-necked and obstinate. They are prone to sin and unfaithfulness. Nevertheless Moses asked the Lord, on the basis that he had found favor with the Lord, to go with them, to pardon them, and to take them as His possession. These are the things we still need. We still need to have the Lord's presence. We need a relationship with Him, and we have it through faith in Christ. We need to have Him forgive us our iniquities and sins, and we receive that forgiveness through Christ. We need to be His people, His possession, and again, through Jesus Christ we become His because He purchased us with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19 and Revelation 5:9). All of these things that Moses sought for himself and for the nation we receive through Jesus Christ in the new covenant.



The Lord responded that He was going to make a covenant. He was going to make a commitment to Moses and the nation. He will perform unprecedented miracles never before seen by anyone in all the earth. He promised that they would see Him work and perform in powerful ways that would cause them and others to fear. What He will do will inspire awe in the hearts of those who see it and hear of it. In fact, these things should inspire awe, fear and faith as we read of them today!

This covenant required that they observe what the Lord was commanding them here. These things He mentions are things that will enable them to remain faithful to the Lord and avoid idolatry. The biggest danger they are going to face is not a military danger, but a spiritual danger. They are going to face people who do not worship Yahweh, but worship their own man-made gods. The Lord assured Moses in verse 11 that He was going to drive out the people of the land before Israel. He names the nations, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. He Himself was committed to destroying these people for their sinful practices.

In verse 12 the Lord commands them to protect themselves by making no covenant with the people of the land where they are going. He told them to protect themselves deliberately. There was to be no peace treaty with any of these people. They were not to enter into alliances or trade arrangements with these people. He warned that if they did this, it would become a snare to them. They would be like an animal caught in a snare. He expands the warning in verses 15 and 16. If they made a covenant with the people of the land, it may lead them to turn from the Lord to worship the false gods of these people and to intermarry with them. There is no guarantee that these people would turn to the worship of Yahweh, but rather it was more likely that the people of Yahweh would turn to the impure false gods of the people of the land. Therefore the Lord's order was that they were to erase all the traces of their idolatry. They were to "tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim." They were not to preserve and adopt any of these things. He explains in verse 14, "for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." The Lord names Himself "Jealous" and assures us that jealousy is part of His nature. He will not tolerate any rivals. He is the only God and the only one worthy of anyone's worship, and therefore to worship anyone or anything else is like marital unfaithfulness. It truly angers the Lord that people do this.

The Lord sketched out the scenario He was warning about in verses 15 and 16. If you make a covenant with the people of the land they will continue to "play the harlot with their gods." They had given themselves over to the worship of false gods and would not turn to the Lord. They are prostitutes given over to prostitution who are not faithful at all to the Lord. Such a man might invite an Israelite to come eat from his sacrifice to his false god. This is how it might start. It would start rather innocuously, with a simple dinner invitation that would seem harmless. Since the nation had made a covenant with these people it might be assumed that they and their practices were approved by the nation and even by the Lord. The man invited to dinner might attend and it would be the beginning of a slide into idolatry. They might end up intermarrying with these people and being influenced to also "play the harlot" with their gods." The Lord says, "his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods." The sexual relationship has a powerful influence in our lives. We saw it at the beginning with Adam and Eve. Eve was deceived into eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but Adam ate because of Eve's influence (Genesis 3:6). It is not hard for spouses to influence one another in both positive and negative ways. This is why believers are warned not to be "bound together" with

unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

The Lord pictures idolatry as marital and sexual unfaithfulness. Here and elsewhere in scripture this reference to “playing the harlot” is applied to those who worship idols. It is the fundamental sin of mankind, turning away from the Lord to go after other things that are unworthy of our worship. Paul talks about this in Romans 1:18-32:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

We see that the first sin of turning away from the Lord and exchanging His glory for an image of created and corruptible things led to all kinds of other sins as God gave men over to go their own way. If someone is “playing the harlot” with other gods and other things, you can be sure that they will engage in other corrupt and wicked practices as well. This is why even John writes in 1 John 5:21, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” Idolatry can be a temptation and snare for Christians as well as ancient Israelites.

Having made a molten calf idol recently, the Lord explicitly, in verse 17, makes it clear, “You shall make for yourself no molten gods.” Though this should have been obvious, the Lord wanted to make sure that they understood this was prohibited.

The next thing that He says they must do is observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (verse 18). The establishment of this feast was recorded in Exodus 12:15-20. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was kicked off with the Passover, and was observed for seven days to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt and how they had to leave in haste. The instructions were repeated in Exodus 13:6-10, and includes the fact that it would be a means

of telling subsequent generations about what the Lord had done for them when they came out of Egypt.

Hand-in-hand with the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the offering of the firstborn to the Lord (verses 19 and 20). This was also commanded along with the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 13. The explanation they were to give their children for this practice is in Exodus 13:15, "It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem." The sacrifice of the firstborn commemorated the Passover when the firstborn in Egypt died. Donkeys could be redeemed with the sacrifice of a lamb, and of course they were to redeem their children as well.

The Lord again repeats the requirement that they should observe the sabbath in verse 21. There were to be no exceptions to the sabbath law of resting on the seventh day, even during plowing time and harvest. It might be thought that there should be exceptions, especially if it was harvest time and it was critical to get the crops in. The Lord says they were to rest even when they thought they could not afford to rest or that they might incur losses if they rested. It's important, especially for active, driven people that they discipline themselves to rest.

Besides the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, there were two other feasts that the men of the nation were required to attend, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Ingathering (verses 22 and 23). The purpose of these feasts was that they might "appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel" (verses 23 and 24). These feasts were not just parties for feasting and fun, they were appearances before Yahweh, they were meetings with the Lord. They were to bring the firstfruits and their offerings and be seen before the Lord. The word translated "appear" is *râ'âh*, to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider.<sup>28</sup> The word "before" is again the word *panîym*, the face. The men were to be seen before the face of the Lord. They were to be there in His presence three times a year. This was critical for the maintenance of their relationship with Him. They did not all have copies of the scriptures. They needed these times to worship, to be taught, exhorted and unified under Yahweh as His people and as a nation. Without these times of gathering, they would drift apart from each other and apart from Yahweh as well. This is why we also must gather as the church, the Body of Christ, for worship, teaching and fellowship on a regular basis. The loner Christian will have a difficult time maintaining his faith in and love for the Lord.

The Lord gave them a promise if they would observe these feasts. He said, "For I will drive out the nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall coven your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the Lord" (verse 24). If they would maintain their relationship to Him, He would protect their land. Even when all the men were gathered before the Lord the fear of the Lord on the surrounding nations would keep them from violating their borders. They could gather before Him without worrying about their families at home.

The blood of the sacrifice was not to be offered with leavened bread, and the Passover sacrifice was not to be left over until the next morning (verses 25 and 26). The first of the first fruits were to be brought into the house of the Lord. A young goat was not to be boiled in its mother's milk. (verse 26). Again the Lord is repeating things He has told them previously (Exodus 23:18-19). The commands of the Lord have not changed since the first time Moses met with the Lord on the mountain. Reminders were necessary.

The Lord told Moses to write down the words he had heard, because they were the terms

of the covenant, the covenant made with Moses and with Israel (verse 27). A covenant, a legal contract, must be written down and recorded. It is necessary in order to verify later all the things that the parties involved agreed to. It was Yahweh who dictated these terms and gave them to Moses who gave them to the nation. Yes, they were imposed upon the people whom God had chosen, called and saved for Himself. There was no negotiation about these things, which may seem unfair, but we need to remember that we are talking about the sovereign Lord here. The universe is a monarchy, not a democracy. The Lord issues commands and proclamations and dictates terms of covenants, and does so perfectly because He is perfect. He understands all the issues perfectly so that the covenant He dictates is perfect. He expects His people to observe their part which He has laid down. We might think that some things should be modified, but this is not our prerogative.

As Moses was there on the mountain with the Lord for another forty days and forty nights we are told that he did not eat nor drink anything. One might go forty days without eating, but you can't go forty days without water. Moses must have been supernaturally sustained by the Lord in His presence. When Jesus and the disciples were in Samaria, and Jesus had been speaking to the woman at the well, the disciples came with food and urged Him to eat. He said, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." They said, "No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?" Jesus replied, "My food is to do the will of Him who send Me and accomplish His work." (See John 4:31-34.) When you are with the Lord doing what He has called you to do, He will sustain you. He will see to it that your needs are met.

The Lord wrote the ten commandments on the two tablets and the meeting on the mountain was concluded. The covenant was renewed and restored. The terms were the same as before. No commandments were added or revised, and none were taken away.

#### Exodus 34:29-35

It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony *were* in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them *to do* everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, 35 the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

Moses had met with the Lord and been in His presence for 40 days and nights, and the time came for him to come down from Sinai and rejoin the people of Israel. As he was coming down the mountain he was unaware of the fact that "the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him." How could such an incredible change take place without Moses being aware of it? The simple answer may be that he had no mirror and therefore could not tell that his face was shining, that others could see it, but he couldn't. I want to suggest, though, that there may be another factor, though this is only speculation. I think it may be that as a result of spending so much time alone in the presence of the holy God, Moses became far less self-

aware than usual. I think that one of the results of the fall is that we are much more self-aware than we were before our original disobedience. Before they disobeyed the Lord by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve did not know that they were naked. Genesis 2:25 says, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." Immediately after they ate the forbidden fruit, they became aware that they were naked and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). The Lord came looking for them and they hid themselves from Him. When the Lord called out to Adam, "Where are you?" Adam replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." The Lord then asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:9-11). Somehow Adam and Eve in their innocence were clueless that they were naked. They did not have an awareness of their nakedness. They had no need to cover themselves, nor to be ashamed. They were not obsessed with self and how they appeared. There was not this concern that we have about self. We can't fully understand how they perceived things because we are born into a sinful nature, but before sin and guilt came along, they in some sense lacked self-awareness. I think maybe Moses picked up some of this as he spent time in God's presence.

Aaron and the other rulers initially were afraid to come near Moses. They saw that his skin was shining. The glory of the Lord was on his face, and it was a scary thing. We can imagine what it would be like to see a glowing being standing before us. So Moses had to call them to himself and assure them they were in no danger.

After speaking to the leaders Moses spoke to the congregation and told them to do all that the Lord had commanded them. He repeated the terms of the covenant. Verse 32 is echoed in the "Great Commission" passage in Matthew 28:20, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Followers of Jesus still need to be taught and exhorted to keep His commands. We must still concern ourselves with obedience to the commands of the Lord. We do not set aside God's commands because Jesus has fulfilled them (see Matthew 5:17-20). We are not saved by obedience to commands, but we are saved in order that we might obey His commands. Too often we quote Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9 but leave out verse 10. Verses 8 and 9 say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" and then verse 10 adds, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." We are not saved by good works, but we are saved *for* good works.

Moses began at this point to put a veil over his face when he was with the people, but when he went in to meet with the Lord he would take it off. Paul makes reference to this in 2 Corinthians 3:

1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you? 2 You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look

intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. 10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses *it*. 11 For if that which fades away *was* with glory, much more that which remains *is* in glory. 12 Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in *our* speech, 13 and *are* not like Moses, *who* used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. 14 But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. 15 But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; 16 but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Paul contrasts the new covenant with the old covenant here. The old covenant is called “the letter” which kills, “the ministry of death,” and “the ministry of condemnation”. The new covenant is the covenant “of the Spirit” that “gives life”. It is “the ministry of the Spirit” and “the ministry of righteousness”. The old covenant came with glory, the glory that shone on Moses’ face, but the new covenant comes with even more glory. Paul uses the veil of Moses as a metaphor for the “veil” that lies over the hearts of the Israelites that keeps them from seeing the truth of the fulfillment of the law in Christ. This veil is removed in Christ. We are able to behold the true glory of the Lord with unveiled faces in Christ. When we turn to the Lord, the veil is removed, we are liberated from the inadequacy of the law, and are now being transformed into the image of Christ.

#### Exodus 35:1-3

1 Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded *you* to do: 2 "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 "You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day."

Again there is an emphasis on the sabbath. This is what the Lord has commanded. One of the core requirements for Israel was that they observe the sabbath and rest completely on it. Anyone doing any work on the sabbath was to be put to death.

#### Exodus 35:4-35

4 Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, 5 'Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD'S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, 6 and blue, purple and scarlet *material*, fine linen, goats' *hair*, 7 and rams' skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, 8 and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, 9 and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 10 'Let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the LORD has

commanded: 11 the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; 12 the ark and its poles, the mercy seat, and the curtain of the screen; 13 the table and its poles, and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; 14 the lampstand also for the light and its utensils and its lamps and the oil for the light; 15 and the altar of incense and its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the doorway at the entrance of the tabernacle; 16 the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; 17 the hangings of the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court and their cords; 19 the woven garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests."

20 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence. 21 Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came *and* brought the LORD'S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. 22 Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came *and* brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so *did* every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. 23 Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine linen and goats' *hair* and rams' skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. 24 Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD'S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. 25 All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, *in* blue and purple *and* scarlet *material* and *in* fine linen. 26 All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats' *hair*. 27 The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; 28 and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. 29 The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring *material* for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD.

30 Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 31 "And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; 32 to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, 33 and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. 34 "He also has put in his heart to teach, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. 35 "He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple *and* in scarlet *material*, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.

The time had come for the nation to build the tabernacle, the ark, the courtyard, and all the other things related to the tabernacle. Two things were needed – the materials for making everything and workers to do the work. The people already had all the materials that were needed for this project, so the first thing that Moses did was to ask the people to contribute the things needed. He requested an offering from the people and listed all the things that were needed in verses 5-9. He also asked for skillful men to come do the work in verse 10. Then, in verses 11-19 he listed everything that the Lord had commanded be made, even down to such details as the pegs and cords that would hold everything in place.

When God commands we undertake a project He will provide the materials and the workers when they are needed. When the Israelites “plundered” the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36), doubtless this project was one of the reasons. The plundering provided the materials for the tabernacle. God had already provided everything needed for the job, materials and labor, all that was needed was the willing contribution of both.

Having heard Moses ask for the offering of materials, the people went off and willingly brought all the materials as a contribution to the Lord. Their hearts were stirred and their spirits were moved (verses 21, 22, 26 and 29). Everyone who had the things asked for gave them freely. Everyone who could give did give. They did not have to be continually exhorted and harangued and urged. There is a joy that comes when we together freely give to the Lord to accomplish His purpose. There is a willingness that comes along when we know that the Lord has stirred us all up to do something together.

Moses repeated to the Israelites what the Lord had said previously about Bezalel and Oholiab. In Chapter 31:2-6 the Lord had said, “See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *kinds of* craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all *kinds of* craftsmanship. And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you.” Moses repeats what the Lord had said about these men almost word-for-word. The Lord had called them and had filled them with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding and knowledge to do all the work that He had commanded. He had also equipped them to teach others how to do the work. The plans, the materials and the skilled workers all came from the Lord. Nothing that they needed to accomplish this project was lacking.

#### Exodus 36:1-7

"Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the LORD has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded."

2 Then Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person in whom the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him, to come to the work to perform it. 3 They received from Moses all the contributions which the sons of Israel had brought to perform the work in the construction of the sanctuary. And they still *continued* bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. 4 And all the skillful men who were performing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work which he was performing, 5 and they said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the LORD commanded *us* to perform." 6 So Moses issued a command, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp, saying, "Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary." Thus the people were restrained from bringing *any more*. 7 For the material they had was sufficient and more than enough for all the work, to perform it.

I'm not sure why verse one was included in chapter 36 rather than being the end of chapter 35, but obviously it concludes the words of Moses in chapter 35. Bezalel, Oholiab and all the skillful people are told to carry out the work commanded by the Lord. Moses tells them to carry out the work in accord with the command of the Lord. They were not to improvise, but



were to follow exactly the directions the Lord had given them.

Moses called the workers together and gave them the materials that had been given by the people. Day by day the people continued to bring offerings for the project. The skillful men concluded that they had “much more than enough for the construction work.” Moses had to tell the people to stop bringing contributions. The proclamation went out (a call, a voice, a sound) telling the people that they had enough and needed no more. They not only had a sufficiency, but they had more than that. There were materials that would not be needed.

Would that God’s people always gave so willingly! It’s sad that we feel like we have to use so many gimmicks to raise money for the Lord’s work – rummage sales, bake sales, auctions, golf tournaments, banquets and so on. Too many, it seems, won’t give unless there is some benefit to themselves attached to the giving. We need more of a spirit of sacrificial and joyful giving in the body of Christ!

#### Exodus 36:8-38

All the skillful men among those who were performing the work made the tabernacle with ten curtains; of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet *material*, with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman, Bezalel made them. 9 The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains had the same measurements. 10 He joined five curtains to one another and *the other* five curtains he joined to one another. 11 He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; he did likewise on the edge of the curtain that was outermost in the second set. 12 He made fifty loops in the one curtain and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set; the loops were opposite each other. 13 He made fifty clasps of gold and joined the curtains to one another with the clasps, so the tabernacle was a unit. 14 Then he made curtains of goats' *hair* for a tent over the tabernacle; he made eleven curtains in all. 15 The length of each curtain was thirty cubits and four cubits the width of each curtain; the eleven curtains had the same measurements. 16 He joined five curtains by themselves and *the other* six curtains by themselves. 17 Moreover, he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was outermost in the *first* set, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain *that was outermost in* the second set. 18 He made fifty clasps of bronze to join the tent together so that it would be a unit. 19 He made a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of porpoise skins above. 20 Then he made the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing upright. 21 Ten cubits was the length of each board and one and a half cubits the width of each board. 22 *There were* two tenons for each board, fitted to one another; thus he did for all the boards of the tabernacle. 23 He made the boards for the tabernacle: twenty boards for the south side; 24 and he made forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards; two sockets under one board for its two tenons and two sockets under another board for its two tenons. 25 Then for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty boards, 26 and their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board and two sockets under another board. 27 For the rear of the tabernacle, to the west, he made six boards. 28 He made two boards for the corners of the tabernacle at the rear. 29 They were double beneath, and together they were complete to its top to the first ring; thus he did with both of them for the two corners. 30 There were eight boards with their sockets of silver, sixteen sockets, two under every board. 31 Then he made bars of acacia wood, five for the boards of one side of the tabernacle, 32 and five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the tabernacle for the rear *side* to the west. 33 He made the middle bar

to pass through in the center of the boards from end to end. 34 He overlaid the boards with gold and made their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold. 35 Moreover, he made the veil of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, and fine twisted linen; he made it with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. 36 He made four pillars of acacia for it, and overlaid them with gold, with their hooks of gold; and he cast four sockets of silver for them. 37 He made a screen for the doorway of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver; 38 and *he made* its five pillars with their hooks, and he overlaid their tops and their bands with gold; but their five sockets were of bronze.

The first thing was to make the tabernacle that would house the ark of the covenant, the Holy of Holies, the table of the showbread, the lampstand and the altar of incense. Bezalel took the lead to make all of the curtains, loops, clasps, boards, sockets, rings, bars and veil. Everything is described in detail and was made according to God's specifications.

#### Exodus 37:1-9

Now Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; its length was two and a half cubits, and its width one and a half cubits, and its height one and a half cubits; 2 and he overlaid it with pure gold inside and out, and made a gold molding for it all around. 3 He cast four rings of gold for it on its four feet; even two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. 4 He made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 5 He put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry it. 6 He made a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. 7 He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat; 8 one cherub at the one end and one cherub at the other end; he made the cherubim *of one piece* with the mercy seat at the two ends. 9 The cherubim had *their* wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces toward each other; the faces of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat.

Here is the thing that is at the heart of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant. It was the box that held the tablets of the covenant, the ten commandments, and also held the jar of manna and Aaron's rod that budded (Hebrews 9:4). This was the holiest thing in the holiest of places, and so it was the most magnificent thing as well. It was overlaid with gold on the inside as well as on the outside. The mercy seat was pure gold as were the cherubim. This was a departure from the practices of other peoples and nations. Others would put a representation of the idol or idols they worshiped into the holy place of their temples. Typically these idol statues would not be curtained off from people but would be accessible so that people could marvel at their magnificence. But the ark was no idol statue. It was not even an object that was to be worshiped or venerated. It was a representation that said something about the presence of Yahweh and how He was to be approached. It was the place where the Lord would meet with them and speak to them (Exodus 25:22). The principle that mercy covers the law is very clear. The Lord meets us at the place of mercy and grace.

#### Exodus 37:10-16

Then he made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long and a cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. 11 He overlaid it with pure gold, and made a gold molding for it all around. 12

He made a rim for it of a handbreadth all around, and made a gold molding for its rim all around. 13 He cast four gold rings for it and put the rings on the four corners that were on its four feet. 14 Close by the rim were the rings, the holders for the poles to carry the table. 15 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold, to carry the table. 16 He made the utensils which were on the table, its dishes and its pans and its bowls and its jars, with which to pour out drink offerings, of pure gold.

This is the table of the showbread, which was in the tabernacle outside the veil. It always had bread on it before the Lord, the “bread of the Presence” (Exodus 25:30).

#### Exodus 37:17-24

Then he made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work, its base and its shaft; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers were *of one piece* with it. 18 There were six branches going out of its sides; three branches of the lampstand from the one side of it and three branches of the lampstand from the other side of it; 19 three cups shaped like almond *blossoms*, a bulb and a flower in one branch, and three cups shaped like almond *blossoms*, a bulb and a flower in the other branch--so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. 20 In the lampstand *there were* four cups shaped like almond *blossoms*, its bulbs and its flowers; 21 and a bulb was under the *first* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *second* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *third* pair of branches *coming* out of it, for the six branches coming out of the lampstand. 22 Their bulbs and their branches were *of one piece* with it; the whole of it *was* a single hammered work of pure gold. 23 He made its seven lamps with its snuffers and its trays of pure gold. 24 He made it and all its utensils from a talent of pure gold.

One talent of pure gold was used to make the lampstand. A talent was a weight of gold, and the weight varied by nation and date, ranging from 57 pounds for the Greek or Attic talent, to 130 pounds for the New Testament “heavy common talent” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent\\_\(measurement\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent_(measurement))). Needless to say this was a very impressive lamp!

#### Exodus 37:25-29

Then he made the altar of incense of acacia wood: a cubit long and a cubit wide, square, and two cubits high; its horns were *of one piece* with it. 26 He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and he made a gold molding for it all around. 27 He made two golden rings for it under its molding, on its two sides--on opposite sides--as holders for poles with which to carry it. 28 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 29 And he made the holy anointing oil and the pure, fragrant incense of spices, the work of a perfumer.

Bezalel not only made the altar for the incense, he also made the incense for the altar. He was a “renaissance man”! He was a woodworker, a metal smith and a perfumer.

#### Exodus 38:1-7

Then he made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits wide, square, and three cubits high. 2 He made its horns on its four corners, its horns being *of one piece* with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. 3 He made all the utensils of the altar, the

pails and the shovels and the basins, the flesh hooks and the firepans; he made all its utensils of bronze. 4 He made for the altar a grating of bronze network beneath, under its ledge, reaching halfway up. 5 He cast four rings on the four ends of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. 6 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. 7 He inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the altar, with which to carry it. He made it hollow with planks.

This altar of burnt offering was going to get a lot of heavy use, so it is overlaid with bronze, and all of its utensils are made of bronze. This is not made of gold because gold is too soft. It will melt if you burn things on it. The last note on this is “he made it hollow with planks.” Evidently he made the altar as light as he could because men would have to carry it.

#### Exodus 38:8-21

Moreover, he made the laver of bronze with its base of bronze, from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

9 Then he made the court: for the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twisted linen, one hundred cubits; 10 their twenty pillars, and their twenty sockets, *made* of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* of silver. 11 For the north side *there were* one hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty sockets *were* of bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* of silver. 12 For the west side *there were* hangings of fifty cubits *with* their ten pillars and their ten sockets; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* of silver. 13 For the east side fifty cubits. 14 The hangings for the *one side of the gate were* fifteen cubits, *with* their three pillars and their three sockets, 15 and so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court *were* hangings of fifteen cubits, *with* their three pillars and their three sockets. 16 All the hangings of the court all around *were* of fine twisted linen. 17 The sockets for the pillars *were* of bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands, of silver; and the overlaying of their tops, of silver, and all the pillars of the court were furnished with silver bands. 18 The screen of the gate of the court was the work of the weaver, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen. And the length *was* twenty cubits and the height *was* five cubits, corresponding to the hangings of the court. 19 Their four pillars and their four sockets *were* of bronze; their hooks *were* of silver, and the overlaying of their tops and their bands *were* of silver. 20 All the pegs of the tabernacle and of the court all around *were* of bronze. 21 This is the number of the things for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were numbered according to the command of Moses, for the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

The laver is barely mentioned here in verse 8, but it’s interesting that it says that the bronze for the laver came from the mirrors of the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. It makes me wonder if these women made a “designated gift” like so often happens in our churches. Maybe they gave their mirrors and said, “We want to give these for the laver,” and so this detail is mentioned here. This is just speculation, though. These mirrors were things that were probably hard for these women to give up. We take mirrors for granted these days and never really think about how difficult it would be to do certain things without one. Surely it was a true sacrifice for these women to give their mirrors.

The court measured 100 cubits by 50 cubits. The long sides were on the north and south, the short sides were to the east and west. Evidently the “gate” was on the east end.

Moses summarizes in verse 21 that the things mentioned since chapter 36 were “the number of the things for the tabernacle.” An inventory of all the things had been compiled by Ithamar in obedience to the command of Moses. I guess Moses wanted to make sure that everything had been properly made and nothing was overlooked.

Exodus 38:22-31

Now Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD had commanded Moses. 23 With him was Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and a skillful workman and a weaver in blue and in purple and in scarlet *material*, and fine linen.

24 All the gold that was used for the work, in all the work of the sanctuary, even the gold of the wave offering, was 29 talents and 730 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 25 The silver of those of the congregation who were numbered was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary; 26 a beka a head (*that is*, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary), for each one who passed over to those who were numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men. 27 The hundred talents of silver were for casting the sockets of the sanctuary and the sockets of the veil; one hundred sockets for the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. 28 Of the 1,775 *shekels*, he made hooks for the pillars and overlaid their tops and made bands for them. 29 The bronze of the wave offering was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels. 30 With it he made the sockets to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and the bronze altar and its bronze grating, and all the utensils of the altar, 31 and the sockets of the court all around and the sockets of the gate of the court, and all the pegs of the tabernacle and all the pegs of the court all around.

Everything related to the tabernacle and court had been made by Bezalel and Oholiab. At least, they were the primary craftsmen. No doubt many others helped under their tutelage. Again they are mentioned as skillful men who followed the commands of the Lord carefully.

We get an idea of the amount of gold, silver and bronze that went into the construction of this thing in verses 24-31. The gold involved was around a ton. The silver weighed in at over 3 tons, and the bronze was over 2 and a half tons. Each of the silver sockets weighed a talent, maybe around 75 pounds.

The silver came from a half-shekel assessment from each male in Israel who was at least 20 years old. There were 603,550 of these men, and the assessment therefore would have amounted to 301,775 shekels of silver, so we can calculate that the talent consisted of 3,000 shekels.

Exodus 39:1-31

Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet *material*, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

2 He made the ephod of gold, *and* of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, and fine twisted linen. 3 Then they hammered out gold sheets and cut *them* into threads to be woven in *with* the blue and the purple and the scarlet *material*, and the fine linen, the work of a skillful workman. 4 They made attaching shoulder pieces for the ephod; it was attached at its two *upper* ends. 5 The skillfully woven band which was on it was like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold *and* of blue and purple and scarlet *material*, and fine twisted linen, just

as the LORD had commanded Moses.

6 They made the onyx stones, set in gold filigree *settings*; they were engraved *like* the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. 7 And he placed them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

8 He made the breastpiece, the work of a skillful workman, like the workmanship of the ephod: of gold *and* of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen. 9 It was square; they made the breastpiece folded double, a span long and a span wide when folded double. 10 And they mounted four rows of stones on it. The first row *was* a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald; 11 and the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; 12 and the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 13 and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They were set in gold filigree *settings* when they were mounted. 14 The stones were corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they were twelve, corresponding to their names, *engraved with* the engravings of a signet, each with its name for the twelve tribes. 15 They made on the breastpiece chains like cords, of twisted cordage work in pure gold. 16 They made two gold filigree *settings* and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. 17 Then they put the two gold cords in the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece. 18 They put the *other* two ends of the two cords on the two filigree *settings*, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front of it. 19 They made two gold rings and placed *them* on the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inner edge which was next to the ephod. 20 Furthermore, they made two gold rings and placed them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it, close to the place where it joined, above the woven band of the ephod. 21 They bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it would be on the woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece would not come loose from the ephod, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

22 Then he made the robe of the ephod of woven work, all of blue; 23 and the opening of the robe was *at the top* in the center, as the opening of a coat of mail, with a binding all around its opening, so that it would not be torn. 24 They made pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet *material and twisted linen* on the hem of the robe. 25 They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around on the hem of the robe, 26 alternating a bell and a pomegranate all around on the hem of the robe for the service, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

27 They made the tunics of finely woven linen for Aaron and his sons, 28 and the turban of fine linen, and the decorated caps of fine linen, and the linen breeches of fine twisted linen, 29 and the sash of fine twisted linen, and blue and purple and scarlet *material*, the work of the weaver, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

30 They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and inscribed it like the engravings of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." 31 They fastened a blue cord to it, to fasten it on the turban above, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Verse one is a summary of what follows in verses 2 through 31. This passage details the making of the garments for Aaron and the priests who would serve in the tabernacle. It covers the ephod, the precious stones on the ephod, the breastpiece, the robe of the ephod, the linen tunics, the turban, the caps, the breeches, the sash and the gold crown. All the details of these things are mentioned.

The thing that stands out to me here is the recurring phrase, "just as the Lord had

commanded Moses.” It occurs seven times here, and is also emphasized in verses 32 through 43. The workmen followed exactly the commands of the Lord as to how to make the garments for Aaron and the priests. They did not improvise or deviate from His specifications. The details were important. There was symbolic meaning to all of these things, and so the instructions had to be followed.

#### Exodus 39:32-43

Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed; and the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did. 33 They brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its boards, its bars, and its pillars and its sockets; 34 and the covering of rams' skins dyed red, and the covering of porpoise skins, and the screening veil; 35 the ark of the testimony and its poles and the mercy seat; 36 the table, all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; 37 the pure *gold* lampstand, with its arrangement of lamps and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; 38 and the gold altar, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the veil for the doorway of the tent; 39 the bronze altar and its bronze grating, its poles and all its utensils, the laver and its stand; 40 the hangings for the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords and its pegs and all the equipment for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; 41 the woven garments for ministering in the holy place and the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.

42 So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses. 43 And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them.

When all the work was completed and all the things were made, they brought everything to Moses. Everything is listed in verses 33 through 41. Again we are told here that they did “according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses.” When it came to the tabernacle and everything related to it, they had completely and carefully followed all of the Lord's commands. Moses examined all of the work and found that this was true. He could find nothing to criticize or correct. The specifications for the tabernacle and all the other things had been successfully communicated by the Lord to Moses and then by Moses to the people and then executed by the workers. So Moses was pleased and blessed the people.

#### Exodus 40:1-15

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 3 "You shall place the ark of the testimony there, and you shall screen the ark with the veil. 4 "You shall bring in the table and arrange what belongs on it; and you shall bring in the lampstand and mount its lamps. 5 "Moreover, you shall set the gold altar of incense before the ark of the testimony, and set up the veil for the doorway to the tabernacle. 6 "You shall set the altar of burnt offering in front of the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. 7 "You shall set the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it. 8 "You shall set up the court all around and hang up the veil for the gateway of the court. 9 "Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and shall consecrate it and all its furnishings; and it shall be holy. 10 "You shall anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, and the altar shall be most holy. 11 "You shall anoint the laver and its stand, and consecrate it. 12 "Then you shall bring

Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. 13 "You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister as a priest to Me. 14 "You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them; 15 and you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father, that they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing will qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations."

Now that everything had been made correctly, the Lord spoke to Moses and told him exactly how everything was to be set up and arranged. First, He told him when to do it, "on the first day of the first month." In our calendar this would have been March – April. Once everything had been set up, Moses was to anoint the tabernacle and everything in it (verse 9). The Lord had told him how to make this oil back in Exodus 30:23-33. It was made of myrrh, cinnamon, fragrant cane and olive oil. It was a very fragrant perfume, and would have spread a nice smell throughout the tabernacle area. The Lord had told Moses what this oil would be used for and that it was holy and they were not to make any like it for any other purpose. The oil was used to sanctify, to make holy, all the things related to the tabernacle and qualify Aaron and his sons to be priests. The record of the anointing of Aaron and his sons is in Leviticus 8:10-12.

Not only were the priests anointed in order to sanctify them for service in the tabernacle, but later the kings of Israel were also anointed with oil in order to set them apart and recognize their authority as king which had been conferred upon them by the Lord. The kings were referred to as "the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:6 and 10). In fact, the word "Messiah" means "anointed one". Psalm 2 is a prophecy warning people to honor the Lord and His Son, the Anointed (Psalm 2:2). Daniel 9:25-26 is a pivotal prophecy that says, "So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. 26 Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined." So Jesus the Messiah acknowledged that He had been "anointed to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). In Acts 10:38 Peter told the people assembled in the home of Cornelius that God had anointed Jesus "with the Holy Spirit and with power."

In addition to Old Testament priests and kings, believers in Christ are anointed as well! We are anointed, as Jesus was, with the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." John writes in 1 John 2:20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know." And then in verse 27 he says, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." We are not literally anointed with oil, but we are "anointed" with the Holy Spirit. He is the one who sanctifies us and sets us apart as the special possession of the Lord. He is the one who makes the difference in us for the glory of God. The anointing of the priests was a picture of the true anointing we have through the Holy Spirit.

Exodus 40:16-33

Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did. 17 Now



in the first month of the second year, on the first *day* of the month, the tabernacle was erected. 18 Moses erected the tabernacle and laid its sockets, and set up its boards, and inserted its bars and erected its pillars. 19 He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 20 Then he took the testimony and put *it* into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark. 21 He brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a veil for the screen, and screened off the ark of the testimony, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 22 Then he put the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil. 23 He set the arrangement of bread in order on it before the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 24 Then he placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. 25 He lighted the lamps before the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 26 Then he placed the gold altar in the tent of meeting in front of the veil; 27 and he burned fragrant incense on it, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 28 Then he set up the veil for the doorway of the tabernacle. 29 He set the altar of burnt offering *before* the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the meal offering, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 30 He placed the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. 31 From it Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. 32 When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 33 He erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work.

The Lord had just told Moses to do all of these things, and so Moses did them. Again the phrase, “just as the Lord had commanded Moses” seven times here. You can't miss the emphasis on this. God's directions had been followed precisely.

I doubt that Moses did all of these things himself. No doubt he had many people working alongside him to set all of this up. It would be the job of the Levites to take care of the tabernacle and the ark and the court and all the other things related to the tabernacle, so I'm sure that Moses directed the work, but I seriously doubt that he did it all by himself. After all the meetings and instructions and donations and work, the work was finally finished (verse 33).

#### Exodus 40:34-38

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36 Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; 37 but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. 38 For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.

Once the tabernacle was finished and everything was set up and sanctified, the Lord moved in. The cloud covered the tent and the Lord's glory filled the tabernacle. Not even Moses could enter the tabernacle because of the glory of the Lord. As long as the cloud and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle they could not move. When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then they knew it was time to set out and travel. Moses gives us more

details in Numbers 9:15-23:

Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. 16 So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. 17 Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. 18 At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. 19 Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the LORD'S charge and not set out. 20 If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the LORD they remained camped. Then according to the command of the LORD they set out. 21 If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or *if it remained* in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. 22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. 23 At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the LORD'S charge, according to the command of the LORD through Moses.

For Israel at this time, figuring out what the Lord wanted them to do, whether He wanted them to travel or stay put, was easy. Was the cloud over the tabernacle? They did not travel. Had the cloud been lifted? It was time for them to move on. Sometimes the cloud would stay over the tabernacle for an extended period, and so they would not travel. They were on God's timetable.

The cloud shows up in the New Testament also. As Peter, James and John were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father spoke to them from out of a bright cloud and said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:34-35). The Father appeared in the same manner as He had to Israel in Exodus. He spoke to them out of the cloud as He had when He gave the ten commandments. The cloud said to them, "Yahweh is here!" For the apostles, there was one simple message: "This is My Son – listen to Him!" The main job of a disciple of Jesus is to listen to Him and follow His directions.

The Israelites did not have to wonder at this time if God was with them, they could see the cloud every day! It should have filled them with both fear and with comfort, knowing that God had chosen them and rescued them, was with them and was leading them. This visible manifestation of God's presence was an extraordinary blessing.