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Exodus

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PROVIDENCE
From the New Bible Dictionary

Chapter One

The Providence of God Exodus 1

If we thought about it very long at all, the devastating tsunami in and around the Indian Ocean in 2005, raised many hard questions. Theodicy is a word that describes the effort of reconciling the existence of a great and good God with the presence of evil and tragedy. When I see the pictures of children suffering, it makes me want to ask, "Where is God?" or "What is He doing?"

Such questions become even sharper and more difficult when it is our loved ones or us who are immediately affected. It is then that we cry with the Psalmist, "How long O Lord, how long?"

- Maybe it is unremitting pain that causes such questions.
- Maybe it is the death of a child.
- Maybe it is a series of what we call "misfortunes" that leave us wondering if there is any hope.

Times of disappointment, discouragement, and dismay are common from early in life. And the people of God are not immune to the temptations to discouragement and even despair.

We have solid evidence to suggest that Moses wrote the book of Exodus. And he wrote it while the people of God, the Israelites, 2-3 million in number, were camping in the desert of the Sinai Peninsula. They had escaped from the Egyptians and were heading to the Promised Land of Canaan. But because of their unbelief they were condemned to 40 years of waiting in the desert with nothing but enemies around them and powerful enemies

living in the land they were supposed to eventually inhabit. They were living in tents, with nowhere to go and with manna to eat morning and evening. And as I said, their immediate future was simply to wait, to wait until everyone who was then over 20 years of age died. It is that audience that first heard Moses' stories as retold in the book of Exodus.

I want God's word to influence what we think of our circumstances whether, at the moment, they seem good or bad.

The question implied at the beginning of the book of Exodus is as old as Job and as current as the 2005 tsunami—"What in the world is God doing?"

There are three things I want to see happen in this study: First, I want God's word to influence what we think of God. Second, I want us to see our lives from God's perspective. And third, I want God's word to influence what we think of our circumstances whether, at the moment, they seem good or bad.

Read Exodus 1:

"These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

"Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

"Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come,

we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.'

"So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?'

"The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.'

"So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

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

This story in the book of Exodus does not begin well. In fact what we have read thus far, ends on a tragic note! Think of it! The entire country is put on notice that Hebrew baby boys are fair game.

In fact not only is it "open season" on Jewish male infants but the people of the country are ordered to kill them. Unfortunately 3500 years later and many times between similar orders would be given by equally evil despots.

It was November 9, 1938. Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda minister for Adolph Hitler, saw another opportunity to demonize the Jewish people. Two days earlier a Polish-Jewish student had shot a German diplomat in Paris. With Hitler's blessing, Goebbels incited the Nazi Storm Troopers to take revenge by organizing "spontaneous" demonstrations against the Jewish people of Germany and Austria. The intention was to build public resentment and hatred toward the Jews.

The immediate result is what we now know as "Kristallnacht" (night of crystal) because of all the broken glass that littered the streets of the Jewish areas of those countries. The public was given license to do whatever it wanted to the Jews in their cities. In one night scores of Jews were killed, 177 synagogues were burned, 7500 Jewish businesses were destroyed, and 30,000 Jews were arrested by the Gestapo. Worst of all, the event fed a growing hatred among German people for anything Jewish, eventually allowing for the complicity in or at least the indifference shown as 6,000,000 Jews were killed in the coming 6 years. Goebbels and Hitler took a page right out of the Pharaoh's playbook.

By the time in history referred to in Exodus chapter 1, the Egyptian people are part of the attempted genocide of the Israelites. *"Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every (Hebrew) boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.' "* (Exodus 1:22) Apparently over time the Pharaoh's propaganda machine turned the Egyptian people against the Israelites. Exodus 1:12 says,

"So the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites." The word "dread" can also be translated "loathed." The word conveys a negative prejudice. And in that climate of fear and hatred it was now the law that every Hebrew baby boy was to be drowned.

Most of us know that one baby boy, Moses, escaped that fate and led his people to freedom.

- But what of the babies that didn't escape?
- What of the families that were devastated by that genocidal law?
- For that matter, what of the Israelites who were sitting in the desert 60 years later waiting to die?

What were all of those families to think? Where in the world is God? I think it is that question, among others, that God, through Moses, is answering in this book of Exodus.

As I said earlier, I want God's word to influence what you think of God. Secondly, I want you to see your life from God's perspective. And thirdly, I want God's word to

By the time in history referred to in Exodus chapter 1, the Egyptian people are part of the attempted genocide of the Israelites.

influence what you think of your circumstances whether, at the moment, they seem good or bad.

So how does Moses give his people and us a correct perspective on life and even on the hardships and tragedies of life? How does he bring true hope into what tempts us to discouragement or despair? I answer with one sentence: He implores us to look at God rather than ourselves. Or stated differently, he urges us to see our circumstances in the greater context of what God is doing in all of history.

Moses will give us ample reason to trust God and then implicitly call us to that trust. So let's see what God is doing in the world!

The book begins with a reminder of long-before history. God's work in the world didn't begin with me and it won't end with me. We are so shortsighted that we tend to judge God based on our experience of the last 30 minutes. So Moses pulls his readers back in time over 500 years.

Moses urges us to see our circumstances in the greater context of what God is doing in all of history.

Exodus 1:1-5 says, *"These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar,*

Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt."

In the Hebrew language, the book actually begins with the conjunction "and," reminding us that what continues here had its beginning in the book of Genesis.

I hope you remember that Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, had twelve sons. Joseph, who was son number eleven, had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers to men going to Egypt. The land of Canaan, where Jacob and his other sons lived entered a time of severe famine. After struggling to make ends meet, they finally went to Egypt to get grain. There they were reunited with Joseph who, in the providence of God, had risen from slavery to become Prime Minister of the land. Finally because the famine continued in Canaan, Jacob, his sons and their families moved, lock, stock and barrel, to Egypt.

Because of Joseph's prominence, they were given some of

the most fertile land in the country – the area known as Goshen along the Nile River. There they lived in prosperity, but always with the thought of returning to Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Every Israelite would have been constantly reminded of the promise made at least 100 years earlier. Look at Genesis 15:4-16: *"Then the word of the LORD came to (Abraham): 'This man (Ishmael) will not be your heir, but a son (Isaac) coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'*

"Abram believed the LORD, and he (God) credited it to him as righteousness.

"He also said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.'

"But Abram said, 'O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?' ... (God told Abram to prepare a sacrifice, which Abram did.) As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.' "

So right at the beginning of Exodus, Moses puts us in touch with 500 years of God's work in the world. And for the first many years things were wonderful in Egypt and the family of 70 became a tribe, a people, of thousands. *"And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them."* (Exodus 1:6-7) With the use of

many synonyms, Moses is obviously emphasizing the rapid growth and great number of the people of Israel. When Joseph was alive and for a while after, when they were living on the most fertile land, 400 years didn't sound so bad. But when things changed, as God said they would, 400 years can discourage the most ardent believer. And change they did. Probably within 150 years the change of rulers of verse 8 takes place. *"Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.'"* (Exodus 1:8-10)

A new king didn't mean simply a change from a Queen Elizabeth to a King Charles as will take place in England in the next few years. This change of kings was likely a coup wherein non-Egyptians took power. They had no reason to know about Joseph or to keep any agreements if they did know. The new king looked at the numbers, the prosperity and the growth rate of the Israelites and thought that he had to stop them or they would pose a threat to national security.¹

And so over the next 250 years this king and those who followed him increased the pressure on the Israelites, attempting to limit their number. Exodus 1:11-14 says, *"So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, **the more they multiplied and spread**; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly."*

Now here is where those since, who question God's actions in the face of tragedy and suffering, begin to identify. Moses doesn't paint a pretty picture. He heaps words up to describe an intolerable situation: oppressed, bitter, ruthlessly, hard labor. A mural from that era has been discovered on which is painted a slave master towering over Asiatic slaves saying, "The rod is in my hand, do not be idle." An ancient Egyptian text titled, *Satire on the Trades*, describes brick makers as follows: "He is dirtier than...pigs from treading under his mud. His clothes are stiff with clay, his leather belt (is) going to ruin... ..His sides ache, since he must be outside in a treacherous wind... His arms are destroyed with technical work...What he eats is the bread of his fingers, and he washes himself only once a season. He is simply wretched through and through..."²

The new king looked at the numbers, the prosperity and the growth rate of the Israelites and thought that he had to stop them or they would pose a threat to national security.

Why does Moses point out their misery? What was going on in the midst of this? "*So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. **But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread...***" (Exodus 1:11-12) The very thing the kings and Pharaoh's meant to decrease the population of Israelites, God used to increase them. Seeing that his program wasn't working, the king tried something much more evil; he tried infanticide—killing the male infants. Pharaoh convinces his people that the Hebrews are a threat, such a threat as to

require the murder of their children. The same thinking is pervasive today; the pernicious lie of abortion is that an unborn child is a threat to my life or that nationally, many unborn children are a threat to our economic stability. Such thinking lacks the perspective that only trust in God can give.

Moses goes on to say, *"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.'* The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told

Moses wants us most of all
to see that it is God who is
behind the scenes.

them to do; they let the boys live." (Exodus 15-16) With as many Israelites as there were, Shiphrah and Puah may not

have been the only two but may have represented midwife guilds. In any case, these women had a greater reverential awe of God than they had fear of the king. Even in the face of likely death for disobedience, these women had a larger and longer perspective on life and eternity.

Not only did they refuse to obey but they also managed to get in their own not-so-subtle insult as they said that the Hebrew women were just a lot tougher than the Egyptian women and they have their babies before the midwives get there. It is interesting that it is women, all the way through these first two chapters of Exodus, that wind up saving the people of Israel—these two midwives, Moses' mother, his quick-witted sister, and the Princess of Egypt.

But Moses wants us most of all to see that it is God who is behind the scenes. *"So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous."*

And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.” (Exodus 1:20-21) Again, the very thing the kings and Pharaoh’s meant to decrease the population of Israelites, God used to increase them, even using the civilly disobedient midwives to do it. That must have caused a laugh or two as it was retold through the years.

Then, of course, is when we reach the nadir, the lowest point, of the story: *“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.’ ”* (Exodus 1:22) It doesn’t take much thought to imagine the cries of the Hebrew people at that time: Where is God? What is He doing? But by the time Exodus was written, what they, and now we, know is that the very river that was supposed to kill the Israelites became the river that saved them. The very river that was to keep the Israelites in bondage became the river that floated their deliverer, Moses, right into the Pharaoh’s own house.

Do you see what Moses is saying? He condenses 500 or more years of history into one short chapter to demonstrate what becomes so easily obscured by our shortsightedness.

- A much loved son, Joseph, is lost to slave-traders,
- A famine threatens the very lives of Jacob’s entire family,
- A privileged place in Egypt turns to slavery,
- And the cruelest fate of all, the slaughter of their sons, hangs over the people.

But what’s happening through it all? God has been in charge all the time, working His plan for the salvation of

the world.

The Bible is not a history book per se. It is a selective history—a history of God’s saving work. The Bible’s purpose is far greater than simply chronicling people, places and events. The Bible is salvation history. Whenever you read the Bible, bear that in mind. The stories of the Bible are not like Aesop’s Fables; they are not merely fodder for moralisms. To help give you an understanding of the sweep of salvation history in the Bible, see Appendix A, “A Short History of God’s Work in the World.” I encourage you to read it and think about how each book of the Bible fits into God’s overall plan of salvation of the world. But our natural tendency is to be quite unsatisfied with merely a discussion of the sweep of history.

- We are glad God is in control of history but we tend to think mostly, if not only, of our own history.
- We’re glad there is a Moses who escapes the drowning but we wonder about the babies who didn’t.
- We love the stories of miraculous escape from the 2005 tsunami, but we wonder about the thousands who didn’t.
- We put ourselves in the place of those who didn’t make it and we ask, “What about me?”

I think what Moses demonstrates in these opening chapters of Exodus is that we must have a wider perspective on God, life, and our place in it than we typically have. We are often self-obsessed and bound to our own short view of history – namely, our life span. We lump all that happened before we were born into one time frame (the past) and we lump all that might happen after we die into one time

frame (the future). And our perspective is only as great as we can imagine how it will impact us personally now. We want all history to culminate in us and we think that way. Every generation thinks it is the last. Whether it is religious people thinking surely Jesus will come again in their lifetime or it is non-religious people speculating about the end of the world. (Seen in the end-of-the-world movies that are always popular.)

We think God exists for us. We think all history is supposed to be working out for our desired goals. We become self-obsessed and thus we think we

What Moses demonstrates in these opening chapters of Exodus is that we must have a wider perspective on God, life, and our place in it than we typically have.

are entitled to a certain kind of life. We think it is about us and so we demand to understand why this or that happened.

- We all want to be Joseph who rose to prominence out of slavery.
- We want to be Moses who escaped drowning and got to live in the Pharaoh's wealth.
- We want to be Joshua who led the army of God into the Promised Land.

We don't want to be the slave who died in the quarries of Egypt, or the baby whose life was snuffed out in the river, or the countless unnamed men and women who died in the desert and never got to the Promised Land. But when I read Exodus I come to understand that it is not about me, it is about God.

- We think God exists for us but we learn that we exist for God.
- It is not God's role in my plan but my role in God's

plan.

When Moses puts 500 years of history in front of me and then I add to that, what I know of the 3500 years since, I realize I am but a small part in God's salvation history.

- Is my role 15 minutes of life before I'm drowned in the Nile?
- Is my role suffering for a lifetime in the quarries of Egypt?
- Is my role to be a John the Baptist, a Robert Murray McChayne, or a Jim Elliott whose light shines brightly but is snuffed out before 30 years of age?
- Is my role to live long and prosperously?

What I learn is that God isn't part of my story, I'm part of His.

An evangelical church in town is currently running billboard

We are part of a much
larger picture of God's work
in the world to bring real
salvation to His people.

ads that state their
purpose in this way:
"Your Success is our
Passion!" No! A
thousand times, no.
God's success is our
passion!! I want my

eternity tied to God's success not to mine. I suppose we could misunderstand this God-centered thinking and conclude that we are nothing, that we are mere pawns on a great chessboard controlled by God. We could become fatalistic or even nihilistic in our thinking. But what we see is that God is in control of every detail of life because of His love for us. We tend to think of our lives (be they short or long) as the sum of it. But God has our eternity in mind. God sees far beyond the 15 minutes that someone might live, or the years of suffering someone else might experience. God is controlling both the immediate

circumstances and setting things up for the future. Oh the matchless wisdom of a God who can work “all things together for good” for the welfare of His people forever.

- Is God in control of your life or are you on your own?
- Is He working all things together for good?
- Is the life that you enjoy today or the life that you endure today the product of the providence of God?
- Is God a “watch-maker” God who simply wound the world up and let it go or is He intimately involved in every circumstance of our lives?

Great questions and how does God answer them in these early verses of Exodus?

We are part of a much larger picture of God’s work in the world to bring real salvation to His people. As difficult as our lives may be or as incidental as they may seem, they are planned by a sovereign, benevolent God. We are the objects of His love but we must see that love from the perspective of eternity, not just from the perspective of our present circumstances. God can be trusted, even through our present circumstances, to bring about what is ultimately good, even if we suffer and die before then.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says, *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

End Notes

¹ Fretheim, p. 28

² Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 23

Chapter Two

Seen vs. Unseen Exodus 1:17 and Hebrews 11

Exodus 1:17: *"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do..."*

Hebrews 11:1-16, 23-27:

*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and **certain of what we do not see. This is** what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that **what is seen was not made out of what was visible.***

"By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

*"By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. **And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

*"By faith Noah, when warned about **things not yet seen, in holy fear** built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*

*"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, **even though he did not know where he was going. By** faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For **he was***

looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

"By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. **They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. **Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.**"***

Look ahead to verse 23:

*"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were **not afraid of the king's edict.***

*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. **He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.** By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."*

Every day and in countless ways we make decisions, large and small, based on what we truly believe about life. What

I have in mind specifically is whether we believe this life is all there is or we truly believe also in a life hereafter. More specifically, even if we say we believe in a life hereafter, we make decisions based on which life we consider more real and more important to our welfare, the life we now live or the one yet to come.

To me, one of the most powerful stories in the Bible is when God told Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. The tension between the seen and the unseen was palpable. Which was stronger to Abraham – what he could see or what he couldn't? Which was more believable, the life he enjoyed with

Isaac alive with him or the life he couldn't see if he obeyed God? Could Abraham trust God even when every appearance was that obedience would result in the greatest

We make decisions based on which life we consider more real and more important to our welfare, the life we now live or the one yet to come.

loss imaginable? Was the "seen" reward of disobedience (Isaac alive) greater than the unseen reward of obedience? Our human nature and the culture in which we live continually tell us, "What you see is what you get."

In Chapter One from Exodus 1, we saw the sovereign hand of God working all of history toward His desired goal. We observed God's actions during a period of over 500 years setting the stage for the exodus of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The prophecy and promise given to Abraham 500 years earlier was being carried out in detail. Thus we can trust that same God today. One of the points I tried to make was that we are all part of something far bigger than our individual lives here on earth. We are part of God's overall plan to bring salvation to the world.

One of the things that captured my attention as I studied Exodus 1 was not the people we hear about by name in the Bible but the ones we don't. As we reflected on the history covered in that first chapter, we realized that tens of thousands of Israelites died in Egypt during the 400 years after Abraham. For probably 250 of those years they were in slavery, the harshest slavery imaginable. Those tens of thousands died never experiencing for themselves the fulfillment of the promise that would eventually come. We also know that at one point the Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew baby boys should be thrown into the river to be killed. And while we know that one of them, Moses,

What we can see, that is,
our present circumstances,
is far more real to us than
what we can't see, that is,
God's planned future for

us.

escaped that fate and
went on to be the
great deliverer of
Israel, undoubtedly
many baby boys
drowned.

So when Moses puts
500 years of history in

front of me in Exodus 1 and then I add to that what I know of the 3500 years since, I realize I am but a small part in God's sovereign work in the world. And so I asked the questions:

- Is my role in God's plan simply 15 minutes of life before I'm drowned in the Nile?
- Is my role suffering for a lifetime in the slave-quarries of Egypt?
- Is my role to be a John the Baptist, a Robert Murray McChayne, or a Jim Elliott whose lights shine brightly but are snuffed out before 30 years of age.
- Is my role to live long and prosperously?

When I read Exodus I come to understand that it is not just about me here and now; it is about God. History doesn't revolve around me but around God. What I learn is that God isn't part of my story, I'm part of His. But what does that make of me?

- Do I simply become a minor cog in the machine of history?
- Am I merely a pawn on God's great chessboard?
- How does my life have any value and how can it be said that God loves me if my life lasts only 15 minutes before drowning or I spend 50 years suffering in the slave-quarries of Egypt?

I believe those questions demonstrate the great tension we live with between the seen and the unseen.

We believe in God but we find it hard to trust Him. And I believe the reason is because what we can see, that is, our present circumstances, is far more real to us than what we can't see, that is, God's planned future for us. Most of us are pragmatists—maybe all of us. The question we ask is, "Does it work?" For Christians the questions become more specific:

"Does obeying God work?"

"Is it worth it to be a Christian?"

Thus:

- If being charitable results in God's material blessing on my life then it "works."
- If remaining faithful to my marriage vows will make me happier in the long run, then it "works."
- If being a "good" Christian by reading my Bible, going to church and serving others in some capacity will mean that God will keep me prospering, then it "works."

- If when I'm sick or without a job I try to be a better Christian and I get well or get a job, then it "works."

We judge whether life "works" or not based solely on what we can experience, here and now.

We can't imagine a 15-minute life having any value because we see it only from the perspective of this life. We can't imagine a 50-year life of suffering being worth it because we judge life to be good or bad based solely on the present. Look again at two Hebrew midwives named Shiphrah and Puah. Here is what it says of them:

"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do..." (Exodus 1:17)

I suppose you remember that they had been commanded by the king to kill all newborn Hebrew baby boys. This wasn't America with civil liberties and legal due process. This was a despot of the most evil kind and the midwives were part of the very people he was attempting to eliminate. In that king's mind, what value do you suppose their lives had? Do you think the midwives knew that? Of course! What does the text say? They "feared God." Apparently their awe of the God they could not see was greater than their awe of the king they could.

The book of Hebrews, drawing specific attention to Exodus 1 and 2, gives us a fuller understanding of the thinking of these people of faith. I think these midwives, like Moses, saw a future that was more real to them than the present.

- The unseen was a more powerful motivation than the seen.
- They were convinced enough that even if their lives were meant by God to be only a few years here on earth, it would be worth it.
- They were in God's hands and they trusted him.

- The “unseen” future was more real and more attractive than the “seen” present.

Look at those Hebrews passages we read earlier. *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.” (Hebrews 11:1-2)*

“Hope” here is not as in “I sure hope so” or “wishful thinking.” Hope is God’s promise—faith is being sure of what God has promised and being certain of what we do not see.” Faith is when the unseen becomes more real than the seen.

We judge whether life
“works” or not based solely
on what we can
experience, here and now.

And, Hebrews 11:6, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* The essence of faith is a confidence in the existence of God and in His faithfulness to His promise to reward those who seek Him. And the confidence in God is that the reward will come **whether I see it now or not**. This is what God demonstrates over and over again in this 11th chapter of Hebrews.

- Hebrews 11:7 – “By faith Noah, when warned about **things not yet seen**, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.”
- Hebrews 11:8 – “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, **even though he did not know where he was going.**”
- Hebrews 11:9 – “By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were

heirs with him of the same promise. For **he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**"

- Hebrews 11:13-16 – "All these people were still living by faith when they died. **They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.** And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

Moses' parents were like the midwives before them: "*By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were **not afraid of the king's edict.***" (Hebrews 11:23)

We don't like a 15-minute life or a 50-year life of suffering because we aren't convinced there is a future we can count on! We see the present and fear that is all there is.

And most of us know the story we will look at next wherein Moses chooses to identify with his own people rather than a privileged life.

"He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value

than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

(Hebrews 11:26-27) Oh, Hebrews 11 goes on to give many more illustrations to make the point but notice the last

phrase of verse 27: *"he (Moses) persevered because he saw him who is invisible."*(Hebrews 11:27)

Which is more real to you, the seen or the unseen? We tend to grasp for the here and now because we are tempted to think this is all we can count on. A friend of mine used an interesting word picture to describe this. It is like we are hanging on to a trinket of this life in an small-mouthed jar, refusing to let go so we can reach to take hold of the hand of the Lord. We judge God's love for us based on what we experience in the present more than on what He has in store for us in the future. We don't like a 15-minute life or a 50-year life of suffering because we aren't convinced there is a future we can count on! We see the present and fear that is all there is.

George Guthrie wrote, "During the nighttime awakenings, at this stage in my life, I am tempted to hear the call of various fears: The fear that something might happen to Pat or one of the children; fear that something might happen to me, preventing me from being there for my family, fear that I might not be able to follow through on a project; fear of evil people who might (wish to harm us); fear of mid-life (or old age); and so on. There is much of which to be afraid in this dark and morbid world. One session of the evening news provides ample evidence that the world has much harm to offer us as people. These fears call me to shrink back from life and, at times, from the Lifegiver. As people of faith we must not answer that call."¹ We complain or cry about the present when God's eye is on the future He has for us.

As I said earlier, we judge God's love based on the present; God judges it based on the future. God sees the future and is using the present to shape us for it. Is that not very much like parenting?

- We make our children eat food good for them.
- We make them sit at a piano and practice.
- We correct their speech, we teach them manners, and we make them do homework.

From their limited perspective it is often drudgery and nonsense. They are even convinced at times that we make them do these things because we don't like them – as they will sometimes tell us. But what do you, as the parent, see that they don't?

- You see them ten and twenty years later.
- You see them healthy instead of sickly.
- You see them as talented, educated, courteous, successful adults.

You don't struggle with them to do their homework because you hate them, or because you need it, but because you love them and have a future in mind for them.

Now the future that God is bringing to pass for His people, for you, is of His design not ours. And He knew from before the creation of the world, what part He would have each of us play in that plan. My part may only be 15 minutes or it may be much longer. It may be a lead role of prominence or a never-noticed role of apparent insignificance but it is His plan for my life and for my future. We are not pawns in God's hand. We are priceless human beings whom He created and died for to bring to Himself.

All of Scripture looks forward. It looks forward to what God sees for us. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."*

But don't just think of heaven as just a larger, better, version of what we think is attractive now. Heaven is not

just delayed selfish gratification.

- We're tempted to think, "I may not have much of a house now, but just wait until you see my mansion in heaven."
- "I love to ski and I can hardly wait to ski in heaven."
- "I have been sick my whole life, but in heaven, my body will be whole and healthy."

What is ahead is not primarily about physical comfort and psychological satisfaction but about being with God. The future is not mainly tangible but relational; it is not health, wealth, and fun but it is about fullness, sufficiency and joy in the presence of Jesus.

That has been God's plan from the beginning: Over 400 times through the Bible God's great goal for us is said to be an intimate relationship with Him.

We are not pawns in God's hand. We are priceless human beings whom He created and died for to bring to Himself.

- He says it in Genesis 17:7: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you...to be your God."
- He says it again 500 years later in Exodus 6:7: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God."
- He says it again 900 years later to Jeremiah 30:22: "So you will be my people, and I will be your God."
- He repeats it again 600 years later in Hebrews 8:10: "I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Jesus said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going*

there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3) The Apostle John was allowed to see into the future and he wrote, *"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."* (Revelation 22:3-4)

How profound it is to know God loves us. "A wonderful story is told of a wealthy Scottish nobleman, richly attired, who was riding his magnificent horse and came beside a poor peasant, dressed in rags , who was kneeling in the mud and praying.

"You must be close to God", the nobleman scoffed.

"Aye", the peasant responded with unmistakable bliss, "He

How do we develop a vision for the future that God has for us that can become clearer and more powerful in our thinking and living than anything the world offers us here and now? We must spend time with God.

is very fond of me!"²

And so again I say the Scripture teaches that I dare to trust God because in His sovereign plan, whether my life is short or long, hard or easy, His loving purpose will not fail—I will be with Him forever.

The "unseen" becomes even more powerful than the "seen." In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 it says, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what*

is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

How do we develop a vision for the future that God has for us that can become clearer and more powerful in our thinking and living than anything the world offers us here and now? We must spend time with God. He has taken great pains to show Himself to us in ways that will build our trust. He is presented as Father, husband, older brother, mother, friend, shepherd, and much more.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same." We must not make this world our home; it isn't. John Wesley was shown around a vast plantation by a proud landowner. They rode their horses all day and saw only a fraction of the estate. When they sat down to dinner the man said eagerly, "Well, Mr. Wesley, what do you think?" Wesley pondered the question, then replied,

"I think you're going to have a hard time leaving all this."³

Novelist, Randy Alcorn, tells of the beautiful painting by Ron DiCianni.

It's entitled *Safely Home*. Alcorn describes the painting:

- It portrays a man on his knees.
- His clothing is worn and tattered.
- He's walked down a long strip of blood-red entry-carpet that has led him to the foot of a throne.
- The man's arms dangle at his side.
- He appears both exhausted and relieved, overcome with emotion.

- His head rests on the chest of one kneeling down to him, holding him tight in a loving embrace.

The one hugging him has stepped down off the throne. It's the King, the Creator of the universe, who is also, incredibly, a man. King Jesus. A few feet to the right are open shackles lying on the palace floor.

- The man had been a prisoner on earth.
- He'd suffered terribly at the hands of those who despised him because they despised his King.

In his right hand, hanging limply to the ground, is a beautiful gold crown.

- The man is a martyr.
- He has lived out Revelation 2:10-he's been faithful unto death, and his Lord has given him the crown of life.

To many people today, the single most important thing is the preservation of their life on earth. To this man, obeying his Lord was more important than prolonging his earthly life. In the background of *Safely Home* stands an angel, reverently watching, holding out in his arms a white robe. The angel is the man's guardian. In the stonework on both sides of the carpet walkway you can see the continents of earth below.

Several things strike me in this painting.

- One is heaven's view of earth below.
- Another is the look on the man's face, at long last freed from pain and persecution.
- But what really strikes me is the look on the face of King Jesus.

He, too, is full of emotion. His face radiates compassion and approval. His nail-scarred hands, drawing the martyr to

Himself, are silent testimony to the extent of His love. The artist could have named the painting *Well Done* or *Overcomer* or *No Longer a Stranger* or something else. But he named it *Safely Home*. The evil that pursued him in the Shadowlands can no longer touch him. He's forever beyond its reach, for between evil and the man stands the Lord of the Cosmos, the one who embraces him and says, "You're home!"⁴

Exodus 1:17 says, "*The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do...*"

And, Hebrews 11:27 says, Moses "*persevered because he saw him who is invisible.*"

End Notes

¹ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, p. 394

² Marva Dawn, *Royal Waste of Time*, p. 24

³ Randy Alcorn, "Eternal Perspective"
<http://www.epm.org/randysbio.html>

⁴ Alcorn, *Ibid*

Chapter Three

The God of Details Exodus 2

It was 1948, three years after the end of World War II and Marcel, nearly 50 years of age, took his usual 9:09 morning train from his suburban home and headed into New York City. On this particular morning however he decided to change trains and visit a friend in Brooklyn. After the visit he took a Manhattan bound subway to go to his office. The subway car was crowded but a seat opened up and Marcel sat down next to a man reading a Hungarian language newspaper. Having come from Hungary, Marcel struck up a conversation with the man only to learn that the man, whose name was Bela, had come from the city of Debrecen, a city Marcel knew well.

During the war, Bela said, he had been sent to a German labor camp in Ukraine, had been captured by the Russians, but after the war escaped and made his way back to Debrecen. When he found his way to the apartment building in which his parents and brothers and sisters lived he found it inhabited by others who knew nothing of his family. He went from there to the next street where he had lived with his wife and found the apartment occupied by strangers who knew nothing of his wife. As he was leaving a young boy, who had lived in the neighborhood before, spotted him and recognizing him, told him that his whole family had been killed and his wife taken to Auschwitz, one of the worst of the Nazi concentration camps.

After weeks of fruitless searching, Bela finally gave up hope and set out on foot to leave Europe. He had managed to immigrate to the U.S. just three months before Marcel met

him. As Bela was telling his story, Marcel couldn't help but think of a young woman he had met a year earlier who was also from Debrecen. She told of having been sent to Auschwitz then to a munitions factory and finally being liberated by the Americans and, since all in her family were dead, she was brought to the U.S.

Marcel had been so moved by her story that he had written her name and phone number on a piece of paper that he had in his coat. Marcel turned to Bela and said, "Is there any chance your wife's name was Marya?" Turning pale, Bela said, "Yes, it was, how did you know?" Marcel said, "Let's get off the train." He took a stunned Bela by the arm and led him to a phone booth where Marcel called the number.

The phone was not in Marya's apartment but in the hallway outside and so Marya never answered it because it was never for her. But this time no one else answered and it kept ringing so finally she responded. Marcel asked her to describe her husband and give her address in Debrecen. At that he told her to hold the line for just a minute while he asked Bela did you live on such and such a street. Marcel then said to Bela, "Something miraculous is about to happen."

Here take this phone and talk to your wife." Bela's eyes filled with tears as he took the phone and hearing his wife's voice, he began to just mumble. Marcel took the phone and told Marya to stay where she was; he was sending her husband to her. That day a reunion took place that was like few others.

The person retelling the story asked, "Was this reunion by mere chance?" Did chance introduce Marya to Marcel a year earlier? Did chance cause Marcel to take a different

train that day? Did chance cause Bela to be reading a Hungarian paper at that exact time? Was it chance or did God ride that Brooklyn subway that day?¹

We live in a skeptical if not cynical age. Something within us wants to believe there is design and purpose to life but the spirit of the day suggests, almost demands, that we abandon any such notions. Good things happen and we "chalk it up" to luck. Bad things happen and we say, "That's life." In the struggle to survive in something better than a perpetual melancholy mood, we usually take the short view of life and live only in the moment not bothering ourselves with how it matters. But in our more serious moods we find it hard to be optimistic about the world or even our own lives in the presence of evil, tragedy and the inevitable death of everything.

"Something miraculous is
about to happen."

For centuries, at least
in the nominally
Christian western

world, the Providence of God was assumed. "Providence" is the word used to describe God's benevolent control of all things. The Westminster Confession of Faith states it this way:

"God, the great Creator of all things upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy."

The Bible states it this way:

- *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, **sustaining all things by his powerful word.**"* (Hebrews 1:3)
- *"His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom*

*endures from generation to generation... **He does as he pleases** with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth.”(Daniel 4:34-35)*

- God *"determined the times set for (humanity) and the exact places where they should live... For in him we live and move and have our being.”(Acts 17:26-28)*

God *"works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...”(Ephesians 1:11)*

Until recently, belief in the providence of God was nearly universal. But as I said, the spirit of the age has changed

We are not cogs in God's historical machine; we are the objects of His undying love.

and now the very existence of a personal God is challenged. And even among those who cling to a belief in the divine, confidence in

His providence has waned. That loss of confidence in God's benevolent control of all things has set our culture adrift on the seas of either baseless optimism or depressing cynicism. And such cynicism has left even Christians wondering if they are on their own.

- Maybe God is there but I can't see Him.
- Maybe He is working out history but what about my history?

I began our current series in the book of Exodus, attempting to give a much broader perspective to life and history than we usually think about. I wanted us to see that God is working through hundreds and thousands of years of history to bring about His desired goal. Then, I attempted to show that while our part in the overall scope of history may be small, God's goal is motivated by His eternal love for us. We are not cogs in God's historical

machine; we are the objects of His undying love.

Now I want to emphasize that while our role may be small in the overall plan of God (while our time is short in comparison to thousands of years of history) yet God's attention is on us individually. He not only works in macro-history but in micro-history. He sets kings up and takes them down but the Bible also says sparrows are nearly worthless, *"Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."* (Matthew 10:29-31)

In Exodus chapter 1 we are quickly led through 400 years of history.

- It begins with the names of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, and his 12 sons leaving Canaan to live in Egypt.
- It moves through 400 years of what began in prosperity but ends in slavery of the worst kind.
- The chapter ends with an evil king attempting to limit the growth of the people of Israel through infanticide—in this case the drowning of every newborn Hebrew boy.

From the perspective of those who were reading the book of Exodus for the first time, nearly 100 years later, that first chapter reminded them of the hand of God on the life of His people even through those many hellish years.

Now before we question too quickly the love of a God who would allow them to languish in slavery for so many years, we might want to see something else about these Hebrew people. Ezekiel 20:5-9 said, *"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I chose Israel...I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt... And I said to them, 'Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your*

eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’ But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt.”

What seems clear to me is that the descendants of Jacob in Egypt soon forgot their God and turned to serving themselves with all the perversions that leads to.

Romans 1:24 gives us some insight into the ways of God. Speaking of humanity in general, it says, “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...” In the providence of God, He uses even the sinfulness of human beings to accomplish His goals. In the case of the Hebrew people in Egypt, God gave them over to their sins long enough to cause them to cry out to Him as we will see at the end of the chapter. Then they were ready for the deliverance He would provide.

But that brings us to Exodus chapter 2. What we will see are three stories told in rapid succession covering, not 400, but just 80 years. And instead of the focus being on an entire people, it will narrow to one man, Moses. And what I most want you to see is the providence of God controlling people, places and events that converge in achieving God’s purposes in the life of that one man.

Story number one:

“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.’ Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a

distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?' 'Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'

I most want you to see is the providence of God controlling people, places and events that converge in achieving God's purposes in the life of that one man.

Story number two:

"One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?' The man said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'What I did must have become known.' When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses."

Story number three:

"...but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian,

where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, 'Why have you returned so early today?' They answered, 'An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.' 'And where is he?' he asked his daughters. 'Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.' Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have become an alien in a foreign land.' "

Lastly, a commentary on the times:

"During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help... because of their slavery, went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with

The author of Exodus is using this accounting of these three events to teach his readers and us about the providence of God.

Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them." (Exodus 1:22-2:25)

We have good reason to believe that the author of Exodus is using this accounting of these three events to teach his readers and us about the providence of God. In the first story, the reference to Moses being placed in the basket is significant. The word for "basket," his readers would know, is the word for the ark that saved Noah. And this is the only other time that word is used. As surely as an ark saved Noah so an ark saved this child. God's providential care is

written all over that comparison.

The Princess gives him an Egyptian name unaware that the name, in Hebrew, sounds like "to draw out." Again, the first readers of this book would have known as we do that God used Moses to draw them out of Egypt. God's providential care is written all over this comparison. But I think it is the twist in the story, the irony dripping from the way it is told, that most indicates the hand of God on each detail of this time in Moses' life. What we should expect after reading the death decree in chapter one and what actually results are so different, we must ask, how this is possible?

- Moses survives undetected for three months.
- He is set afloat on the very Nile that is supposed to kill him.
- He is shown kindness by the daughter of the man who commanded his death.
- He is adopted into the very people he would later oppose.
- And he is assigned to the care of his own mother who had disobeyed the king's law.²

We laugh at the Pharaoh when we realize that his own princess thwarts his plan. We smile when the princess is fooled by the true mother becoming the nurse of the child and being paid to do so out of the Pharaoh's treasury. The very river into which the children were to be thrown becomes the medium of Moses' salvation. He floats on it instead of drowning in it. Is God in control?

The second story in the chapter likewise demonstrates the hand of God in the details of Moses' life.

"One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he

killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, 'Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?' The man said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?' Then Moses was afraid and thought, 'What I did must have become known.' When Pharaoh heard of this, he *tried to kill Moses.*" (Exodus 2:11-15) There was no way that Moses was going to be able to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt—he had no credibility with them. When Moses tried to break up a fight between two of his own people, their response was, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" Likewise, Moses had no credibility with the Egyptians. Other historical sources indicate that the new Pharaoh in Egypt now hated Moses' adoptive mother, the Princess. Moses, as her son, would have no standing with him.

Moses had to "get out of Dodge!" In so doing, God saves Moses' life until that Pharaoh dies. Exodus 2:23 says, *"During that long period, the king of Egypt died."* And God gives the formerly privileged Moses the experience of his people—a death sentence hangs over him and he becomes an exile, a man without a country.

There's a third way God is working in Moses through these details of his life. In Acts 7 when Steven, in a sermon, recounts this event he speaks of Moses' intentions when assaulting the Egyptian slave master.

*"When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. **Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.**"* (Acts 7:23-25 – Emphasis Added)

With no direction from God, with no calling by God, Moses takes it upon himself to do God's work. God had to knock the arrogance out of Moses and prepare him for the task ahead. Is God in control?

The third story probably has much more to it than I address right now:

"Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked

them, 'Why have you returned so early today?' They answered, 'An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds.

With no direction from
God, with no calling by
God, Moses takes it upon
himself to do God's work.

He even drew water for us and watered the flock.' 'And where is he?' he asked his daughters. 'Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.' Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have become an alien in a foreign land.' (Exodus 2:16-22)

It covers a period of nearly 40 years. At least we can see God placing Moses right where he needs to be to learn the humility that would be necessary for the leadership he would eventually have.

The naming of his son shows the work God was doing in Moses' heart. *"Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have become an alien in a foreign land.'"* (Exodus 2:22) He grew up in the Pharaoh's palace but he has now become one

with his own people in exile. Numbers 12:3 says of Moses, *"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."*

Where did he learn it? I have heard it said, Moses spent 40 years thinking he was a somebody and 40 more years learning he was a nobody before he was ready for 40 years of being God's body – meaning a body for God.

What I want you to see, above all else today is that God not only works in a general way to shape history, but He also works in very specific ways. He not only moves nations, He works in your history and mine; He is personally involved in our personal lives. The culture, the age, may be cynical but the word of God says God has not forgotten you; He is working in every detail of your life. In

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Isaiah 49:14-16 it says, the people of God said, *"The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the*

child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands..."

In February 2005 my son, Paris, turned seven years of age. Thoughts on God's providential care and especially the birth narrative of Moses, reminded me of the specific ways in which God worked His providence in our lives between 5 and 7 years ago. Many of you know some of what I'm about to tell you, but like Paul Harvey, let me tell you "the rest of the story." Paris was born at what was then known

as Denver General Hospital, the second child of an imprisoned young woman. A chaplain was asked if she knew anyone who might be willing to care for the newborn until the mother's sentence was served. Because the chaplain is a relative and friend of ours, and because we had done foster-care in the past, we agreed, assuming it would be 5-6 weeks. My wife and daughter, Stephanie, went to the hospital and brought home a one-day-old baby boy. The short story is that 5-6 weeks turned into over three years.

As I have expressed in the past, those three years became for us one of the greatest testings of our faith. Through numerous prison contacts with the mother and visits with her family, we discovered how unfit for motherhood she was and how unsafe for a baby her world would be, when she was released. Her own father had abandoned the family, her mother had died of illegal drugs, her siblings were in various stages of trouble with the law, and even her own grandmother wanted nothing to do with her. Her life, up to that point had been one of drugs and prostitution, even giving birth but abandoning a first child 2 ½ years earlier. We pleaded with God for the safety of this second child, now in our home.

We had no legal standing—the child was not in foster care and Social Services could not intervene unless we abandoned him. And if we abandoned him to Social Services, they would be required to consider us unfit to care for him and would place him in the foster care system to languish for who knows how long. In the meantime, now two years into Paris' life, his birth mother expected to be released and said she was planning to reclaim her son.

- She had refused every offer to help her with living arrangements, with employment, and the rest she would need to care for a child.

- She had also steadfastly refused to consider relinquishing the child for adoption even though we encouraged her that way and even had younger families willing to adopt
- For those three years, in scores of visits to her, with the baby, she had shown no interest in the child, sometimes even refusing to hold him.

Then in the year 2001, three years into this ordeal, the County and State were still powerless to intervene because the child was not in their system and was not being neglected. The county couldn't be responsible for him, no one could adopt him, and we had no legal standing to keep him if she came to get him. It seemed to us be one of those impossible situations that you only read about happening to someone else. Our hearts broke when we considered his future but we and everyone else were powerless to do anything. What we could not see then was how God was working behind the scenes.

Two years earlier in 1999, when Paris was but one year old, the state legislature amended the laws concerning adoption. It was commonly referred to as the new "kinship" provision. It was technically a two-step process, but it basically decreed that if the birth parents had not cared for the child for a period of over one year and the child's custodian had provided care for over a year, the custodian could apply for immediate adoption. That law became effective February 1, 1999, almost exactly one year after Paris' birth. God put a baby boy in our home, put him there in such a way that "foster care" was precluded, dare I also say kept the young woman in prison until a law was passed, and timed the passing of that law to make it possible for us, when no one else could, to adopt him. We were working with adoption agencies, lawyers and Social Services trying to determine some way to protect this child,

when God was fully in control the whole time, working in His way to bring about His loving plan for Paris' life and for our lives.

But that is not the full extent of God's providential care. Every bit as significant is what God had done even while the baby was developing in his mother's womb. Paris' mother was HIV positive. But in the providence of God, she was incarcerated within three months of Paris's conception and was made to take medication to lessen the chances of Paris contracting the disease. For 18 months following his birth he was tested regularly and it was determined that he was completely free of the deadly virus.

When John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was 5 or 6 years old, the family home caught on fire. John's bedroom was in the attic and at first no one was able to get to him. At the last moment that little boy leaned out a window and a neighbor managed to rescue him. The incident so dramatically affected John that until his death, in old age, John believed God had saved him for a special task in life and often referred to himself, from a verse in Zechariah (3:2) as "a brand (burning stick) plucked from the fire." In the three to four years since those dark days in our lives, I have often thought of my son likewise, as a brand plucked from the fire.

Do I believe in the providence of God? Yes, I believe! What about you? Just imagine how God is working behind the scenes even now for you. Imagine what He started decades ago or even hundreds of years ago that will eventually converge with your life producing just what God lovingly desires for you. Imagine how your present circumstances, be they seemingly good or bad, will be used by God to bring about good in the lives of your children or even great-great-grandchildren.

I'd like to end with a meditative reading of a portion of Psalm 139:1-16:

*"O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.
You hem me in – behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well...
All the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be."*

Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For I know the plans I have for you,"*

declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

End Notes

¹ *Focus on the Family* magazine, December, 1996

² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, p. 17

Chapter Four

The Trustworthiness of God Exodus 3:1—4:17

"I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly..."

If you were writing the story, how might you finish that sentence?

- I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly **a shot rang out.**
- I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly **a light blinded my eyes.**

Even to the oldest of us, forty years is a long time. Most people under 50 years of age either can't remember 40 years ago or weren't even yet born.

For Moses, 40 years ago was a different life – he was the son of the Princess of Egypt, the best schools, everything a boy could want growing up – what a different world that was. Moses was a Hebrew, raised as an Egyptian, but had killed an Egyptian and had to run for his life. At first the loss of all those advantages was hard to accept and maybe he dreamed of going back. But 40 years passed and everything changed. Oh, it wasn't Pharaoh's palace he lived in now, but it was home. Life had settled into a good routine. Married, two kids, a job, and the health to enjoy them; really, what more could a man want?

"One day I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly..." How would Moses finish that sentence?

Look at Exodus 3:1 – 4:17:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight--why the bush does not burn up."

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from

the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey--the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of

Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '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, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

"Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites – a land flowing with milk and honey.'

"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

"And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed

toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'"

Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This," said the LORD, "is so 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."

Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow.

"Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes

him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."

There's something to be said for the mundane. We have our homes, our church, and our community of friends. We can settle down and just enjoy life. But that is not the extent of God's call on our lives.

Well, Moses got to finish the sentence: "I was just walking along minding my own business when suddenly a voice spoke to me out of a burning bush." That experience changed everything. But most importantly it changed him! How he changed and what changed him is what I wish for us to explore in these verses.

Moses had settled into a new life. Two sons, a job, a routine—life wasn't as comfortable as in the Pharaoh's palace but it wasn't bad either. Being in a place in life of peace and enough to get by on is okay. There's something to be said for the mundane. We have our homes, our church, and our community of friends. We can settle down and just enjoy life. But that is not the extent of God's call on our lives. That is not the whole of the mission He has given us. Eugene Peterson wrote, "If I am not reminded of

the foundational realities with which we are dealing—(The realities of) God, kingdom, and gospel—I am going to end up living a futile, fantasy life.”¹ So God steps in, taps us on the shoulder and reminds us of His desire for our lives – for us to give, to serve, to be reconciled, to maybe even change the whole course of our lives.

What’s the hardest thing God has ever asked you to do? What has He been urging on you lately? Moses is tending sheep far from home when he sees a bush burning but not being consumed. Curious (Who wouldn’t be?), he goes closer. A voice from the fire, calls his name—that’s weird! I’m guessing in an almost knee-jerk reaction, Moses responds with “Here I am” or “I’m here” or “Yes?” Then the voice identifies himself as the God of Moses’ father and forefathers—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Being told to take off his sandals and stand clear because he is on holy ground, Moses is now afraid—he recognizes he is in the presence of The Holy. And so there he stood barefoot in the presence of God and heard God tell him what to do. The problem for Moses was not with God’s great plan but

What’s the hard thing God
is asking you to do?

Is it to forgive, to be
reconciled to someone who
has treated us unjustly?

the part God had for Moses in that plan. In verses 7-9 God tells Moses what God plans to do. He has heard the cries of His people in Egypt, He is concerned about them

and plans to deliver them from their slavery and, as He promised hundreds of years earlier, give them a rich land of their own. Moses certainly would have been happy to hear that. He had heard of the promise of God and it now appears that the time has come for God to fulfill that promise. Excellent!

It's verse 10 that stops him cold: *"So now, go, (God says,) I am sending **you** to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

Whoa! "Hold your horses. What?"

"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' " (Exodus 3:11) God, I'm an honest man, an honorable man. I do my job, I take care of my family, I help people out; I'm trying to live life according to Your standards. Isn't that enough? I have little doubt that the exchange, in the next many verses, between God and Moses is central to a dramatic change in the way Moses thought, to the very way Moses saw life.

What's the hard thing God is asking you to do? What has He been urging on you lately? God's "call" is on our lives as it was on Moses' life. It is not likely to be as dramatic as the task set before Moses but it may be just as hard for us to imagine.

- Is it to serve in some way we don't think we're equipped for?
- Is to give in a way that may make life less comfortable?
- Is it to forgive, to be reconciled to someone who has treated us unjustly?

Not so incidentally, if the task is something you CAN do on your own, without God's help, it probably isn't of greatest value. What's the "God thing" that He is calling you to?

Listen to some aspects of God's call on our lives:

- *"Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."* (Romans 12:1-2)
- *"I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last... This is my command: Love each other."* (John 15:16-17)

- *"Go and make disciples of all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19)
- *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."* (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord..."* (Colossians 3:23)
- *"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."* (Ephesians 4:1-2)

We can't just dismiss those words. They are God's call on our lives. The particular applications of those words to your life today, I don't know, but you do – God has been speaking to you. Is it too big, too hard, to unlike what you are comfortable with? Then you are right where Moses was.

In Exodus 3:11 it says, *"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'"*

- "I have no business doing this; this is a job for the Almighty."
- "Without being impertinent, you've got to be kidding!"
- "You expect me to walk up to the leader of the strongest nation on earth and tell him that I'm going to lead 2 million people, including his hundreds of thousands of slaves, out of the country. Do you remember that I'm a wanted man? If I go back I'm dead."

What I love is that God doesn't draw back in anger at Moses' questions; He engages Moses. God doesn't overwhelm him; He doesn't use a "power play." He enters into a dialog with Moses to draw him in rather than bully him. God encourages the conversation as bit-by-bit God reveals to Moses what Moses then can hear. Next it says, *"And God said, 'I will be with you.'"* (Exodus 3:12)

Moses asks, "Who am I?" God answers, "I am with you." Moses, the point is not *who are you* but *who is with you!* I've told the story too many times, but it is a good example to me. Walking home

from our one-room grade-school building in the country, we had to pass a woods, thick with underbrush.

What I love is that God doesn't draw back in anger at Moses' questions; He engages Moses.

Having angered some other boys in my school (how, I can't imagine!) they threatened to get me after school. And sure enough as I passed that thick underbrush they attacked and beat me up. But they were not satisfied and threatened to do the same the next day. I, however, thwarted their plans when I asked my older, taller, and much stronger brother to walk home with me. I can still remember walking past those woods with something of a smirk on my face.

Moses, it's really not a matter of who you are but who you are with. God said He would be with Moses in all he undertakes. It gave Moses possibilities he would not otherwise have dreamed. We are assured of that same divine presence and provision. What should that mean for you and me today or tomorrow? Imagine the possibilities if God is truly with us.

But Moses wasn't satisfied. So, *"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God*

of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them?' " (Exodus 3:13) God, not only do I think I have no business doing this job, everyone else will think the same thing. God, I know I have no authority, what authority do you have? That question is not as impertinent as we might think. God had introduced Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It's one thing to be the "god" of individual ancestors but are you "god" enough to take on the most powerful nation on earth?

God says, "What authority do I have Moses? I AM!"

So Moses asks, "What is your name?" A name in ancient times was not just

something you called someone; a name represented who they actually were—the name described their character and ability. As some of you already know this brings us to the high point of the passage. We will now hear from God one of the most important things about God that Moses or we could possibly know. It is this about the person of God that makes everything else possible.

In Exodus 3:14 it says, *"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' ' " God uses the Hebrew root word meaning "to be." It's a four letter word without vowels and is transliterated as Yahweh. In most of our Bibles it is translated into English as LORD (all upper case letters) to distinguish it from the more generic word for god, the word "elohim."*

God says I'll tell you who I am, I am the I AM.

- I am the God who has always existed and always will exist.
- I am the first cause of all other things that exist—

they exist because I exist.

- I am the infinite, absolute, undetermined One.
- Everything else is caused, I am uncaused, I simply "AM."

God gives Himself a name that describes His essential character. That same verb God uses to describe Himself could be translated this way: I will be who I am/I am who I will be.² He is the unchangeable God. One scholar wrote, "God foresees all circumstances and has no weaknesses. Nothing in all creation takes him off guard and backs him into a corner where he might have to act out of character or compromise his integrity. He is who he is, and therefore, as James says, 'With him there is no variation or shadow due to change' (James 1:17). He is the same yesterday, today and forever. His absolute name is the granite foundation of our confidence in his ongoing faithfulness."³

God says, "What authority do I have Moses? I AM!" It's a silly comparison, but I'll try it: Imagine you are touring the White House and the President shows up, singles you out and invites you to enter the east wing. You demur saying you don't have any authority to go in there. Does the President have to do any more than look at you to communicate, "Do you not know who I am?" So God says, "Moses, you are right, you have no authority but I do.

"The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD (Jehovah, the I AM), the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.'" (Exodus 3:18)

But in spite of God's revelation of Himself, Moses still hesitates. In Exodus 4:1 it says, *"Moses answered, 'What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"* God, they won't believe me. I have no authority to make those statements. Moses, get

your eyes off of yourself! Don't you get it Moses, the great I AM is with you. You are right, you don't have any authority, but you have borrowed authority; you have God's authority. And God uses three signs to show Moses that God has the authority. He has Moses throw down his shepherd's staff and it turns into a snake. Given the prominence of snakes in Egyptian culture even to the point of the symbol of a snake on the crowns of the Pharaohs, Moses would probably catch the significance. The great "I AM" can set kings up and take them down.

Next God tells him to put his hand in his vest. The hand becomes leprous. He's told to put the leprous hand back in his vest, which he does and when he withdraws it, it has returned to normal. The great "I AM" can make one sick and He can heal. The third sign is not done at the moment but God promises that when Moses pours water on the ground in Egypt it will turn to blood. In a few days, this will be the first of the plagues used to convince the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The great "I AM" is above nature; He controls the natural and the supernatural. "See Moses, you're not credible on your own, but I am and I make you credible."

But still Moses resists:

"Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' " (Exodus 4:10)

"God, you may be the eternally present 'I AM' but I'm still the same old Moses. "I'm not equipped to do this; I'm not adequate." Peter Enns wrote, "Moses seems to resist God's call because Moses assumes that he is playing the central role in the deliverance of the Israelites."⁴

But look what happens next:

"The LORD said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.'" (Exodus 4:11-12)

The Lord says, in essence, it may be true that you are not equipped, and it certainly is true that you are inadequate, but it's not really relevant. The great "I AM" is with you and will help you. God doesn't call only "perfect" people to service because effectiveness is not the result of perfection but is the God who is with us.

"But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it.'" (Exodus 4:13) God has patiently answered every objection but now Moses crosses a line. This is no longer honest questioning. This is unbelief. So, *"Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses..."* (Exodus 4:15) We aren't given information about what the Lord and Moses thought next. But what we see is that the LORD accommodates Moses' weakness and sends Moses' brother Aaron to help him. And we see that Moses must have finally understood that eventually it is not information you need it is decision. It's as if God said, "Moses, no more. You know who I am. Will you trust me?"

Moses begins the encounter with God by objecting to God's call on his life. I think Moses, like many of us, wants to be left alone to enjoy the life he has built for himself. And so he tries to put God off:

- He says he has no authority.
- He questions the authority, the capability of God.
- Moses says he has no credibility.
- He says he has no ability.
- Lastly he admits he is afraid; he's not certain he can

trust God.

But God answers every objection and then puts the question squarely to Moses, "Will you trust me?"

The fundamental character trait of a man or woman of God is not competence but dependence—dependence on God. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, the Apostle Paul wrote, (the Lord) *"said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' "* (And Paul said,) *"When I am weak, then I am strong."* What would it look like if you or I trusted God completely? What ministry might you be willing to undertake if you had absolute confidence in God to make it effective? What would you be willing to give financially to kingdom work if you had complete confidence in God's ability and willingness to take care of you and your family?

What will it take for us to believe Him?

- Will it take a burning bush that talks?
- A stick that turns into a snake?

Is it more evidence we need? Creation, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, God's providence in our own lives? Do we really need more? Or do we need to decide?

Look at Isaiah 43:1-3:

*"But now, this is what the LORD says--
he who created you... he who formed you...
'Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze."*

For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One...your Savior...' "

End Notes

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*

² Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 63

³ John Piper in a 1984 sermon on Exodus 3

⁴ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p. 111

Chapter Five

Circumcision of the Heart—Radical Obedience Exodus 4:18-31

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

That statement was made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who not much later was executed by the Nazi government because of his commitment to Jesus Christ. The word “disciple” occurs 264 times in the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament. Although originally it meant an apprentice in a trade or the student of a teacher, the New Testament defines the concept as a man or a woman who is sold out to Christ. It is not someone who necessarily understands what all that will entail, but it is someone who has made up their mind that Jesus is Lord and they are willing to learn and obey.

- They are ordering their lives by Jesus’ priorities.
- They eat, breath and sleep, “Jesus.”
- They seek first the kingdom of God.

God calls every one of us to that discipleship-relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no room in the Bible for a man or a woman to say, “Well, I’m a Christian but I just haven’t gotten around to truly allowing Jesus to order my life.” I think there is ample evidence in the Bible to say that anyone who is not a disciple is not a Christian. As I said, that doesn’t mean we now fully understand all that means, or that we unfailingly live up to what we already know it means, but it does mean we have turned around—Christ is Lord. I love the name of our high school ministry—“180.” That very name calls students to that radical 180-degree turn from following themselves to truly following Jesus as His disciple.

The call of God on our lives is clear and complete. The Triune God said, *"You shall no other gods before me."* God, the Son said in Matthew 10:37-39, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* That's what Bonhoeffer was talking about when he wrote: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

When God truly saves a man or a woman, when He calls them to Himself, He will not let them forever drift through life in an "easy-chair" type of Christianity. We may resist God's work in our lives to conform us to His image, but I'm convinced He loves us enough to break us. In Hebrews it says, *"If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness."* (12:8-10)

In our on-going study of the book of Exodus, the main human character, Moses, is slowly learning that lesson. General Tommy Franks was selected to lead the coalition forces into Iraq. General Dwight Eisenhower commanded the Allied forces in Operation Overlord on D-Day. In this text we have a fugitive-prince-turned-shepherd, namely, Moses, appointed to liberate a people of 2 million plus from their slavery in the strongest nation on earth.

Even though Moses resisted, God patiently met each objection, giving Moses evidence of God's call on his life and God's ability to see him through. It appears that Moses got the point that it wasn't more information he needed, it wasn't more evidence of God's faithfulness, it was a decision he needed to make—would he trust God. The

fundamental character trait of a man or woman of God is not competence but dependence—dependence on God. We are not told how that issue was resolved but apparently Moses is ready to obey. He has been commissioned by God to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of their slavery and out of that country to a country of their own.

Now it seems to me that Moses is finally ready and if I were retelling the events I would shift the scene immediately to Egypt where Moses begins to confront the Pharaoh with a demand to release the Israelites. This is precisely what we find in chapter 5: *"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert".'"* (Exodus 5:1) But the author of Exodus doesn't go there yet. There is still more that we need to hear about the preparation of this man Moses and God's continuing work in us as His disciples.

**"When Christ calls a man,
he bids him come and die."**

Look at Exodus 4:18-31:

"Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, 'Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive.'

Jethro said, 'Go, and I wish you well.'

"Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.' So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart

so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son." "

"At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,' she said. So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

"The LORD said to Aaron, 'Go into the desert to meet Moses.' So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform.

"Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the

Moses is obeying God but
there is something not
right.

LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."

I commend to your consideration the idea that verses 24-26 are the heart of why the author paused on his way to chapter 5:

"At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,' she said. So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.) (Exodus 4:24-26)

It's true that verses 18-31 give us some details about the

time between God's call of Moses at the burning bush and when he actually arrives back in Egypt and yes, Moses gets his father-in-law's blessing. But even in that I think there is a hint at a problem in Moses. Look at Exodus 4:18: *"Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, 'Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive.' Jethro said, 'Go, and I wish you well.'"*

God had told Moses that the people were alive and that Moses was to lead them out. I don't know why Moses dissembles in his remarks to his father-in-law. He wasn't commissioned to go back to see if they were alive but to lead them out. It makes me suspicious Moses is still holding back.

- He's obeying God but there is something not right.
- He's obedient, but not completely.

In these verses, we are told that the Pharaoh will resist and that God will participate in that resistance. Look at Exodus 4:21: *"The LORD said to Moses, 'When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.'"* That certainly anticipates a tension, with which we will have to eventually deal when we see God hardening Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardening his own heart. But that is for a later sermon.

And, it is true that we see Moses and Aaron getting together, which God had allowed in accommodating Moses' reluctance. *"The LORD said to Aaron, 'Go into the desert to meet Moses.' So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs*

he had commanded him to perform.” (Exodus 4:27-28) And finally, it is true that we see Moses and Aaron back in Egypt convincing the elders of Israel of God’s intentions.

“Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.” (Exodus 4:29-31)

But right in the middle of all of that is this very odd event: *“At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him.” (Exodus 4:24)* God spent all this time preparing Moses—protecting his life from the Pharaoh’s death sentence when he was born, placing him in the Pharaoh’s own palace for the connections and training he would need in the years to come, putting him in the wilderness for 40 years to shape his character, and then calling him in the dramatic fashion of a voice from a burning bush. And now He’s going to kill him?

There are certainly some things about these verses that we don’t understand. In Exodus 4:24-26 it says, *“At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it. ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said. So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said “bridegroom of blood,” referring to circumcision.)”* We don’t know what Moses’ wife, Zipporah, meant when she said to Moses, *“Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.”* Apparently even by the time it was written in this retelling of the event, that statement was arcane or obscure enough that the author had to tell the first readers that it was referring to circumcision. I think we can safely assume we don’t need

to know what the phrase means to get the message of this event.

What does seem quite clear is that Moses was in trouble. It is also clear that it is Moses' son who is here circumcised. Zipporah is the one who did it. And when she circumcised the son, the Lord let Moses alone—that is, let him live. To understand what is happening here we need to go back 400 plus years to God's command to Abraham when God initiated the covenant between Himself and Abraham and his descendants:

"Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and

God spent all this time
preparing Moses, And now
He's going to kill him?

your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised...' " (Genesis 17:9-12)

It is very clear in the Old Testament that circumcision didn't create or keep the covenant between God and man. The true covenant was made and kept in the heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6 it says, *"The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live."* But the outward sign of that covenant was circumcision. And if anyone refused to circumcise his son it was obvious he or she was not part of the family of God; God was not their LORD.

By the time of this event, Moses' son is probably over 30 years of age. What had Moses failed to do? Circumcise his

own son! In chapter 12, just before the great exodus from Egypt, God tells His people to get ready to leave. The most significant event leading up to their leaving was the killing of the firstborn sons of all Egyptians and the Passover, which protected the firstborn sons of the Israelites. We'll come to the story eventually, but most of you know that God told the Israelites to slaughter a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death would "pass over" their houses, not killing their firstborn sons. Here is what God says about those who will be part of the Passover and the great exodus. *"No uncircumcised male (will participate)."* (Exodus 12:48)

Now let's go back to Exodus 4:24-26 and God's threat on Moses' life. Here, God's human instrument to deliver His people from Egypt, the great leader Moses, has not obeyed the central outward act indicative of the covenant relationship with God. And if Moses has not obeyed the outward act, what does it suggest about the inward condition of his heart? Moses is getting ready to do a great work with God when he hasn't even attended to the basics of his relationship with God. He was apparently ready to do significant things for God when he didn't care enough about the Lordship of God in his life to have attended to the lesser things.

Why hadn't Moses circumcised his son when he was 8 days old? Why hadn't he taken care of that important business before now? Did Moses get so busy with life that he didn't consider obedience to God, on such an external matter, to be of any real importance? Moses had disregarded this sacred responsibility and evidently had no intention of doing it. It's as if God is saying, "Moses, you are about to engage the Egyptians and to bring my judgment on them for their sin. How can you take on that role when you stand

in disobedience? Do you not take me seriously?"

Another indication to me that verses 24-26 are not just weirdly misplaced is what the author is talking about in Exodus 4:22-23:

"Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' "

God calls the people of Israel His "firstborn son." The "firstborn" in those cultures was uniquely set apart.

The outward sign of the covenant with God was Circumcision.

Further God says, *"Let my son go, so he may worship me."* They belong to God and not to another. Now to Pharaoh, Moses was to say, *"But you refused to let (my son) go; so I will kill your firstborn son."* Obviously this is a reference to the 10th plague that would afflict Egypt.

Now the next thing in our text is God ready to kill Moses. Why? Is it because Moses has not given his firstborn son to the Lord; has not let his firstborn son go to worship the Lord? Again it's as if God is saying, "Moses, you are about to engage the Egyptians and to bring my judgment on them for their sin. How can you take on that role when you stand in disobedience? Do you not take me seriously?" God wants men and women who are "sold out." God wants a man who will take God seriously. No, circumcision didn't earn anyone a relationship with God. Salvation was and is by grace through faith.

But God says that the one who is saved by grace belongs to Him. God's intention is to remake us into His image. And God will brook nothing less than complete obedience—not

half way, not partial but full allegiance, single devotion.
"You shall have no other gods before me."

I truthfully don't know if Moses' failure at this point was due to carelessness, unbelief, or rebellion. But I think it makes no difference. God wanted a man wholly devoted to Him. And He could not allow Moses to go forward until this matter had been dealt with. Would Moses be wholly devoted to God? Why does Zipporah, Moses' wife, do the chore instead of Moses? We don't know but we can speculate that the way God threatened Moses' life was

The one who proclaims the
word of God must be
servant to that word.

through sickness. What we can know is that whatever kept Moses from actually doing the circumcision did not stop God from

applying Zipporah's obedience to Moses. Moses must have understood what God was doing and his wife's obedience vicariously became Moses' obedience. The evidence of that is that God withdrew the threat. *"So the LORD let him alone."* (Exodus 4:26) Obedience is not optional. There is no excuse for disobedience.

Let me first of all apply this to those who would be leaders in God's work in the church and world. Are you a teacher in Sunday School, a Bible study leader, a youth worker, one who prays for the sick or serves in any other way? God will find someone else to do His work if we attempt to work with unconsecrated hearts and un-surrendered wills. Even after 80 years of preparation by God, Moses was dispensable—God didn't need him. The one who proclaims the word of God must be servant to that word. Tell me, Christian leaders, have you come so far in your life and ministry that you think you can overlook some things. Oh, we used to be diligent in hearing and obeying God. But

we've let some things go, considering them unimportant. Do we still take God seriously?

Whether we are leaders or not, God's call on our lives is full surrender of all of life to His loving control. We want to call ourselves Christians but still hang on to certain areas of life. In Hebrews 12:1 the Bible says, *"Let us throw off...the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."*

What is the sin that you so easily fall into or maybe you've even given up confronting?

- I want to serve God but I don't have to deal with that grudge I have toward so and so.
- I want to serve God but I'll hold off on any real financial stewardship, giving any significant amount of money to kingdom work, until I have my financial house in better order.
- I want to serve God but I won't give up my illicit relationship with my boyfriend or girlfriend or I won't give up the lust I indulge in.
- I want to serve God but I won't discipline myself to be a man or woman of prayer, or one who studies God's Word.

I can overlook the "little" things. They won't matter.

God's not looking for perfection but He demands radical obedience. God was gracious enough to confront Moses straight on. Is He confronting you today? How will we respond?

Chapter Six

The Gospel of Exodus Exodus 5:1—6:9

It was 60 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, which granted freedom to America's slaves and it was the same year my father was born. In that year, just 88 years ago, Robert Sadler, at five years of age, lived in Anderson, South Carolina. His father was a drunk; his mother died from physical abuse. A new woman and her two sons moved into the shack with Robert and his sisters and beat them often.

His father began drinking hard again and finally the new wife convinced Robert's father that the children had to go. Robert writes, "One terrible day our father came into the room where my sisters and I slept and woke us, ordering us to get into the wagon outside...Little was said during our ride down the Abberville Road, through Anderson and on south...

"Finally my sister Pearl said to Father, 'Where are we going?' He sat almost motionless on the small seat at the front of the wagon... His silence meant, don't ask any more questions. We grew hungry as the morning wore on, yet we said nothing.

"Finally we left the main road and turned into a long driveway. We saw a large house, obviously owned by a white man, and we saw several shanties near the back of the property. Father halted the mule, got out of the wagon and started for the back door. Soon a white man, as tall as Father, opened the door. They talked a while and then Father turned and pointed to us. Father and the white man went inside the back door.

"In a few minutes they came out and Father ordered us to get out of the wagon. Margie and Pearl got down first and helped me down. We stood in our bare feet on the cold ground staring at the white man.

'Y'say the boy is only five years old?' the man asked.

'Yessuh. Five years old, suh,' my father answered.

'Hmmm...I don't like 'em so young.'

'Take 'em all or take none,' my father said.

The man's eyes narrowed, then he said, "OK, I'll take 'em."

"Git over there by the house and stand still!" he ordered us roughly. We did as we were told and when we turned around, Father was in the wagon and turned the way we had come. Pearl called out, "Father, wait! Don't leave us! Father didn't even look back. The wagon disappeared down the road. Pearl, Maggie and I stood trembling against the side of the house with our feet digging into the cold earth. My sisters and I had just been sold as slaves. For the next eleven years Robert Sadler lived in a hell-on-earth not knowing that slavery was illegal and not even knowing that life could be different.¹

Slavery is not only about the body; it is also about the soul. And many more souls are enslaved than bodies. And the worst enslavement is when the slave doesn't even know he's a slave. Or when the security of slavery seems better than a future of freedom.

Why isn't everybody a Christian?

- If there is a heaven and a hell, who wouldn't want to go to heaven when they die?
- Who wouldn't want peace of mind and heart?
- Who wouldn't want to have assurance of a sovereign God's loving care and protection of them?
- Who wouldn't want to have harmonious and loving

relationships with family and friends?

- Who wouldn't want to live a life that matters, that makes a difference, and that has eternal significance?
- If there truly is one supreme God, who wouldn't want to know and love Him and be known and loved by Him?

Why isn't everybody a Christian? Because they are enslaved! They are enslaved by the world's philosophies and systems, enslaved by their own passions, and all of that was masterminded by the archenemy of God, Satan himself. That language may be a little strong for you but it is what the Bible teaches:

Slavery is not only about the body; it is also about the soul. And the worst enslavement is when the slave doesn't even know he's a slave.

- 1 John 5:19—*"The whole world is under the control of the evil one."*
- 1 Peter 5:8—*"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

The Bible says of Jesus in Matthew 9:36, *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* They were easy prey for the enemy to subdue and enslave.

When we too come face to face with individuals and the miserable situations of their lives, our hearts ache for them. I know a young man in his mid-20s who is angry over the divorce of his parents at least 15 years ago. He is trapped in marijuana use, drifts from job to job, and is in and out of

trouble with the law. It is truly pathetic. Your heart goes out to him when you realize how helpless he seems to be to change, how enslaved he is to his own wounds, anger and bad choices.

There's a woman I know in her early 40s, abused, divorced, caught in a cycle of relationships that end nowhere. Not that long ago she linked up with yet another man thinking she would find the peace her heart longs for but never finds.

I know a child so confused by his parents' divorce that he doesn't know what to do except act out in self-destructive ways. Your heart breaks when you see a child so hurt but

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It's a story of life-long
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so powerless to
change anything else
that he destroys the
only thing he can
influence, his own
body and future.

I know a woman who
lived in a physically
abusive relationship
for nearly 10 years
because, in spite of

what she was told and the help she was offered, she had no hope that things could really be different. She was a slave to her fear. We pleaded with her to act, but she felt powerless. I don't overlook the personal responsibility most of these people have for their response to their situations. But I grieve for them nonetheless when I see the slavery in which they live.

The story we come to next in Exodus is a sad story! It's a story of life-long slavery, unrelieved misery, of hopes raised

and dashed, of retaliatory accusation, of bitterness, and even anger at God. But it is a story that mercifully includes an offer of grace and a future. And the end of the story is yet to be told. Look at Exodus 5:1 —6:9:

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert".'

"Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.'

"Then they said, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.'

"But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!' Then Pharaoh said, 'Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working.'

"That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, "Let us go and sacrifice to our God." Make them work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.'

"Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, 'This is what Pharaoh says: "I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all." ' So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, 'Complete the work required of you for each

day, just as when you had straw.' The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, 'Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?'

"Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: 'Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, "Make bricks!" Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.'

"Pharaoh said, 'Lazy, that's what you are--lazy! That is why you keep saying, "Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD." Now get to work. You will not be given any straw,

These verses and the chapters that follow describe an epic battle. The battlefield here is in the hearts of men and women.

yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.'

"The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, 'You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.' When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'

"Moses returned to the LORD and said, 'O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.'

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.'

"God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by

my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD".'

"Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage."

These verses and the chapters that follow describe an epic battle. No, it is not on a physical battlefield like Waterloo, Gettysburg or Guadalcanal. And it is not fought with guns and bombs. It is not even between two great national powers. This is a different kind of battle. The battlefield here is in the hearts of men and women. The ammunition is words. And it is a battle, as St. Augustine stated it, between the City of Man and the City of God.

Oh, the author leaves no doubt as to who are the antagonists—they are Pharaoh and God. God had said it was time for His people to be freed from slavery in Egypt and be led to a country of their own. But Pharaoh said, *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."* (Exodus 5:2) Like Babylon and Rome, in the millennia later, the Pharaoh of Egypt was a manifestation of the worldly

philosophies, systems, governments and rulers who set themselves up against the one true God. This Pharaoh, like Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan or Adolph Hitler, believed they were immune to the will and power of God. And like the first Adam, like the citizens of earth in Noah's day, and like every human heart today, there is the desire to steer our own ships: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" "I will not!"

Such rebellion is not usually expressed so strongly today. Too many say they know God and will serve Him, but don't. At least Pharaoh had the courage of his convictions. But even courageous rebellion is still rebellion. God had said Israel would serve God. In Exodus 5:3 it says, Moses and Aaron said, "*The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.*" But Pharaoh said Israel would serve him! "*But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!'*" (Exodus 5:4) The battle-lines are drawn but it is the battlefield that commands my attention. The people of Israel are caught between the call of God and the command of Pharaoh.

How can your heart not go out to these people? Like the victims of Nazi labor camps or the slaves of the worst of the plantation owners of the antebellum south, these people's lives were miserable. I rented and watched part of Cecil B. DeMille's "Ten Commandments" this past week. I was a little disappointed with the depiction of slavery—it seems that nearly every slave was oiled, bronzed and belligerent. If you want to visualize life for the Israelites, I think the motion pictures, "The Hiding Place" or "Schindler's List," give you a far better representation.

Earlier, I said, slavery is not only about the body; it is also

about the soul. Many more souls are enslaved than bodies. When we think about the situation of the Israelites in Egypt, we can't imagine why they didn't all rise up in rebellion. That's the worst thing about slavery, when the slave thinks slavery is better than freedom; when the security of slavery seems better than a future of freedom. Have you ever heard the phrase, "The deceitfulness of sin"? (Hebrews 3:13) I

wonder if that is sin's most powerful dimension? It twists our minds to think that bad is good and good, bad.

The worst thing about slavery is when the slave thinks slavery is better than freedom; when the security of slavery seems better than a future of freedom.

There's an astonishing statement made about the Israelites only shortly later in the book of Exodus. They had seen the hand of God miraculously deliver them from Egypt. But now the Egyptian army was pursuing them. Listen to what they say:

"(Moses) didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians..." (Exodus 14:12)

- Have they so quickly forgotten the abject misery of their slavery in Egypt?
- Did slavery actually begin to look good to them?

Do you remember in 2002 when a then 15 year-old Elizabeth Smart was abducted? According to Reuters and the AP News Service, Brian Mitchell and Wanda Barzee were charged with aggravated kidnapping, sexual assault and burglary in the June 5, 2002 abduction. Elizabeth was found nine months later on March 12, 2003. Asked why Elizabeth had not tried to escape from the street preacher and his wife held on suspicion of kidnapping her, one authority said; "There was clearly a psychological impact

that occurred at some point.” She “psychologically” joined her captors. This is called the “Stockholm syndrome” referring to prisoners taken hostage who then identify with their captors, based on what happened in 1973 during a prolonged Stockholm bank robbery. America's most famous example of the syndrome was heiress Patty Hearst.² Why don't people escape their terrible situations? Because their souls are enslaved.

In our story, the Israelites' situation becomes worse rather than better. Pharaoh gives orders that makes their lives even harder. They are commanded to continue to fill the

They'd been enslaved so long they couldn't believe it could be better.

same quota of brick-making as before but now they must also gather some of the materials themselves.

This doesn't affect only a few of the Israelites but apparently all. They spread out all over Egypt looking for the straw they need to make as many bricks as before. The Hebrew foremen are beaten when the people fail to produce.

When the foremen finally worked up sufficient courage to confront the Pharaoh with the injustice of their situation, hear what they say:

*"Why have you treated **your servants** this way? **Your servants** are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' **Your servants** are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people."* (Exodus 5:15-16—Emphasis Added)

Whose servants are they? Pharaoh's servants? They have already capitulated. They had their hopes raised that they would get out of slavery quickly and when Moses was initially rebuffed and things got worse, they threw in the towel. They were more than ready to have things go back to the miserable existence they had known for so long. And

then Pharaoh further enslaves them by using a technique common among oppressors; he says the oppressed are at fault. *"Lazy, that's what you are—lazy!"* (Exodus 5:17)

Their souls are so enslaved that they leave Pharaoh and seeing Moses, they blame him. Look at Exodus 5:21: *"May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."* And Moses leaves them and goes to the Lord and blames Him: *"O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."* (Exodus 5:22-23)

God had come to the Israelites and told them He would deliver them. Apparently they had some hope that might happen because we are told that when they first heard that news, they bowed down and worshipped God. But they didn't really trust God because at the first sign of opposition, they folded. They were willing to return to their miserable existence, they trusted more in the Pharaoh than in God, pleading with Pharaoh to help them rather than praying to God. And they turned against God's man, Moses, accusing him, not Pharaoh, of making things worse. Later in the text we to see this statement:

"They did not listen to (Moses) because of their discouragement and cruel bondage." (Exodus 6:9) They'd been enslaved so long they couldn't believe it could be better.

Some of you are living in miserable conditions. I'm not referring to a lousy job or a mean-spirited family member; I'm talking about the turmoil in your soul; I'm talking about the slavery to passions of fear, anger, greed, and bitterness that keep you from God. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Some

cannot receive Christ because they are so full of anguish, and are so crushed in spirit that they cannot find strength enough of mind to entertain a hope that by any possibility salvation can come to them. It is to their sad case that I desire to speak... for I have felt the same. I do remember when I could not believe even Jesus himself by reason of (my) anguish and (hopelessness); and, therefore, as one who has worn the chains, I speak to those who are still in chains. I know the clanking of those fetters, and what it is to feel the damp of the stone walls, and to fear that there is no coming out of prison, and to be so despairing that even when the Emancipator turned the great key in the lock, and set the door wide open, yet still my heart had made for itself a more horrible cage, and I could not believe in the possibility of liberty, and therefore I sat bound in a dungeon of my own creation. Ah! There is no Bastille (prison) so awful as that which is built by despair, and kept under the custody of a crushed spirit. Many are the desponding ones whose eyes fail so that they cannot look up..."³

Yes, there are those openly rebellious people who say as Pharaoh did, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" "I will not..." But there are also people who by the sin of others and their own sin are so enslaved that they need an Emancipator, a deliverer.

If Jesus looked into your soul today and saw the burden you carry what would He say to you?

- If He saw the **anger** toward a parent or a spouse that weighs you down,
- If He saw the **isolation** in which you live, withdrawn from family members that continually hurt you,
- If He saw the **fear** you labor under at work or at home,

- If He saw the **bitterness** that erupts too often in the words to your ears or from your mouth,
- If He saw the **weariness** that leads you to take an extra sleeping pill or too many drinks just to numb the hopelessness,
- If He saw the **jealousy or envy** that burns in your mind toward another in your family, at work, or among your friends,
- If He saw the **emptiness** that leaves a hole in your heart.

If He looked into your soul and saw one or a combination of hurt, fear, bitterness, hopelessness, jealousy, or emptiness, what would He say? "You miserable faithless sinner, I told you I

would save you from your bondage to all of that and as soon as things got worse, you bailed out. Forget you!" No! That is not what He says! The

There are also people who by the sin of others and their own sin are so enslaved that they need an Emancipator, a deliverer.

Bible says in John 3:17, *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* Don't misunderstand; God doesn't think we are just victims. He knows we deserve the circumstances we live in. God doesn't come to save us because we deserve to be saved but because He is a compassionate God.

Listen to what God has already said about His feelings for the Israelites: *"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them..."* (Exodus 3:7-8) That's

the compassion of God, which is now expressed in the grace of God. Listen to the Gospel of Exodus in 6:6-8: *"I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD."*

Hear His heart: I AM! Therefore I will! I AM the I AM—Yahweh—The eternal, omnipotent, gracious God.

- I will bring you out.
- I will free you.
- I will redeem you.
- I will take you as My own.
- I will be your God.
- I will bring you to the place I promised.
- I will give it to you.

I am the Lord. Hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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."* God didn't cast the faithless Israelites aside; He offered his mercy and grace yet again. And He grounded His promise in His person —God has spoken. Will you trust Him? Will you follow Him?

End Notes

¹ *The Emancipation of Robert Sadler*, p.23-27

² Reuters and AP wire services, March 13, 2003

³ Spurgeon, June 3, 1888

Chapter Seven

The Ego of God Exodus 6:1—7:7

The text of Scripture we look at next is in the midst of the larger story we've began studying. Before the death and resurrection of Jesus, this story was the greatest story ever told. The Israelite deliverance from Egypt is referred to in nearly every book of the Old Testament. It was the *sine qua non* of their very existence as a people.

Periodically throughout the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God promised them a future with many descendants and a land of their own. But God also said that before the promise was fulfilled the people would live in slavery in Egypt for 400 years. Most of you remember the beginning of the story, in Genesis, when Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob was betrayed by his own brothers and sold as a slave and ended up in Egypt. Eventually, famine in Canaan forced the brothers of Joseph and their families to likewise seek asylum in Egypt.

There they grew in number until, perceived as a threat by the Egyptians, they were enslaved. The slavery became more and more onerous as the years wore on. So God called Moses to be His spokesman to deliver the people from their slavery and lead them to the land that had been promised so many years before. The only problem was that the rulers of Egypt were not about to let their cheap labor disappear. And so the Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. But God was not to be refused!

Look at Exodus 6:1 - 7:17:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you will see what I

will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.'

God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.'

Before the death and resurrection of Jesus, this story was the greatest story ever told.

'Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free

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

"Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.'

"But Moses said to the LORD, 'If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips'

"Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

"Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, 'I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.'

"But Moses said to the LORD, 'Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?'

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.'

"Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, "Perform a miracle," then say to Aaron, "Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh," and it will become a snake.'

"So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the

staff that was changed into a snake. Then say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened. This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood"."

I have quite obviously, but with reluctance, left out of the passage, the genealogy in the latter part of chapter 6. Central in the genealogy is Aaron, his ancestors and his

God comes again to Moses and tells him to tell the Israelite people of the freedom that will soon be theirs. But the people are so discouraged they can't hear.

descendants. This and a number of other indicators in the text suggest it is inserted to give legitimacy to Aaron's role in the events of Exodus. Because of time, I will not detail it for you but notice that both in

the genealogy and in the commentary on it, the two leaders, in very unusual fashion, are mentioned in reverse order (not "Moses and Aaron" but "Aaron and Moses") apparently to emphasize and legitimize Aaron's role.

Coming back to the main story line we find Moses frustrated and discouraged. In Chapter 5 we learned that Moses went to Pharaoh the first time and got "shot down" royally. When Moses requested he let the people go, Pharaoh said, *"Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."* (Exodus 5:2) And in reaction, Pharaoh made things even worse for the enslaved Israelites. And so we see that God comes again to Moses and tells him to tell the Israelite people of the freedom that will soon be theirs. But

the people are so discouraged they can't hear.

Then God commands Moses to go again to Pharaoh and demand the release of the people. But Moses is so discouraged that he says, *"If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh **listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?**"* (Exodus 6:12) I don't want to be too hard on Moses, since I can't imagine how I would have responded in his situation, but I would say he isn't very creative —isn't this the same excuse he's been using all along? It seems that Moses has no self-confidence. He had the experience of the burning bush and God speaking to him out of it. He had the experience of the shepherd's staff turning into a snake and then back into a staff. He went to Egypt and met with the Elders of Israel and got them all excited about being freed from slavery. They all bowed down and worshipped God together in anticipation. Moses was "on a roll."

He then went to Pharaoh, made his demands in God's name and...Nothing! No, not "nothing," he was blindsided. Now it was worse for the slaves than before he went. No wonder Moses said, *"If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?"* "God, I don't have what it takes." Have you ever felt that?

Kent Hughes, pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, was discouraged. He had worked so hard but his church didn't grow in spite of the fact that another evangelical church across town grew rapidly. Years later in his book *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* Hughes recalled that time and remembered his feelings:

"The ministry is asking too much of me. How can I go on giving all that I have without seeing results, especially when others are (seeing results)? Those who really make it

in the ministry are those with exceptional gifts. If I had a great personality, or natural charisma, if I had a celebrity status, a deep resonant voice, a merciless executive ability...I could make it to the top. Where is God in all of this? Just look at the great preachers today. Their success seems to have little to do with God's Spirit; they're just superior people! God has called me to do something he hasn't given me the gifts to accomplish."¹ Most of you won't identify with Hughes' circumstances but you can with his discouragement. What God showed Kent Hughes, and what He will show us through Moses' experience, is that it is not about Kent, you, Moses or me. It is about God!

I recognize that such a statement is often made today—"It's not about me but about Jesus." But what does it mean? In the text, so that we don't lose track of the story line, the author states Moses' excuse before the insertion of the genealogy and repeats it after:

- Exodus 6:10-12—*"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.' But Moses said to the LORD, 'If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?' "*
- Exodus 6:28-30—*"Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, 'I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.' But Moses said to the LORD, 'Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?' "*

And then we see God's response in verses 7:1-5:

- "Moses, I want you to start thinking more positively!"
- "I have this guy I know who has some tapes on personal success that I want you to listen to."

- “Moses, I want you to understand that you have it in you, you just need to get up and get going again.”

Is that what God says? It sounds silly doesn't it? What does He say? First of all He reminds Moses that he is not responsible to make anything happen; he is just responsible to obey. Implied in that is that the power is not in Moses' natural ability or any lack of power in Moses' inability but the power is God's. And secondly, God reminds Moses that the purpose behind all of this activity is not to advance Moses' career or even first of all for the deliverance and happiness of the people of Israel, but to glorify God.

God reminds Moses that he is not responsible to make anything happen; he is just responsible to obey.

It's as if before going any further with

Moses and Aaron, God asks them to step back and get the big picture. “Moses, you are discouraged and wanting to quit, and the people are all discouraged and reacting **because you and they don't understand what is going on here.**”

“So first of all, I want you to understand, Moses, that this is not about your natural abilities. I will make you like God to the Pharaoh. Right now you are nothing to him; he could squash you like a bug. He thinks he is a god incarnate—the son of the Sun-God Ra. But I am going to work in ways that will make him realize he is dealing with a god that is greater than he is and greater than the Egyptian gods. What I am commanding you to do Moses is simply to say what I tell you to say.

Three times or more Moses objects to being God's spokesman. Three times or more God reminds Moses that all Moses must do is say what God says. Moses will not bring about the purposes of God by his eloquence but God will bring about His purposes through Moses. Speaking to

the same idea, the Apostle Paul, said he did not come in persuasive speech but in the power of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 2:4)

In fact, to make certain that the Pharaoh and Moses and the people would know it was the true God who was acting, God said he was going to retard the process by hardening the Pharaoh's heart so he would not listen to Moses. God

All Scripture attests to the intentional and powerful intervention of God in our histories. God is doing it!

was going to make it so hard everyone would know it was humanly impossible. Then God was going to heap up miracles and signs for

everyone to witness. And then He was going to lay His hand on Egypt with such fearful judgment that absolutely no one could miss the point —God had done it. The more Moses' efforts "failed" the clearer it would eventually be that it was all God. The more stubborn Pharaoh became the clearer it would eventually be that it was all God. It was not the eloquence of Aaron or the magic of Moses or the eventual faint heart of Pharaoh.

God was about to cause an event in human history, the Exodus, which would demonstrate for the next 1500 years, that He is God. As I said earlier, nearly every book of the Old Testament points back to this event —the emancipation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. And that emancipation commenced in the Passover sacrifice of a lamb in each home. And this became the defining moment of the people of Israel. What they couldn't know but we now do is that that event was pointing forward to the greatest event in human history—the death and resurrection of the ultimate Passover-Lamb, Jesus. And that Jesus-event became the defining moment of all humanity

for all history.

Let's go back to Moses in Egypt. God is about to do something so big, so much bigger than Moses, bigger than the Pharaoh, and so much bigger than a couple million Hebrews that Moses' ability or inability hardly factors in. "Moses, just obey! I'll do it all." Do you realize that today God is working in the midst of every detail of history in the same way. What appears to us to be threatening, impossible, and getting worse not better is fully within the sovereign and benevolent control of God. He will prove to us that it is not what we are doing but what He is doing that matters most—we are just to obey.

I haven't reminded you yet what it is that God is doing, but know that all Scripture attests to the intentional and powerful intervention of God in our histories. God is doing it! As it is sometimes said, perhaps tritely but still very true, "God doesn't need our ability, just our availability." It does not depend on our competence but on our faithfulness.

And now to second issue this text addresses: What is God doing in all of this? As I said earlier, God reminds Moses that the purpose behind all of this activity is not to advance Moses' career or even first of all for the deliverance and happiness of the people of Israel, but the purpose behind it all is the glory of God.

I want you to see two passages that clearly set forth God's purpose in all of this:

The first is Exodus 6:6-8: *"I am the LORD, and... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. **Then you will know that I am the LORD your God...**"* (Emphasis Added)

And the second is Exodus 7:3-5: *"But I will harden*

*Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. And **the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD** when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."*(Emphasis Added)

In our shortsightedness, it is very easy to begin to assume that God is there to make our lives easier, to keep bad things from happening, and to insure that we're happy. Do you see how easy it is for us to hear, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" and get God's purposes all twisted around in our understanding? Apparently Moses began to think that the ultimate purpose of God in Egypt was to free the Israelites. And so when Pharaoh said "No," Moses thought all was lost. When his own people accused him and rejected him, he was angry and discouraged—he even accused God of failing them.

Yes, God was going to deliver them from slavery but that was not the ultimate goal. The goal that was above deliverance was the demonstration of the glory of God—everyone will know that I am the LORD!

- That's why God created the heavens above—Psalm 19:1: *"The heavens declare the glory of God."*
- That's why the Scriptures were given—Psalm 19:7-10: the other way the glory of God is displayed is in the Law of God.
- That's why Jesus came—Hebrews 1:1-3: *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..."*
- Or as the Apostle John said it said in John 1:14: *"We*

have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

- And that is why Jesus said in John 17:3, "*Now this is eternal life: that they may **know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.***" (Emphasis Added)

This might be a good time to mention the title I gave to this sermon: "The Ego of God" Because of our own proud bent, when we hear that God does everything for His own glory, it is tempting for us to wonder (never out loud) "Is God an egotist?" Is God so preoccupied with Himself that He just can't get enough praise?

When we read Isaiah 43:6-7, "*Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory...*" do we think He set the whole universe up so that He would get kudos for eternity? Or when we read Hebrews 13:15, "*Let*

us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise," do we have the sense that like some self-centered child, God needs our attention or that He will be displeased if we don't say enough good things about Him?

Like some pagan worshipper who brings vegetables or flowers to appease the gods, do we bring our songs and words to meet some need in God to be glorified? Are we trying to flatter God?

In our shortsightedness, it is very easy to begin to assume that God is there to make our lives easier, to keep bad things from happening, and to insure that we're happy.

God wants the Egyptians, the Israelites, and the world to know Him. God wants us to know Him because only then

do we have true value. The word “glory” in reference to God in both the Hebrew and Greek speaks of the perfect worthiness and awesomeness of God. Now this next statement is very important: **God already has all the glory He can ever have.** You and I can add nothing to the glory of God. God didn’t become more glorious when He created the universe. He has always been and always will be infinite in His perfections. We don’t and can’t add or detract from the glory, the worth, and the awesomeness of God.

Here’s another very important statement: **Nothing has any intrinsic value apart from its relationship to God.** All creation, including humanity, exists because of the

The heavens declare the glory of God—they don’t create the glory, they reflect it. Human beings are made in the image of God and our value is in reflecting His glory.

creative love of God. And we only have value as we reflect the glory of God, because everything begins with, exists and ends with God. The tragedy for the human race, in the sin of Adam and our sin,

was that mankind moved away from God—we stopped living in the kind of relationship with God that reflects His glory. And when we did so, and do so today, we cease being fully the creatures we were meant to be. We cease having value and we become fit for destruction.

The heavens declare the glory of God—they don’t create the glory, they reflect it. Human beings are made in the image of God and our value is in reflecting His glory. In a difficult but precise quote an Eastern Orthodox theologian, by the name of Petro Bilaniuk, has written, “The intrinsic (essential nature of the) glory of God is his holiness,

goodness, beauty and all the other attributes. (The true goal of all creation is the extrinsic glory of God—the reflection and manifestation, through creatures, of the intrinsic (essential nature) and substantial (true) glory that is God himself.) Therefore God necessarily ordered all things to his extrinsic glory. Consequently the intrinsic perfection of any creature is in reality the extrinsic glory of God.”²

The butterfly reflects the glory of God when it flits in all its beauty from one flower to another. The tree reflects the glory of God when it grows strong and tall and shades the earth. They don’t add to God’s glory of creativity and benevolence, they reflect it. Thus only when reflecting the glory of God are we most human, most what we were created to be and most fulfilled as human beings.

That is why the Westminster Catechism begins with, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This is not due to some selfish need of God’s. This is the loving desire of God for us —He knows that we will continue to destroy ourselves until we reflect His glory. We were created to be mirrors and mirrors are worthless unless they are reflecting. The more beautiful is the source, the more beautiful the reflection. Again, please note we don’t add to God’s glory, we simply reflect it.

So why does God want the world to know Him? Is it for God’s good? No! It is because one aspect of His perfect glory is that He loves! Since the “fall” of man in Adam in Genesis 3, God has been in the process of restoring His creation. His patience is seen in His actions generation after generation to demonstrate His glory so that everyone will know that He is the LORD. So that we may be restored to that relationship with Him wherein is life.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate expression of the Glory of God ("that they may know"). Philippians 2:10-11 says, *"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* It is advisable to know that the glory of God will be reflected both in redemption and in judgment. *"Every knee will bow... and every tongue confess."* Some will bow only in judgment but many others will bow in adoration as part of the redeemed. Judgment will reflect the glory of the holiness of God and redemption will reflect the glory of the mercy and grace of God.

The Apostle Paul addresses this in Romans 9:

"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power (glory) known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? (And) what if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy?" (Romans 9:22-23) Hell is not only the place of divine judgment; it is also the logical and natural consequence of the worthlessness of everything apart from God.

In this passage, God speaks of revealing His glory this way:

- *"I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment (against Egypt)... Then you will know that I am the LORD your God."* (Exodus 6:6-7)
- *"And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt (judgment) and bring the Israelites out of it (redemption)."* (Exodus 7:5)

But while God will ultimately demonstrate His glory even in judgment, the Apostle John makes it abundantly clear that is not His goal at the moment. *"For God so loved the world*

that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”(John 3:16-18)

And so theologian Donald Bloesch writes, “The divine purpose in creation and redemption is not to procure glory for either the Father or the Son but to communicate and manifest (his) eternal glory to the whole of creation. The **goal** is the transfiguration of the cosmos (the redemption of the universe); the **motivation** is self-giving love that proceeds out of a heart of boundless compassion. God’s loving acts redound to his glory, but they proceed out of his own free decision to share the goodness of his being. He has no need to go out of himself to create and redeem, for he already possesses creative love within himself. He already shares his bountiful capacity to love within the fellowship of the persons of the Trinity. He is not metaphysically bound to go out of himself to create, but he wills to do so out of inexplicable love that (reflects) his glory but does not make him more (glorious).”³

Judgment will reflect the glory of the holiness of God and redemption will reflect the glory of the mercy and grace of God.

To Moses, to the people of Israel, and to us God is saying the circumstances may seem impossible, they may be painful, resolution may take far longer than you thought necessary, but understand this: “I am making Myself known; I am communicating My glory in judgment and

mercy. And I am doing so that you may know Me because only in relationship with Me, only by reflecting My glory, will you be fully human." And so finally we see that it is all about God. But in that it is also about us because God chooses out of His infinite compassion to allow us to live in relationship with Him reflecting, radiating, and sharing in His glory. That's why Jesus said, "*I have come that they might have life,*" and "*This is life that they may know the only true God...*"

End Notes

¹Kent Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* in Ryken, p. 199-200

²Petro Bilaniuk quoted in Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, p. 127 and paraphrased by GLN

³Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, p. 127

Chapter Eight

From Fact to Faith Exodus 7:8—10:29

Do you merely believe **in** God or do you **believe** God? Most of the world believes in God or gods and much of the world believes in the God but the question is do you believe God? It is one thing to think God exists, it is quite another to trust Him, to truly trust Him day to day with the stuff of our lives. The evidence that many, even many who attend church, believe in God but don't believe God is seen in the way their lives are lived.

- Their priorities are earthly and selfish rather than God's kingdom and altruistic.
- Their morality is culturally conditioned and relativistic rather than biblically based and objective.
- Their charity is opportunistic and calculated rather than missional and sacrificial.

They believe in God but they don't trust Him with life. They may have modified some of their outward actions and habits to conform to their sense of what an acceptable Christian does but their hearts are unchanged. They are still in control of their jobs, their relationships, their leisure time and their money. They suspicion they can't control their eternal destiny but not for lack of trying. They believe in God, but they don't believe God.

In our study of the book of Exodus we come to the time when God is about to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and into a land of their own—the fulfillment of promises, made and repeated, for nearly 500 years. The problem is that the promise has been obscured by nearly 400 years of slavery.

- Can you imagine a father telling his 10-year-old son about the promise that God had made 399 years earlier?
- Can you imagine a son hearing that promise and then watching his father and grandfather as they are marched out to the stone quarries as slaves?
- Can you imagine the boy's struggle to believe the promise when all the evidence points to the disappearance of God and the futility of faith?

Who of us, living under much less extreme conditions, has not felt something of that same struggle of faith?

The descendants of Jacob, also known as Israel, are called the Israelites and they probably numbered nearly 2 million men, women and children (Cf. Exodus 12:37)—the population of the greater Denver metropolitan area. Through the centuries the people of Israel had become numerous enough to take the next step in their history under God's direction but they weren't ready. What we see in the text before us is God's preparation of the people to not just believe in Him but to believe Him sufficiently to stake their lives on Him—to trust Him in spite of the evidence.

Freedom is not an easy thing to manage. It is one thing to be free and quite another to know what to do with freedom. When he was about three, my son Paris, decided to run away from home. He packed a few things, went out the front door and we found him... seated on the front porch. He wasn't ready for freedom. The people of Israel aren't ready. They believe in God, but they don't yet believe God. This sermon is part one of two. We will finish this topic in the next chapter.

How does God prepare His people to believe Him? How

does God convince them to trust Him? To the Israelites, God may have seemed absent in the past, but He is going to break into their present in such powerful ways that some of them will know not only that He is but that He can be trusted. Earlier, I showed you what the Bible says is the reason for these events. Both by the judgment on Egypt through the plagues AND by the mercy shown to the Israelites by leading them out of their slavery God will bring glory to Himself.

As I said, the way God will show His glory is by both judgment and mercy.

God's preparation of the people is to not just believe in Him but to believe Him sufficiently to stake their lives on Him—to trust Him in spite of the evidence.

And so God says in Exodus 7:5 and is repeated several times, *"And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD..."* By the time Israel leaves Egypt, the Egyptians certainly know that God is THE God. But I contend that while the Egyptians' acknowledgment of God as God is certainly an objective here, the greater objective is that Israel may know that the LORD is God. Listen to the way God says it to Moses regarding the Israelites: *"Then you (you Israelites) will know that I am the LORD your God..."* Exodus 6:7 This knowledge is not the grudging acquiescence of Pharaoh and the Egyptians but the knowledge of relationship, of intimacy—"our" God. That is repeated again in chapter 10: *"I... perform these miraculous signs of mine among (the Egyptians) **that you may tell your children and grandchildren** how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and **that you may know that I am the LORD.**"*(10:1-2- Emphasis Added)

From the perspective of hindsight, we know that the

Egyptians, as I said, came, only grudgingly, to the acknowledgement of God as THE God but they didn't believe God, as in trust Him. We also know that most of the adult Israelites, while they believed in God, did not believe God. Getting ahead of where we are in the story, we know that they grumbled their way across the desert and refused to enter the Promised Land because of their lack of trust in God. Do you remember to whom God gave the privilege of entering the Promised Land? Only those who were under 20 when they left Egypt.

Now look again at 10:1-2: "*I...perform these miraculous signs of mine among (the Egyptians) that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and **that you may know that I am the LORD.***" I don't think it is a stretch at all to suggest that the primary audience of the miracles of the Exodus were the children of the Israelites, their children and even us to this day, 3500 years later. For 1500 years, until the cross and resurrection event

May God's Spirit impress
the same on us to the end
that we not only believe in
His existence and power
but also that we believe
Him, trusting Him with our
lives.

of Jesus, the Exodus event was the quintessential demonstration of the presence and power of God so that His people might believe Him.

I want you to join me
in reliving those days

and capturing something of the impact those events had on them and that God expects those events to have on us. It is very interesting to me that the story is told in such prosaic form —no fantastic language, just a straightforward telling of the what God did. We don't have eyewitness

accounts where the people cry about their favorite lamb getting pummeled by the hail or tell how frightening the darkness was, or describe in medical detail the boils on their babies. Future generations were just to hear the basic unvarnished truth and realize it is their God who has such power and uses it for the sake of His people. May God's Spirit impress the same on us to the end that we not only believe in His existence and power (as the Egyptians grudgingly came to accept) but also that we believe Him, trusting Him with our lives.

So I'd like to tell the story, largely the way the Scripture does. I will leave out some details that I wish to address another time. For reasons I stated earlier, I want to tell it through the eyes and experience of a 10-year-old Israelite boy—one of those under-age-20 children to whom the text refers.

"I've never known anything else than being the son of a slave. My grandfather was a slave before my father, and his father before him. From what I'm told, we've been slaves for 400 years. But it wasn't always that way. Many, many years ago, our forefathers were a free people. And I am reminded every Sabbath that the promise of God is that we will be a free people again. I believe that but probably only in the way that you believe something you've been told over and over again. I don't think I actually expect to see it happen—it's just nice to believe it.

"But one day, not that long ago, my father and the other men began to get excited about the idea of escaping Egypt and going to that land promised to us so long ago. It turns out that one of the Princes of Egypt is in fact a Hebrew, one of us. This man, named Moses, returned from somewhere and is promising to lead us out of Egypt. But the excitement turned to disappointment pretty quickly

when Pharaoh flat-out refused to free us and instead made it harder than ever for my father and the others.

Exodus 7:8-13

"But then, just a month ago, or so, I heard my father talking again about this Moses and what he was doing. I couldn't tell if my father was excited or if he thought it was all just foolishness. But one night he came home saying he had heard that this Moses actually went again to the Pharaoh demanding that we be set free. And when Pharaoh asked to see some sign that Moses had any authority to be demanding anything, Moses' brother Aaron, who was with him, threw down his shepherd's staff and it turned into a terrifying snake.

"Well Pharaoh called his magicians to match Moses and they did, they threw down their staffs and those staffs became snakes too. But what was fun to hear was when my father said that without so much as a word by anyone, the snake of Moses and Aaron swallowed up all the other snakes. My father smiled when he told it —the best Pharaoh had to offer was no match for our God. You have to wonder what the old Pharaoh thought of all that. But he wouldn't let us go.

Exodus 7:14-24

"I thought that was the end of the whole story. But boy, was I wrong. The very next day, early in the morning, everyone was scared and excited all at the same time. The Nile River, the river that makes our lives possible, the river that waters the land and makes the crops grow, had turned to blood. The fish in the river died and the stink from the river was terrible. The Egyptians couldn't find water anywhere because even the water in their jars and buckets turned to blood. They had to dig wells in order to get any water fit to drink.

"That night Father told us that God had done it through Moses. Moses told the Pharaoh that God was going to punish him because he refused to let us go free. And then Moses told his brother Aaron to stretch out his staff. And the Nile River turned to blood. The river that Pharaoh said he had made and that belonged to him, the river that the Egyptians worshipped, our God just took over and Pharaoh could do nothing about it—he just walked away.

Exodus 7:25-8:15

"It was a week before I heard or saw anything else. Things were finally getting back to normal. I thought maybe it was all over. Then older kids came running from all over saying the same thing—"Frogs!" That may sound like fun to most 10-year-olds but this was not a couple of frogs that you chase through the grass. There were frogs everywhere. They were in every room; they were in the beds, in the kitchens, in the ovens, and covering the places where people cook. Not a few, but millions of frogs. That night, we could hardly wait for Father to get home to tell us what he had heard. Yes, it was Moses again. He waited seven days and then he went to Pharaoh again to tell him to let us go free or he would plague the country with frogs. And that is exactly what Moses did and the frogs came from the Nile by the millions.

"The Pharaoh's magicians made frogs come up too but Pharaoh knew there was a difference between what they could do and what Moses and done. Father said the frog represented one of the Egyptian gods—a god that allowed animals to have a lot of babies. Our God was controlling their gods. This time Pharaoh had to admit that Moses' God must exist. He asked Moses to pray to his God that the frogs would go away—he had to ask our God to stop his god. And then for the first time he promised that if the frogs went away, he'd let us go.

"So the next day, Moses prayed and the frogs died. There were so many of them that they were heaped into tall piles that stunk as badly as the bloody river had. But Father told us that as soon as the frogs were gone, the Pharaoh changed his mind and said he wouldn't let us go.

Exodus 8:16-19

"When that happened, Father said, Moses told his brother Aaron to take his staff and hit the dust on the ground. Not only did our God have control of the water but also, now he showed that He also has control over the land. Aaron hit the ground and all the dust throughout the whole country turned into gnats. Have you ever been caught in a swarm of bugs? They're all over you, in your eyes, up your nose and in your ears. You think you're going to go crazy if you can't get away from those things.

"Well, Pharaoh's magicians immediately tried to match the power of Moses but they couldn't. And even they had enough sense to realize that Moses wasn't using magic; he had some kind of divine power that they couldn't match. They even told the Pharaoh that this was the "finger of God." Not only did Moses' God exist but Moses' God was in Egypt and in fact, He was even in their very homes, in the palace of the Pharaoh; there was no place that our God could be denied. But old Pharaoh's heart was hard and he wouldn't listen.

Exodus 8:20-32

"The next couple of days seemed normal to us. The frogs and the bugs were gone. We didn't realize anything had happened until Father came home that second night. He told us how Moses had gone to the Pharaoh the day before threatening him again that if he didn't let us go free, this next day swarms of biting insects would cover every part of where the Egyptians lived but not where we lived. And that

is exactly what happened—insects everywhere on the ground, in the air, and in their houses. Insects that bit them. (Psalm 78:45) These were worse than the gnats.

“Again, I ask, have you ever been in the middle of a swarm of mosquitoes or hornets. Imagine if they were everywhere and you couldn’t get away from them. Our God has control of the water, the land and now the air.

“Father told us that as soon as the flies appeared the Pharaoh quickly called for Moses and told Moses that we could go worship our God but we had to do it here in Egypt. Moses told him

we had to go out of the country and Pharaoh said okay but we shouldn’t go far and please pray for us that your God will remove the insects. Moses said he would pray but that Pharaoh had better not change

Not only did Moses’ God exist but Moses’ God was in Egypt and in fact, He was even in their very homes, in the palace of the Pharaoh; there was no place that our God could be denied.

his mind again. But as soon as the insects were gone, Pharaoh did change his mind and refused to let us go.

Exodus 9:1-7

“It wasn’t many days later that Father came home with another story but this one we knew something about before he told us. The first clue we had to something else terrible happening to the Egyptians was when some of the Pharaoh’s men came around inspecting our barns and pastures. We kids kept asking questions until we got the idea that something had happened to their cows and sheep. Well, that night Father told us what had happened. Moses went to Pharaoh again and told him to let us go or

all the cattle of the Egyptians would die but not our cattle. And sure enough the next day it happened—all their cattle died. That's why the Pharaoh had sent men to see if ours were still alive. But in spite of seeing what had happened, in spite of seeing that our God has the power of death in His hands and can decide what dies and what doesn't, Pharaoh still refused to let us go.

Exodus 9:8-12

"Father said that as soon as Moses and Aaron heard that the Pharaoh changed his mind again, God told them to throw soot into the air. They did, and swelling, spreading, open sores appeared on all the people and the animals of the Egyptians. This time the magicians didn't even try to match Moses' power because they were covered with the

Pharaoh now knows that our God is alive, that our God is more powerful than his gods, that our God can control everything about nature but he still refuses to yield to Him.

sores. But Father said, in spite of this painful attack on their very bodies, demonstrating God's power not just over nature but even over the Pharaoh's own body, Pharaoh refused to give in. I wondered how much it would take for the

Pharaoh to get the message. I had no idea what would happen next but I was beginning to wonder if all of Moses' efforts would accomplish anything. Actually I didn't think of that—I heard my father say it.

Exodus 9:13-35

"Again, it was a couple of days later when we got the word of what happened next. Moses again went to Pharaoh and warned him to let us go or hail would destroy everything. In fact Moses warned Pharaoh to tell his people to get

under cover the next day and get their cattle under cover or the hail would kill them. And not so incidentally, that terrible hail will fall everywhere except where the Israelites live. Some of Pharaoh's people feared what Moses said and brought their cattle into the barns but many did not.

"The next day it hailed like it had never hailed before, ever in Egypt's history. Even though it did not hail where we lived we could hear the thunder and see lightening that went along with the worst storm ever. It beat down every living thing left out in the open and it stripped every tree. All the crops that had leaves or heads of grain were destroyed. Have you seen what just small hail can do to flowering plants. Now imagine the size of hail that can kill animals and people. That's what happened. This time of year the Egyptians always worship their god Min, the god of the harvest. Did anyone notice that our God is more powerful?

"This time the Pharaoh called for Moses and admitted that he had sinned, that the LORD was right and he was wrong and that he would let the people go if Moses would pray for the hail to stop. And so Moses prayed and the hail stopped but once again Pharaoh changed his mind. It's amazing isn't it—the Pharaoh now knows that our God is alive, that our God is more powerful than his gods, that our God can control everything about nature—He can instantaneously turn water into blood, create millions of reptiles and insects, He can start and stop diseases, and He can kill any animal or human anytime He chooses—and Pharaoh even admits that he is wrong, but he still refuses to yield to Him.

Exodus 10:3-20

"Now, every day we could hardly wait for our father to get home to tell us what happened next. And we weren't disappointed. Once again Moses went to Pharaoh and

threatened him to let us go or this time locusts would come and eat every living plant on the ground. They delivered their message and left. Have you ever seen what billions of insects can do to a field of crops? After the hailstorm, all that was left were the new crops that hadn't yet leaved out. If the locusts got them the Egyptians would starve. Even the Pharaoh's officials understood that and pleaded with the Pharaoh to give in. So Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron back in and said, okay, they could leave but only the men. And then the Pharaoh had his men force Moses and Aaron out of the palace.

"So the Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand over Egypt and an east wind blew across the land and by the next morning the ground was black with locusts. Every plant was eaten, any leaves or fruit still on the trees after the hail was eaten and everything green was devoured. Pharaoh quickly realized he had doomed his country and himself and he called for Moses. Once more he said he had sinned against Moses' God and would Moses please forgive him and pray to his God to remove the locusts. Moses prayed, the locusts were blown away but the Pharaoh changed his mind for the 8th time.

Exodus 10:21-29

"By now we were all sensing that something even more terrible was about to happen. We could see that what started out with a snake eating other snakes had grown so much more serious. Now the lives of all the people of Egypt were threatened. What was next? We didn't have to wait long to find out.

"Have you ever been out in a woods at night when the clouds covered the sky so there were no stars, no moon, absolutely no light, and it was so black you couldn't see anything, not even your own hand in front of your face? That's what happened next. Moses' stretched out his hand

to the sky and it became totally dark. And it wasn't only for a few minutes until someone could get a lantern lit. It was totally dark. I don't know why, but even though we had light in our houses in our part of the country, the Egyptians were not able to get light of any kind. Can you imagine? For a people that worship the sun this kind of total darkness was a greater threat than anything that had happened before. In fact for any of us who think of nothing more certain than that the sun will rise in the morning this was an awesome display of our God's power.

"It seemed that Pharaoh had reached the end of his rope because after three days of this, and no assurance that it would ever end, he called Moses and told him he and all the people of Israel could go. But it seems that

Once more he said he had sinned against Moses' God and would Moses please forgive him and pray to his God to remove the locusts. Moses prayed, the locusts were blown away but the Pharaoh changed his mind for the 8th time.

Pharaoh was still stubbornly refusing to completely give in. He demanded that all the cattle of the Israelites be left behind. Moses, of course, refused. And at that, in spite of the blood, the insects, the hail, the sores, the locusts and now the darkness, Pharaoh became enraged and said that if he ever saw Moses again, Moses would die!

"This was a change that none of us expected. Throughout these days my father alternated between anticipation and discouragement. At times he seemed confident that this would be the time that the Pharaoh would give in. But the longer it went on and the more stubborn the Pharaoh seemed to be, my father wondered out loud if it was hopeless. And then this happened. Not only did the

Pharaoh refuse to let us go, but also he refused to ever see Moses again. How would we ever be allowed to leave if there was no opportunity to talk to the Pharaoh? Many became hopeless. But what about all we have seen these past weeks?

- Our God has power over all the forces of nature.
- Our God has the power of life and death.
- Our God controls even the sun, moon and stars.
- Our God can tease and manipulate the mightiest king on earth.

Can we believe Him?"

And now to us today:

- Have we seen enough to believe God, to trust Him with our lives?
- What will it take for you to more than believe in Him?
- Did your God do all these things in Exodus?
- Can your God best anything that comes against you?
- Can your God care for you?

Chapter Nine

Diamonds are Displayed Best on Black Velvet Exodus 7—10

One of the most common doubts we believers have is the doubt regarding our eternal relationship with God. Sometimes our doubt is brought on by crisis—something happens that shakes us out of the comfort of our routine. Sometimes our doubt is brought on by our own sin—our failure to live up to God’s call on our lives. Even among true believers there is the constant temptation to think our relationship with God is somehow determined and secured by our actions—if we live up to a certain standard then we will be acceptable to God. Concomitant with that is an underlying fear that if we don’t measure up, God will change His mind regarding us.

I hear that theology in the fears people express but I also hear it in the confidence of some people when they say everything is okay between them and God because they are feeling good about their performance at the moment. The fundamental difference between the religion of the Bible and all other religions is on this point. God says we are sought, found, saved and eternally bound to Him by God’s doing alone. All other religions place the burden of a relationship with God on us.

As I have pointed out several times in our on-going study of the early part of the book of Exodus, God is preparing His people to trust Him fully. With the Israelites, as with us, there was a tendency, a predisposition, to see a relationship with God as the result of the cooperative effort of both God and them. God wants them to know that their deliverance from Egypt, just as our deliverance from sin

and death, is all of grace. God wants them and us to place our full confidence in Him and place no confidence in ourselves. He wants us to realize that from beginning to end, from the first moment we have any interest in God to the time when we stand before God in eternity, it is all of grace. When we come to believe that, then we are truly trusting God rather than trusting at all in ourselves.

In Exodus chapters 7-10 God is sovereignly moving in two directions at the same time: He is going to marvelously, draw them by His grace out of Egypt. He is going to display His awesome wrath against and total control over the mightiest king and kingdom on earth.

With that comes great assurance of our relationship with God. When we realize that we have been called to Him, not by our merit or efforts but solely by His choice then we can rest secure in His love—no longer assuming we have to earn it or maintain it. He loves us because He loves

us because He loves us because He loves us—there is nothing in us, somewhere way behind it, causing that love; it is caused by God alone. All of that might be summarized as the sovereignty of God in our salvation—our salvation is uncaused by anything outside of God Himself—He has chosen to save us.

Now in a way that we are not accustomed to, God is going to demonstrate that sovereignty in His choice of Israel. He wants them to know that their salvation is wholly of grace that they might trust Him fully in the future. To do that God is going to show them His sovereignty in grace and His sovereignty in wrath. Just as the beauty of a diamond is displayed best against the backdrop of black velvet, so the

marvel of God's sovereign grace is seen best against the backdrop of God's sovereign wrath.

In Exodus chapters 7-10 God is sovereignly moving in two directions at the same time: He is going to marvelously, miraculously and with no help from the Israelites, draw them by His grace out of Egypt. At the same time He is going to display His awesome wrath against and total control over the mightiest king and kingdom on earth. It is that righteous wrath of God that has our attention today.

Look at Exodus 9:8-17:

"Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land.'

"So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. You still set yourself against my people and will

not let them go.” ’ ”

There is at least one sentence in this text that bothers us:

"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he (Pharaoh) would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses." (Exodus 9:12) The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. Just to make certain that we didn't get it wrong, the author says the same thing many times in this text. Before Moses even went back to Egypt this is what God told him:

*"The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But **I will harden his heart** so that he will not let the people go."* (Exodus 4:21)

Then before Moses went to the Pharaoh a second time, this is what the Lord said:

*"Then the LORD said to Moses... **I will harden Pharaoh's heart**, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you."* (Exodus 7:1-4—Emphasis Added)

17 times in this context God speaks of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. To harden the heart is to make it unresponsive, unwilling.

- 7:13—"Yet **Pharaoh's heart became hard...just as the LORD had said."**
- 7:22—"and **Pharaoh's heart became hard"**
- 8:15—"But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, **he hardened his heart ...just as the LORD had said."**
- 8:19—"But **Pharaoh's heart was hard... just as the LORD had said."**
- 8:32—"But this time also **Pharaoh hardened his heart..."**

- 9:12—"But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart...just as the LORD had said.**"
- 9:34-35—"He(Pharaoh) and his officials **hardened their hearts. So Pharaoh's heart was hard ...just as the LORD had said"**
- 10:1-2—"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for **I have hardened his heart.**"
- 10:20—"But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart...**"
- 10:27—"But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart...**"
- 11:10—"But **the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart...**"
- 14:4,8—"And **I will harden Pharaoh's heart... The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh.**"
- 14:17 —"**I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians...**"

The usual explanation for this "hardening" is that God is simply judging Pharaoh for Pharaoh's own actions. Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and so God responded by hardening it more. I think that explanation is incomplete given the witness of Scripture, which I will attempt to explain in a moment but I also think it is not much help in explaining God's action. We try to justify God by saying that God is simply responding in judgment to Pharaoh. Even if that were the explanation, should we not ask how God could contribute to a man's eternal destruction?

- We don't like that God would arbitrarily harden a man's heart.
- Is it any better that God would harden a man's heart so that he cannot respond, while the man is still

alive?

- Isn't God responsible for always holding out hope and even positively working to bring a man to God?
- How can we justify God making it impossible?

So what is happening here?

- Four times in the context, God says that He plans to harden Pharaoh's heart.
- Six times in the context, God says that He hardened Pharaoh's heart.
- Three times it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart.
- Four times it simply says that Pharaoh's heart became hard (without specifying who did it).

What is noteworthy is that most of the times where it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart or simply that his heart was hardened it also says that it happened "just as the Lord said." This would seem to indicate the Lord's initiative even then.

We may like to say that God only responds in judgment on Pharaoh's hard-heartedness but I don't think the text allows us to reduce it to that. The text seems to make God, not

We belong to God by no merit or effort of our own as proven by how God does the choosing.

Pharaoh, the deciding factor in Pharaoh's actions. It is God who is acting sovereignly not only in grace toward the Israelites but also in wrath

toward Pharaoh. I think God is saying something powerful to the Israelites. "As sovereignly as I am working in the heart and circumstances of Pharaoh, I am working in grace toward you. I am in full control—You are not the cause of

My grace, you are merely the recipients of the wonder of it. You can rest assured—it is all of grace!”

That this is the lesson of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart I think I can prove by moving to the New Testament reference to these same events in Romans 9. There too the purpose of the Apostle is to build the confidence of God’s people that their relationship with God is by grace alone and is not dependent in any way on them.

In Romans chapter 8, the apostle Paul promised that for those who are in Christ Jesus nothing can separate them from the love of God. In fact, in Romans 8 Paul articulates some of the grandest truths of the Scripture:

- 8:28—God is working all things, even the hardest things of life, together for the good of those who belong to God.
- 8:29-30—God will finish what He starts; those He chose and predestined to be saved will, in fact, be saved—they will be resurrected to live with Him forever.
- 8:31-39—God’s unfailing love is so great that absolutely nothing can separate us from Him—not death, not the circumstances of life, not angels, not demons, not the present, not the future, **not anything** shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A dozen different ways, Paul has declared, those whom God chooses He keeps; He will never fail them.

But it doesn’t take much Bible knowledge to cause one to ask, “What about the Jews?” Isn’t the Old Testament filled with promises to the Jews? Look around, how many Jews do you see in the church? If most of the Jews, the specially chosen people, aren’t Christians, and apparently, for the most part, are lost, how much confidence can I place in

God's choice of me? Didn't God start something with the Jews that He didn't finish? If it didn't work out for them, how can I be certain it will finish well for me? God's word then in Romans 9 is a perfect commentary on the point that I think God is making in Exodus—it is all God, not us! And so in Romans 9, just as in our Exodus text, God will again show His sovereignty both in grace and in wrath.

We belong to God by no merit or effort of our own as proven by how God does the choosing. Some Jews thought that all Jews were the chosen people of God. But God says, *"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the*

Paul states the truth of
God's sovereign, free,
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would belong to Him even
more strongly than before.

contrary, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children

of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.' " (Romans 9:6-8) Just because you Jews are descended from Israel doesn't necessarily make you God's child. Only those who were chosen by God are truly God's children.

Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Paul says that only Isaac was the child of promise. Please note also that he was chosen even before he was born, just as we are. And in case we missed the point that this is the sovereign choice of God, uncaused by anything in us or even foreseen in us, Paul goes on to write, *"Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good*

or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'”(Romans 9:10-13)

Paul again notes that God's choice of the one was made before the two were born and now even more specifically, God's choice of the one over the other was done before either of them had done anything good or bad. He is dramatically drawing attention to God's choice not being based on merit or effort on our part. It is not something in us that causes God to choose us or not choose us. It is something in God, *"in order that God's purpose in election might stand."* God's choice is in no way influenced by the people He chooses. It is unmerited favor—Grace alone!

Now here is where Paul's point becomes even clearer on the sovereignty of God's choice. Fully understanding the implications of what Paul has just said, someone might ask, "Is God unjust?" If God chooses some people and doesn't choose others for nothing that He sees in them but solely because of His free choice, doesn't that make God unjust, unfair, and arbitrary? Paul, seemingly reading our minds, answers our question: He says God is not unjust at all!

Here Paul has a chance to clear up a misunderstanding if we have misunderstood him. We thought we heard Paul saying that God chooses some and doesn't choose others not based on what God sees in the people but solely based on God's free choice. We thought we heard Paul saying that God's choice of us was not even caused by His seeing into the future and foreknowing that we would have faith. That's right; here is Paul's chance to clear up his message. Surely, we think, it must be something God foresees in those who will be saved or else God is being arbitrary and that would be unjust or unfair.

But what does Paul do? Does he write, "No, no, God's not unfair; He knew who would have faith, He knew who would respond, He knew who would be faithful and those are the ones he chose"? No, he states the truth of God's sovereign, free, unfettered choice of who would belong to Him even more strongly than before.

Paul defends God's justice but very differently that we would have expected. First in response to the question, "Is God unjust?" Paul says: *"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."* (Romans 9:15-16) The first answer to our charge that God is unjust is that our charge is faulty —we aren't even focusing on the correct issue. The issue is not justice; the issue is mercy.

Paul has already very powerfully made the case, earlier in the book of Romans that every person deserves eternal punishment and God is in no way obligated to intervene. If everyone went to hell, justice would be served. When Paul writes about God choosing some to have life, that is not an issue of justice, as if God were being unfair, it is a matter of mercy. God's choices are absolutely uncaused by anything outside of Himself. Look at verse 16: *"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."* If God chooses to have mercy on some who deserve wrath, then it is not unjust, but rather it is merciful.

But there is a second way that Paul responds to the charge that God is unfair or unjust: *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on*

whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." (Romans 9:17) This quote puts us right back into our story from Exodus because it is a quote from Exodus 9:16. I wish Paul would have said that Pharaoh simply got exactly what he deserved and therefore justice was carried out. Paul could have so easily written that and it would have been entirely accurate. Pharaoh, like every other human being, deserves God's wrath and if God doesn't choose to intervene, God can't be rightly charged with injustice.

But Paul doesn't take that easy way out; instead he keeps beating the drum of God's sovereign choice. Look at Romans 9:18: *"Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."* Even though he continues to run the risk of people charging God with unfairness, Paul wants to drive

home his point: God's choice of you, out of all the people of the world, was a matter of awesome mercy. It was not based on your worthiness or

If God chooses to have mercy on some who deserves wrath, then it is not unjust, but rather it is merciful.

your actions present or future, it was all of grace. And because it doesn't depend on you, you can have great confidence that His keeping you won't depend on you. It too is a matter of God's sovereign gracious choice.

To make that point Paul uses the counterpoint: God also sovereignly chooses whom He will harden. The point in this context is not judgment on sin. The point here is the sovereignty of God's choices—His choices are uncaused by anything outside of Himself. And what does Paul use as an illustration of that? He uses God's dealings with the Pharaoh. As God said it in Exodus 4:21, *"The LORD said to*

Moses, 'When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.' "We are troubled by this and I confess I don't fully understand it—but, again, the point being made is that God is in charge, God is in control and, God is making the choices, not based on what He sees in us, therefore we can rest fully assured in our relationship with Him.

God is perfectly within His rights in showing wrath on those who are prepared for destruction and God is perfectly within His rights in showing mercy on whomever He chooses.

Now to prove that Paul is saying God sovereignly chooses on whom to demonstrate His wrath and on whom to show mercy, all we need to do is look at the next question asked of Paul: *"One of*

you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' " (Romans 9:19) This question only makes sense if verses 15-18 not only taught that God shows mercy sovereignly but that God also hardens people sovereignly. If God was only responsible for showing mercy and not responsible for hardening people I don't think this question would be asked.

And so Paul responds: *"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"* (Romans 9:20-21) We don't like that response but Paul says: Be careful that you don't ask questions of God that are improper. The issue is not that we can't ask honest questions but that once we have the answer we don't blame God if we don't like the answer; that we don't try to

make God the evil one for doing it His way. The very question, "Then why does God still blame us?" is stated in such a way as to find fault with God.

Shall the person made, say to his maker, "Why did you make me this way?" The answer is given in an illustration: Doesn't the potter have the right to take one lump of clay and make one thing for special use and another for common use? The obvious answer is, "Yes, he does!" I can't go as far as to say that it is Paul's intention to teach that God created some people to go to hell. How God sovereignly hardens and still preserves human accountability for sin we are not told. And so this passage, like the one in Exodus, does raise some difficult issues that I don't think we can fully understand.

But Paul was able to hold two Scriptural truths in proper tension even though to us they can appear contradictory.

1. God's sovereign choices.
2. Human responsibility.

Paul doesn't fully reconcile those two truths but accepts both. So do I. Paul's first response to the question of, 'if God sovereignly does the choosing, how then can he find fault with anyone' is: "you actually have no right to be the judge of God."

Paul's second response is given in verses 22-23: God has the right to deal with sinful human beings in any way He chooses, consistent with His character, as He has already stated in verse 18 and restates here: *"What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory..."* (Romans 9:22-23) God is perfectly within His rights in showing wrath on those who

are prepared for destruction and God is perfectly within His rights in showing mercy on whomever He chooses.

But notice also the reason attributed to God in showing His wrath and His mercy. By showing His wrath it highlights ever more brightly His mercy. It is when we know "I once was lost" that we sing "but now am found" and when I know the "wretch" I am that it becomes "Amazing Grace." The splendor of His undeserved mercy shines brightest against the backdrop of His deserved wrath. And most importantly, His choice of us is wholly and only of grace. We don't deserve it, we don't earn it, and we can't lose it. God has acted sovereignly in His choice of you.

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

For more information on this subject:

The Justification of God by John Piper

Chosen for Life by C. Samuel Storms;

Chosen by God by R.C. Sproul;

For an alternative view see *Chosen But Free* by Norman Geisler

See also:

"Free Will—A Slave" by Spurgeon New Park Street Chapel Dec 2, 1855.

"Election" by Spurgeon

Chapter Ten

The Last Passover Exodus 11-12

"Alone In The Universe"

David Usher

"Jamie's on the bathroom floor she don't know why
She's shaking underneath the sink can't feel a thing
She'd love to live a life she's afraid of failure
With all the voices in her head
Now what was that I thought I hear you scream

"I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone left wondering why
I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone in the universe tonight

"Alex on the last train home from god knows where
A million miles away from where he thought he'd be
He's got his suit his tie his drink his MTV
He's trading all his life away
You can't escape, we're all infected now

"I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone left wondering why
I think we're alone here you and I
I think we're alone in the universe tonight"

Probably all of us know something of what it means to feel alone. I obviously don't mean just being away from others momentarily. I do mean to experience separateness, no connection, and no one or place where you belong. Have you ever felt that? It is possible that there is no greater

emotional pain or fear than that.

A few nights ago I watched some 60-year-old film footage of the emancipation of the survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. I saw children who had been born in those camps now without any family anywhere, with no idea of even where their families had lived, and no one or no place where they belonged. The need to belong is a powerful need. We were created as relational creatures and superficial relationships only intensify the feelings of loneliness.

Where do you belong? And is that belonging substantial or only superficial? A superficial relationship is belonging to the same health club, or going to the same school, or working at the same company. A superficial relationship is based on passing events or interests as in we went through some crisis together or we both like to fish. A less superficial relationship is built on what doesn't pass away so quickly—marriage, family, ethnicity, and nationality. But as you think about even those relationships you realize that even they aren't as substantial as they at first appear. Family members move, disagreements become estrangements, and eventually but certainly the deaths of others leave us alone.

Is there anything or anyone to which or to whom we belong that is stronger, more enduring, more substantial, or more secure than the passing relationships of life? Is there any relationship that can endure not only time but also eternity? Can I belong not just superficially but substantially, with enduring reality, truly, without end? Or am I, after all, really "alone in the universe?" I know there are Christians who feel they don't belong. While that is sad, it is not tragic. While they may feel lonely they are not in fact alone and so they need to be shown again the reality

of the enduring, substantial relationships they do have.

Tragic is the non-Christian who doesn't feel lonely but truly is alone—whose relationships are only superficial and temporal. Like the homeowner who confidently thinks he can ward off an intruder, not realizing his gun is empty, so also is the man or woman who wards off loneliness with superficial relationships, when in the end those relationships will fail. What relationships will not fail? What relationships can I count on no matter what happens, even when death happens?

If ever there were people who thought they didn't belong and who thought they had been forgotten it would be the Jewish people in Egypt. For

We were created as relational creatures and superficial relationships only intensify the feelings of loneliness.

400 years they lived in increasingly intolerable slavery. They had become nothing, the refuse of the earth's people. What is more disposable than a 10th generation slave? Yes, they had been promised that a day would come when they would be free, but how difficult must it have been to keep hope alive when generation after generation was born, suffered as slaves and died with no change? Did they have anything in common besides misery and death? Did they belong anywhere?

God stepped into that apparent hopelessness and began to bring to pass the long promised deliverance. At God's direction, Moses demanded of the Pharaoh of Egypt that the people of Israel be freed from slavery to go to their own land. Most of you know that the Pharaoh refused and so God brought increasingly severe plagues on Egypt to convince the Egyptians and the Israelites of God's presence

and power. But due to the hardness of his heart, Pharaoh insanely resisted God. That brings us to the event of Passover.

- Most people know of Passover as some kind of Jewish holiday.
- Many people know it is rooted in Jewish history.
- Some even know it is based on the specific event described in Exodus 12.

Passover is connected to the 10th and final plague that God brought on Egypt. As Moses was being “kicked out” of the Pharaoh’s presence after the 9th plague, Moses turned to him and said, *“This is what the LORD says: ‘About midnight I (the LORD) will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who*

God is about to create a people for Himself, a people belonging to Him and each other, and forever belonging to Him and each other.

sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has

ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.’ (In other words, nothing will happen among the Israelites.) *Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, “Go, you and all the people who follow you!” After that I will leave.’ Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.”* (Exodus 11:4-8) God is about to take a hopeless, destined-for-death, despised people and form them into a kingdom, a nation; a people belonging to Him. He is going to give them a substantial relationship, one that will last forever. From now on, what

they hold most significantly in common will not be their ancestry, and certainly not their slavery, but what they will hold in common is that they are now the new people of God.

In the centuries to come many Jews would get it wrong. They would think that their relationships were based on being descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But that was only the basis of a superficial relationship. The substantial relationship was based on the fact that they now belonged to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That's why 1500 years later the Jewish/Christian Apostle Paul would write, *"Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor (just) because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children."* (Romans 9:6-7) And in Romans 2:28 he says, *"A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly... No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly..."* He belongs to God by what God does and not by ethnicity or nationality. And so God is about to create a people for Himself a people belonging to Him and each other, and forever belonging to Him and each other.

How can this possibly be relevant to us? What you are going to see is that what God did 3500 years ago pictured, symbolized, or demonstrated what God did for us in Christ. In fact, even what God did for the Israelites in Egypt, in making them a people who belong to Him, is based on what God would do, 1500 years later, not only for them but for us as well. Do we need and desire to truly belong, to have real relationships, substantial relationships? The basis of those substantial relationships that endure through time and eternity is shown to us here.

Look at Exodus 12:1-12:

"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your

year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. **The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.** Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must **slaughter them** at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. **The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.**' "(Emphasis Added)

There are three things I want you to see about God's creation of a people who belong to Him:

1. The source of that relationship
2. The means of that relationship
3. The emblems of that relationship

Let's first look at the source of our belonging to God. One

of the things that caught my attention again in my study of this passage was that God told the Israelites that He, God, was going to bring death on every first-born in the land. God's judgment was going to pass through the entire land, even through the neighborhoods of the Israelites. The first-born of the Israelites were not automatically exempt from the judgment. In fact, they were equally deserving of judgment.

In Ezekiel it says that the person who sins dies. (18:4,18) Both the Old and New Testaments confirm that no one is

God's requirement for a relationship with Him is absolute and unbending—God is holy and we must be holy.

righteous, no one seeks for God. (Psalm 14 and Romans 3) God has absolute justification to judge every person and every family, whether Egyptian or Israelite, because all are equally deserving of God's wrath. That might have come as something of a shock to the Israelites.

- They might have thought that because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were their ancestors, they deserved to be saved from the plague of death.
- They might have thought that since they had been slaves so long, surely it was right that they be spared; hadn't they suffered enough?

But the implication is clear enough—everyone comes under this judgment.

Most people yet today think God "grades on a curve." That is not true and never has been true. God's requirement for a relationship with Him is absolute and unbending—God is holy and we must be holy. God cannot tolerate sin in His presence and the wages of sin is death. The only hope for the Israelites *and for us* is if God does something. Not only

are the Israelites deserving of death but they are helpless to do anything about it. After 400 years of slavery and 9 plagues that the Pharaoh resisted, it ought to be apparent to the Israelites that on their own they are hopelessly enslaved. They and we are completely dependent on God. All they and we can do is cry out for God to save us.

And so throughout this passage it is clear that it is God who is acting:

"I will pass through Egypt..." "I will bring judgment..." "I will pass over..." God is acting—He is the only source of salvation. We, too, are bound for judgment and eternal

Because the holiness of God demands holiness and the justice of God demands a life for a life, there can be no forgiveness and no relationship with God without the shedding of blood.

death unless God acts. We have no excuses that mean anything. On our own we are helpless and hopeless. We may have superficial relationships now, but we are headed for an eternity of isolation, of forever alone.

Ignorant and foolish is the man who thinks he will have company in hell. If we are going to belong to God, if we are going to have substantial relationships that last for time and eternity, God must act. And that is precisely what God does.

What we see next is the means that God uses to bring people into a belonging relationship with Himself and each other. In the Exodus account of the first Passover, God told every family to take a lamb or if it was a very small family they were to join with another small family.

- That lamb was to be one year old, in the prime of life.

- It was to be without defect.
- They were to keep the lamb for three days to make certain it was without defect.
- Then they were to slaughter it.
- They were to put some of the blood of the lamb on the doorframe of their house and then they were to eat the meat.

I can imagine some of the Israelites saying to themselves, "How can smearing some blood over the door keep a plague of death from touching us? This is ridiculous!" But God had determined that it takes blood to redeem blood — a life to redeem a life. Hebrews 9:22 says, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."* Because the holiness of God demands holiness and the justice of God demands a life for a life, there can be no forgiveness and no relationship with God without the shedding of blood. To think that is extreme is to show how little we understand of holiness and justice; God cannot violate His own character.

But this all begs the question, "How can the blood of an animal atone or make up for the sins of people?" The answer is, it doesn't! God put a system of animal sacrifice in place that would continue until He provided the perfect Lamb, His own Son, at just the right time to permanently take away the sins of His people and give them a real and lasting relationship with Him and each other.

Referring to the Passover sacrifices and all the other blood sacrifices of the Old Testament, the author of Hebrews writes in chapter 10:

"First (Jesus) said, 'Sacrifices and offerings...you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law

required them to be made). Then (Jesus) said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' (Jesus) sets aside the first to establish the second...Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.... By one sacrifice (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."(10:8-14)

In another place the Apostle Paul makes clear that the sins of all of God's people of all generations are atoned for in the same way—through the death of the Lamb of God, Jesus. Romans 3:25-26 says, *"God presented (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement... (God) did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."* The blood of those lambs smeared over the doors couldn't atone for the sins of God's people. But they pointed forward to a "Lamb" whose blood would and did!

We, Christians aren't being macabre when we speak so much of blood; we are talking about the very means of our relationship with God, the blood of the eternal Son of God, Jesus. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."*

Now I want us to again put ourselves in the place of those Israelites that night. We have been told to take a lamb and kill it and put blood over the door of our home. What would you do? Would you be tempted to sit it out and see what

happens? If you did not put blood over the door, what did God say would happen? You could claim all night that you were descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You could take out and look at the family genealogical record showing that you were part of the tribe of Judah or the tribe of Levi, or part of the First Baptist Church or St. Mary's Catholic Church, but unless you put that blood over the door of your house, your firstborn would die that night.

If you did put blood over the door and the plague of death passed over not killing your first-born what would you say? Would you say that you saved your first-born? Would you claim that your effort of putting

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blood over the door is what kept your first-born from dying? Of course not! You would understand that it was the blood of the sacrifice that atoned for the sin of your family. By putting the blood over the door you simply expressed your faith in God—that God would save you by the grace of substituting a lamb for you. *You were saved by grace through faith.* But your faith was faith in action; it was faith that acted.

We can believe that Jesus is God and we can even know that Jesus died for sins but unless we take the faith/action step of placing our trust in Him, eternal dying is our future. Romans 10:9-10 says, *"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."* Or as the

Apostle Peter said it in Acts 2:21, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

Have you? It's not enough to just sit in your house and think about putting blood over the door or even to think that if you did it would save your first-born's life. Faith acts—it calls on the name of the Lord. It believes in the heart and confesses with the mouth. The Bible says that baptism is certainly one of the first acts of faith.

- I am not saying we must be baptized to be saved.
- I am saying that if one is truly trusting in Jesus, he or she will be baptized because baptism is prescribed by the one in whom we now say we trust.

The baptism doesn't save us anymore than putting the blood over the door saved the Israelites. It is God who saves us, the blood over the door and baptism are expressions of faith in God. The means of our "belonging"

We have become a new people, a people who belong to God and to each other.

relationship with God is by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:12 says, *"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."* "Separate," "excluded," "foreigners," "without hope," and "without God." Could anything more strongly or accurately define what it means to belong nowhere, to be truly alone in the universe, to maybe have superficial relationships but no substantial relationship that will last for time and eternity?

But look at the next verse: *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through*

the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13) What does he mean we have been “brought near?” It means we have become a new people, a people who belong to God and to each other. 1 Peter 2:9-10 “reiterates that: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

From the broader perspective that includes both now and eternity, I have more in common with an Urdu-speaking, shepherding, Pakistani-Christian than I do with my northern-European, middle-class, Bronco-loving neighbor next door. That Pakistani and I are brothers! We were born into different families, ethnicities; we have different histories and nationalities. But we have been re-born into the same eternal family of God. We now have the same Father, we are of the same race, the same citizenship, and we have a common history looking back on the same people as our forefathers and the same events as our family heritage.

That brings me to my last point—the emblems of our new “belonging” relationship with God. The author Moses weaves the instructions about future Passover celebrations into the story of the first Passover. God wanted the annual celebration to be inextricably connected to the actual historical event. God wanted His people to remember what He had done for them. He wanted them to remember that He had saved them and that He had saved them not by their efforts or merit, but by a very real, life for life, sacrifice made for them. And we now know that first Passover looked forward to the last Passover. As we saw earlier in Hebrews 10:11-12, *“Day after day every priest*

stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." And so when the time came for the ultimate Passover Lamb, Jesus, to shed His own blood for the sins of His people, He called His disciples together and initiated a new ritual. From the fuller revelation we are given in the New Testament, we can see that the annual Passover ritual looked forward to the Cross of Jesus. And just before the cross, Jesus took that Passover ritual and changed it to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is the emblem of that completed redeeming grace brought about through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Just as the Passover ritual, before the Cross, was meant to connect the people of God to the Exodus event, so the Lord's Supper, after the

Cross, is meant to connect the people of God to the Cross event. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, *"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

And just as the first Passover was to be observed regularly, so the last Passover is to be observed, "Until he comes." Just as the first and subsequent Passover meals were the emblems of God's redeeming grace that would come, so

the Lord's Supper is the emblem of that completed redeeming grace brought about through Jesus' death and resurrection. Every Sunday, we have the table before us and twice each month we actually participate in the Lord's Supper, all to constantly remind us of the basis of our real, substantial, enduring, "belonging" relationship with God and His people.

This relationship with God and His people is the one that counts because we belong to Him and each other forever. Jesus said, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age...I will never leave you or forsake you. I will come again and take you to be with me forever."* Do you belong? God has acted; He has provided the means for the forgiveness of our sins and an enduring relationship with Him. Will you put the blood over the door? Will you trust Jesus and act on that trust today?

Chapter Eleven

Remember the Great Rescue

Exodus 11-12

Dr. Rich Peterson

Church historian Clair Davis describes the Christian life as “a combination of amnesia and déjà vu.” The follower of Christ is constantly saying, “I know I’ve forgotten this before.” In other words, as we follow Christ we keep needing to learn the same lessons over and over because we keep forgetting them. We suffer from a kind of spiritual amnesia in which we are continually forgetting what God has done on our behalf. And yet this spiritual amnesia is combined with a spiritual déjà vu in which we keep learning what we keep forgetting. It is because we are so forgetful that God so often commands us to remember:

- *“Remember the Lord who is great and awesome”*(Neh. 4:14)
- *“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth”*(Eccles. 12:1)
- *“Remember...I am God, and there is no other”*
- (Isa. 46:9)
- *“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead”*
- (2 Tim. 2:8)

And of all the things God wanted Israel to remember, the greatest, the most significant, and the most important was their rescue from Egypt. Of all the things that were to be remembered, none was more essential than the Exodus. Do you remember the great rescue of God? Do you remember the exodus from Egypt? Do you remember the day of your

salvation?

How could they forget? And yet they did. As even early on in their journey from slavery to the land of promise these same miraculously redeemed people cried out to Moses saying in essence, "Take us back, take us back." *"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"* (Exodus 14: 11-

To say that God "remembers" is to assert that He repeats His acts of saving grace towards His people again and again, and in this way fulfills His promises.

12) How quickly God's people forget.

But God never does. YHWH is the God who r e m e m b e r s . Specifically, *"He (God) remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac*

and with Jacob." Because *"the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them"* (Exodus 2:23-24). More specifically, *"The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...'"* (Exodus 3:7-8a)

God remembers His promises and fulfills them by His mighty hand.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have

given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' " (Exodus 4:21-23)

"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut. 5:15).

Remember the great rescue! No longer a question, but instead a God-given decree. Remember these things. Teach them to your children and grandchildren, and to all generations. Never forget what God has done to secure your salvation. Remember!

- Remember God's righteous wrath upon the unrepentant (Exodus 11, 12:29-30)
- Remember God's lasting ritual of blood and bread (Exodus 12:1-28)
- Remember God's remarkable rescue from slavery and sin (Exodus 12:31-42)

And as we recall and remember these great events we are suddenly struck with an awesome sense of déjà vu in which we learn again what we almost forgot: God fulfills His promises because He remembers His covenant and acts for the salvation of His people.

Remember God's Righteous Wrath Upon the Unrepentant

In Hebrew thought "to remember" is "to act." So, to say that God "remembers" is to assert that He repeats His acts of saving grace towards His people again and again, and in this way fulfills His promises. To say that God "remembers" is also to assert that God repeats His acts of righteous wrath towards those who would continue to disregard His

sovereign power. What God promises, He fulfills:

"Now the Lord had said to Moses, 'I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when you he does, he will drive you out completely. Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold.' (The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people)." (Exodus 11:1-3)

"So Moses said, 'This is what the Lord says: "About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal. Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, "Go, you and all the people who follow you! After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.'" (Exodus 11:4-8)

What God promises, He fulfills: Exodus 12:29-30 says, *"At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead."*

How many times and in how many different ways does God need to communicate the same thing to the unrepentant? Nine different times and in nine different ways God communicated His will and command to Pharaoh and the unrepentant people of Egypt. Nine different times this

leader refused to acknowledge that God was in control. Nine different times Pharaoh refused to change his mind and turn his heart toward God. Despite Nile river blood, despite frogs, gnats, biting flies, dead livestock, horrible boils, unprecedented hail, locusts and despite complete darkness, Pharaoh's heart remained hard and unrepentant.

To repent simply means to have a change of mind. This change of mind then leads to a change of heart. But basically, to repent means to change one's mind and begin seeing things the way God sees things. Nine times God had sought to bring about this repentance in the mind and heart of the leader of

Egypt. Nine different times and in nine different ways God

What God promises,
He fulfills

told Pharaoh that there would be consequences for his lack of submission. Nine different times, this leader of Egypt refused to see things from God's point of view.

So now God *"will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt."* This last one will bring this leader and his nation to their knees. They WILL do as the Lord God has said. They will not only let the people of Israel go, Pharaoh will drive them out completely. All of this will be for the ultimate purpose and glory of God. Look at Exodus 10:1-2: *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord.' "* (Exodus 10:1-2) With terrible and righteous wrath God will exact judgment, *"I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die."*

Even though you missed it before, you won't miss it now—I am God, and Pharaoh, you are not! My desire to bring about my people's salvation WILL be done, and there is nothing more you can say about that. I am the Lord, and I do not negotiate with terrorists! I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals. From the prince to the prisoner, from the richest to the poorest, from the highest to the lowest—all will be stuck down. I am the Lord, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. And then without compromise you will bow before Me in full submission to My sovereign will and purpose. This is My righteous wrath upon the unrepentant.

Dr. Arthur Glasser quotes an anonymous rabbi who said, "A time is coming for all men when they will be either born again, or wish they had never been born at all."¹ The apostle Peter reveals the heart of God when it comes to repentance when he wrote, *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."* (2 Peter 2:9-10)

You will bow before Me in
full submission to My
sovereign will and purpose.

In déjà vu language, the apostle John describes the wrath of God at the end of time:

*"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go, pour out the seven bowls of **God's wrath** on the earth.'*

"The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the

land, and **ugly and painful sores** broke out on the people...

"The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into **blood**...

"The third angel poured out his bowl on the **rivers** and springs of water, and they **became blood**...

"The fifth angel poured out his bowl... and his kingdom was plunged into **darkness**...

"The seventh poured his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came **a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'**

"The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. **God remembered Babylon...and gave her the fury of his wrath.** And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible...

"Then I heard the angel of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One. And I heard the altar respond: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.' " (Rev.16:1-7, 10,17,19-20)

Remember God's Lasting Ritual of Blood and Bread

To make sure that His people would never forget their salvation, God gave them a special memory aid: Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast was meant to be an annual celebration. Three times God told Moses that He wanted Passover to become a permanent addition to Israel's calendar:

"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance."(Exodus 12:14)

"Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come."(Exodus 12:17b)

"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants."(Exodus 12:24)

The Israelites celebrated their first Passover in Egypt. Numbers chapter nine tells us that they continued to celebrate it during the forty years they spent wandering in the desert (Num 9:1-5). Upon entrance into the Promised Land they were to keep it for God said, *"When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony."*(Exodus 12:25) And no sooner had Joshua led the people of God across the Jordan river than they celebrated Passover in their new homeland. (Joshua 5: 10,11) Phillip Ryken summarizes what this ritual was all about:

"Passover was a feast to remember. It was an annual reminder of God's saving grace, in which Israel's deliverance from Egypt was commemorated and celebrated. The exodus was not repeated, of course, but it was symbolically reenacted with blood and with bread. The feast God's people shared was something they could see, taste, touch, and smell. By reliving their escape from Egypt, they preserved the message of salvation in their collective memory. Passover was given so that future generations would know the salvation of their God."²

So significant was this event that a new calendar was created. Because the exodus marked a new beginning, the entire Israelite calendar would reflect its importance. In contrast to the disobedience and the spirit of compromise

of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the Israelites, as the covenant people of God would need to display obedience even to the very finest detail. Instructions were given and were to be followed to the nth degree. On the first month of YOUR calendar, on the tenth day, select one lamb for each family. If your family is too small share a lamb with your nearest neighbor, and calculate carefully how much each person will eat.

Select a lamb (from either sheep or goats), not yet a year old, without any defect, take care of it until the fourteenth day then slaughter it (all the community at twilight), take the blood and smear it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where you eat the lambs. Prepare it carefully by roasting it over the fire—the whole thing; leave nothing uneaten, and if there are leftovers, burn them!

Passover was a feast to remember. It was an annual reminder of God's saving grace, in which Israel's deliverance from Egypt was commemorated and celebrated.

Don't sit around and eat this meal in leisure—no, you must eat it in a hurry—with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover: *"On the same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—the blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and **when I see the blood, I will pass over you.** No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."* (Exodus 12:12-13 emphasis added)

In verses 21-23 these instructions are repeated in a slightly different form and coming between these two sets of Passover instructions is a set of regulations for the Feast of

Unleavened Bread (v. 14-20) that was celebrated the week that followed Passover. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread go together. They are not two separate holidays but one weeklong celebration. In the rest of the Old Testament this festival is sometimes called Passover and sometimes called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, either term can be used to refer to the whole celebration.

Today we are tempted to look at all of this and wonder why all the details? Why would all of this be so important? But look again at the need for extraordinary faith on the part of the Israelites. Faithful obedience to these instructions was the only way in which a person was going to be saved from death that fateful night. Look at Exodus 12:21-24:

"Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said

They were saved by grace
through faith. Grace
because God had told them
exactly what He was
planning to do, when He
would do it and how. Their
response was faith-filled
and faithful obedience.

*to them, 'Go at once
and select the animals
for your families and
slaughter the
Passover lamb. Take a
bunch of hyssop, dip
it into the blood in the
basin and put some of
the blood on the top
and on both sides of
the doorframe. Not
one of you shall go
out the door of his*

*house until morning. When the Lord goes through the land
to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the
top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over the
doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your
houses and strike you down. Obey these instructions as a
lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.' "*

The response of the people was a response of faith. *"Then*

the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded...."(Exodus 12:28) *"By faith he (Moses) kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel."*(Hebrews 11:28) By faith. By faith each family chose a perfect lamb, by faith they slaughtered it and roasted it with bitter herbs, and by faith they spread its blood on the doorframe. By faith they trusted in the ability of the shed blood to save their lives. They were (as all are) saved by grace through faith. The only way to be saved from sin and delivered from death was by trusting in the blood. This is what the Israelites did that first Passover. And in so doing they were saved by grace through faith. Grace because God had told them exactly what He was planning to do, when He would do it and how. Their response was faith-filled and faithful obedience.

In the same way, we are saved by grace through faith. The only way to be saved from sin and delivered from death is by Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, "sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7b). We trust in the blood of Jesus poured out for us on the cross, to cover our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Sometimes we forget this. We too, even as Christ followers, suffer at times from spiritual amnesia. We forget that we are sinners in need of salvation. We forget that God sent His one and only son to be our Savior. We forget that God's Son shed His own blood on the cross for our sins.

So, God has given us a meal through which we will remember. We remember what the Lord has done for us through the Lord's Supper. It was no accident that Jesus was crucified during the Passover season. Jesus had come to make all things new, and so when He celebrated Passover with His disciples just before His arrest, He not only kept the feast of Passover, He initiated a new

ordinance—a ritual of blood and bread. He gave His disciples bread and said, *"This is my body"* (Matt. 26:26). Then he gave them the cup and said, *"This is my blood of the covenant"* (Matt. 26:28). Jesus was (and is) the Passover Lamb sacrificed to take away our sins.

Phillip Ryken reminds us that, *"We remember his sacrifice every time we celebrate the (ordinance) of communion. Passover was for the old covenant: It looked back to the exodus. The Lord's Supper is for the new covenant: It looks to the cross. We celebrate it by eating bread and drinking the cup. Why do we do this? Jesus said, 'Do this in remembrance of me.'* (Luke 22:19) The Lord's Supper is a feast to remember. It helps make sure that we never forget...."³ Remember God's lasting ritual of blood and bread.

Remember God's Remarkable Rescue from Slavery and Sin

It was the dead of night. Most people were asleep in their beds. Some had been up all night, while others slept soundly. Then, without warning, Cynthia interrupted my slumber with the news that "It is time." My stupid response was, "Time for what?" It was the night our first son was born. It was also the dead of night when most people were sleeping in their homes when Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and announced, "It is time." "Up...leave...go!" Worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, take it all...just go and go now! And as you do bless me.

Finally! Finally, full surrender. Up...leave...go! How long Moses and the people of God had waited to hear those words. How much they had seen their God do on their behalf to bring this great rescue. Finally, Pharaoh had enough. Finally, he realized that the great God of heaven is all-powerful and that what He says, He will do. Finally,

Pharaoh comes to fully recognize his need for full submission. He asks for, and he hopes for a blessing. And who is it that blesses, but the One who is more powerful.

And so hurriedly the people of Israel depart, leaving behind over four hundred years of slavery. Quickly they gather their possessions and they plunder their neighbors. In rapid-fire succession they collect all they can carry, taking their dough before the yeast was added and carried it on their shoulders. Up...leave...go! And they did! Their exodus had come at last! They were FREE. Take up...your cross...follow! Remember? Remember!

The foreshadowing of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God; of the Lord's Supper, the new ordinance spiritually commemorating and celebrating with blood and bread; and the rescue from sin that is ours through Jesus Christ—we have only touched on all these exciting New Testament implications.

God has given us a meal
through which we will
remember. We remember
what the Lord has done for
us through the Lord's
Supper.

As we dig deeper in coming chapters, I hope we will feel that strange combination of amnesia and déjà vu, which will leave us thinking, "I know I've forgotten this before."

End Notes

¹ *Reach Out and Grow*, Institute for American Church Growth, 1974

² Phillip Ryken, *Exodus*, 2005, unpublished

³ Ibid

Chapter Twelve

You are Not Your Own Exodus 13

One of the major problems with many who call themselves Christians is that they say they believe in God, but then they act as if they are God. The problem is as old as Satan himself of whom it is said:

"You said in your heart,

'I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne

above the stars of God...

I will make myself like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:13)

It's as old as humanity, when Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:5, *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..."* It is the historical and universal problem of mankind: *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator."* (Romans 1:25)

Again, we say we believe in God but we act as if we were that God.

It is manifested in nearly every aspect of life.

- Commitments are feared.
- Independence is prized.
- We treat our time, our money, and our energies as if they exist for our pleasure.
- Education, jobs, even relationships and hobbies are sought mainly for the advantage they will bring us.
- We respond to setbacks and difficulties as if there is no God in control.

The “good life” is to somehow be physically, psychologically and financially independent—self-reliant. The problem is summed up in the old saying, “The self-made man who worships his creator.” Or to parody another saying, “The self-made man has a fool for a god.”

“Independence”—the word makes such a nice sound in our ears. “Independence”—not under the control of anyone else and not reliant on anyone else—the “captain of my own fate.” How many older teens have muttered under their breath, “I can hardly wait until I’m on my own.” But the truth is, independence is an impossibility. Now I realize that in a superficial way we can be what we popularly refer to as independent in some things. The young adult is living independently when he is no longer dependent on his parents for livelihood. But truly being under no one’s control and reliant on no one are impossibilities.

The Bible says it this way, “You are not your own...” I hear in that both a warning and a promise. The warning is that “you are not your own” and the promise is that “you are not your own.” The truth is that as much as we might like to be, we are not our own. So the question is, to whom do we belong? We also like the word, “emancipation.” It too has the sound of freedom and independence. But the Latin from which the word is derived means, “to transfer ownership.” Even if you are emancipated from one owner, who takes up the new management? Who or what controls, influences, or owns us? 1 John 5:19 says, *“We know that... the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”*

I said the phrase, “You are not your own” is both a warning and a promise. The warning is don’t be a fool—self-reliance is a euphemism for being under the control of the evil one. But “you are not your own” is also a promise: for *“We know that we are children of God...”* (1 John 5:19) Romans 8:9

says, *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you."*

I'm suggesting that the answers to the following questions touch on everything about us: to whom do we (you and I) belong, by what means and price and for what purpose? In our on-going study of the Old Testament book of Exodus, we last left the storyline at Passover. Every Israelite family had been commanded to slay a lamb and put the blood of it over and on the sides of the doorway to their home. That

night the plague of death passed over the Israelites and struck down all the firstborn of the Egyptians so that the Pharaoh would finally allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. We left the

"Independence"—the word makes such a nice sound in our ears. But truly being under no one's control and reliant on no one are impossibilities.

story at Exodus 12:50-51: *"All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions."*

The first part of chapter 13, which is our text now, is an excursus, an important digression, in which Moses gives some instruction for later in Israel's life. Immediately after this excursus, we find the storyline continue: *"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle."* (Exodus 13:17-18)

But in between, in Exodus 13:1-16, God through Moses

gives them and us a visual reminder of "You are not your own."

Look at Exodus 13:1-16:

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.'

"Then Moses said to the people, 'Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. Today, in the

It is readily apparent that the rituals were to remind the people and also to give occasion for the instruction of their children that "you are not your own."

month of Abib, you are leaving. When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land he swore to your forefathers to give

you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month: For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. On that day tell your son, "I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt." This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.'

"After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of

your livestock belong to the LORD. Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

*"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. **This is why** I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."*

It is immediately apparent that God is establishing two rituals. One, in verses 3-10, is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread—bread made without yeast. I am going to give only this brief mention of the first ritual here, the feast of unleavened bread, for two reasons: first, it is so closely connected to Passover that I think its major significance is addressed in that context and second, I find no significant counterpart to the feast of unleavened bread in the New Covenant. So it is the second ritual, in verses 1-2, and 11-16, the consecration, the returning to God, of the firstborn animals and sons that we will focus on.

It is readily apparent that the rituals were to remind the people and also to give occasion for the instruction of their children that "you are not your own."

- We see it in the first ritual in verses 8-10: "On that day tell your son..."
- And we see it in the second ritual in verse 14: "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him..."

So what does this second ritual teach? As I said it earlier,

"To whom do we (you and I) belong, by what means and price do we belong and for what purpose do we belong?"

I can rather easily imagine the scene: It is spring, the birthing season. The family knows every animal and which ones are about to deliver. The father takes note of some of the female goats and sheep and when they give birth for the first time; then he takes the new male lambs and kids and brings them nearer the tent where they live. At the right time he takes a knife and slays the lamb and offers it as a sacrifice to the Lord.

If you have ever watched an animal die, you know that it can be a dramatic and even traumatic experience.

"Daddy, why did you do that?"

"My son, first of all I did it because the Lord told us to."

Exodus 13:12 says, *"You are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD."*

"But Daddy, why would God ask us to take the firstborn lamb and sacrifice it to him?"

"Son, the firstborn male animal has always been symbolic of the whole next generation—males and females. So when we give the firstborn to God as a sacrifice, we are saying that we recognize that it all belongs to God. The animals don't belong to us son; they belong to God."

The children would watch time after time as the firstborn male animal was sacrificed. What a powerful and perpetual reminder—it all belongs to God. Can you imagine as the children got older and they began to think about the apparent waste of this? Or did they wonder why their father didn't sacrifice the lame or sickly animals and let the good ones live? (See Numbers 18:21) The father explained that they gave the first as an indication of trust that God will provide more and they give the best because God is

worthy.

It was not only the first of the livestock that they brought in sacrifice to the Lord but also the first of all they produced or as we would say it *"all they earned or received."* Nehemiah 10:35 says, *"We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree."* The same concept is taught in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..."* Here we have in mind ALL we earn and we first set aside a portion of the whole to give to the Lord. We give not only to meet a need

The children would watch time after time as the firstborn male animal was sacrificed. What a powerful and perpetual reminder—it all belongs to God.

but more importantly to remind ourselves that it is all from God and belongs to God and our trust is in Him not in the money. I think there is precedent in both the Old and New Testaments for regular giving and in this Corinthian passage, even for weekly giving—mainly as a regular and frequent reminder that it all belongs to God.

Who gets the first part of our income? Is it God or some lender, entertainer, or retail store? The firstborn and firstfruits belong to the Lord—to use them otherwise is to steal from God. To use what has been entrusted to us, other than for the owner's purposes, is to violate the owner. Malachi 3:8-12 says, *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse..."*

But the sacrifice of the firstborn male lambs wasn't the end of object lesson. Exodus 13:13 says, *"Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons."* The firstborn males of some kinds of animals couldn't be sacrificed to the Lord. For example, when a firstborn male donkey was born the owner could just kill it or could again get a lamb. Then he would slay the lamb instead of the donkey.

We are held captive. From conception we are held in slavery by a sinful nature and by a sinful world.

Likewise when a woman had her first son, the son couldn't be literally sacrificed to the Lord but an animal would be

sacrificed instead of the child. Later, money could be given instead of a lamb but at first it appears, when we think even of the earlier experience of Abraham and Isaac, that it took a blood sacrifice to redeem the child. Again, imagine the scene: A woman in the community gives birth to her first baby boy and the husband goes to his flock and gets a lamb, which he slays in sacrifice to the Lord.

"Daddy, why is he doing that?"

"Son, that lamb is taking the place of the child. The same thing happened when you were born. As the oldest son, you represent the whole next generation. And God has given us this very physical and powerful reminder that you and every one of us belong to God. Son, you are not your own."

And what of us? 1 Corinthians 6:19 says, *"You are not your own; you were bought at a price."* The first question I asked earlier was, "To whom do you belong?" The answer is, "You belong to the Lord!"

The second question is "By what means and price do we belong to God?"

"Daddy, I understand that we are not our own and that we belong to God. But why does a lamb have to die for that?"

Look at Exodus 13:14: *"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.' "*

"Son, God, in His justice, has decreed 'the soul that sins will die' and 'the wages of sin is death'—eternal separation from God. Because we are sinners too, when the plague of death went through Egypt, you and I both, as firstborns representing both generations, would have justly died in that judgment. But God provided another life to die instead of us —He provided the lamb. And son, every time we sacrifice a lamb in place of a firstborn son, just as we did for you when you were born, we remember how God brought us out of Egypt by His mighty hand and by His grace—how He freed us from bondage to the Egyptians and our own sin."

The Bible calls it "redemption." Exodus 13:13 says, *"Redeem every firstborn among your sons."* Redemption means to secure the release of someone by paying a price. Iraqi terrorists are abducting people and demanding a ransom. The price of Israel's release was the death of the firstborn Egyptians and the death of the lambs in each household at Passover.

We too are held captive. From conception we are held in slavery by a sinful nature and by a sinful world. As free as we might appear, we are controlled by the influences of our forebearers and the world in which we live. 1 Peter 1:18 says, *"You were redeemed from **the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers...**"* And,

Colossians 1:13-14 says, "*For (God) has rescued us from **the dominion of darkness***" by redemption. (Emphasis Added)

The Bible says, as I mentioned earlier, that we are not our own. We are either owned by the evil one and live in the dominion of darkness or God owns us. In the "dominion of darkness" we live in the "empty way of life handed down to (us) from (our) forefathers..." If you are a first generation Christian, then you know something of the empty way of life handed down to you. If you are second or third generation Christian then you probably don't have to go very far back to see what it could have been like to live in the dominion of darkness.

I don't know much about him but my paternal great-grandfather died drunk being hit by a train as he stumbled home on the tracks one night. It doesn't take much to imagine the kind of life he and the whole family lived because of his futile way of life. By God's grace, his son, my grandfather was redeemed from that futility and it began a whole new lineage handed down to my father and to me. I'm not saying we are Christians by being in the right family; I'm saying we are given the great advantage of having godly models before us.

We are held captive to the old way of life, the kingdom of darkness, until God redeems us. And the Old Testament law only shows us how helpless and hopeless we are until God intervenes. We are redeemed from the curse of the law's penalties. We stood ready to die for our sins until Christ died in our place. Galatians 3:13 says, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*"

We are redeemed from having to keep all the ceremonial law of sacrifices and regulations. Galatians 4:4 says, "*But*

when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Christ fulfilled the ceremonial law and we are no longer under its tutelage but are now adopted with all the privileges of God's children.

We are redeemed from the law of works; that is, trying to be good enough for God. Christ has perfectly obeyed the law and we belong to Him. Romans 5:19 says, *"Through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous."*

We are redeemed from the guilt of sin. Colossians 1:14 says, *"In (Christ) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

By what means do we belong to God instead of the old way of life? By redemption. God redeems us; He buys us out of that slavery. At what price? 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, *"For you know that it was **not with perishable things such as silver or gold** that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **but with the precious blood of Christ**, a lamb without blemish or defect."* (Emphasis Added) Jesus came to be the price, the ransom:

We are not our own. We are either owned by the evil one and live in the dominion of darkness or God owns us.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Jesus' life was the price of that ransom:

"The Lord Jesus Christ... gave himself for our sins to

rescue us from the present evil age.” (Galatians 1:4) (See also Eph 1:7; Rev 5:9) And that ransom was paid, was substituted, for us:

*“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous **for the unrighteous**, to bring you to God.”* (1 Peter 3:18—emphasis added) (See also 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrew 9:28) Every time we see the table of the Lord’s Supper, every time we eat and drink from it, we are reminded of the ransom paid for our release.

Back to our three questions:

- To whom do you belong?
- By what means and price?
- And for what purpose?

Exodus 13:1-2 says, *“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every*

What is your only (hope) in
life and death?

“That I belong—body and
soul in life and in death—not
to myself but to my faithful
Savior, Jesus Christ.

*womb among the
Israelites belongs to
me, whether man or
animal.’ ”* Again I
remind you that the
firstborn son
represented the
whole. In Exodus
4:22 it says, *“This is*

*what the LORD says: **Israel** is my firstborn son and I told
you, ‘Let my son go, **so he may worship me.**’ ”*

To “consecrate” something is to dedicate it to a sacred purpose. Every time a family sacrificed a firstborn lamb and every time they sacrificed lambs for their firstborn sons they were reminded that they and everyone else were consecrated to God. Their purpose in life was to bring glory to God.

We are consecrated to the same sacred purpose:

*"But you are a **chosen** people, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy** nation, a people **belonging** to God, **that you may declare the praises** of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* (1 Peter 2:9)

And, *"Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness **and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**"* (Titus 2:14)

And again in Colossians: *"that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may **please him in every way**: bearing fruit in every good work."* (1:10) (All Emphasis Added)

We are back nearly where we started:

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body"—consecrate yourself to the Lord." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) We don't offer lambs any longer because Christ has offered Himself as the perfect, infinite Lamb. But we still respond:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1) (See also Eph. 1:11-12; Eph. 2:8-10)

The Heidelberg Catechism asks: "What is your only (hope) in life and death?"

The Answer: "That I belong—body and soul in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of

eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

I close with the purpose of these rituals of Exodus 13. God wanted the parents to observe these rituals regularly so that their experience of deliverance from Egypt would become their children’s experience as well. The purpose was instructional. Very specific rituals were established and controlled to the end that the children would ask and then experience in sensory ways the answers. They were to see it, and taste it, to realize the cost of their freedom. And they were to do this over and over again. The Bible places great emphasis on the repetition of ritual.

Commentator Peter Enns writes, “Ritual breeds familiarity. It seeps into one’s subconscious and, however subtly, begins to exert a formative influence...Repetition and familiarity work. What is repeated becomes familiar, and this becomes part of us. Our own culture understands this, but alas, not always the church. Far too many equate ritual with spiritual dryness. True, ritual and liturgy can be dead—even using the terms can raise hackles—but only when the significance and power of those rituals are forgotten. Spiritual death is not the property of ritual itself. To the contrary, ritual has always been and will always be a means of securing for future generations the power and reality of the gospel.”¹

Do our children see us participating in the rituals of worship? Do they hear us singing praise to our God, giving our offerings, praying, listening to God’s word preached, and most importantly, participating in the Lord’s Supper? Do we create the contexts wherein they will ask and we tell them what these things mean? I want our children to ask, “What does this mean?” Then I can answer, “The Lord has redeemed us!”

End Notes

¹ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p. 261

Chapter Thirteen

God's Provision in the Disappointing Desert **Exodus 15:22-17:7** **Presented by Dan Luebcke**

GOD OFTEN REVEALS HIS PROVISION AND HIS PRESENCE THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE APPEARS TO BE ABSENT.

Meant To Live

I shop a lot at Wal Mart. Does anyone shop at Wal Mart like me? You don't have to admit it, that's fine; I'm the one preaching. I was walking around Wal Mart and one of the things I love to do is just wander the aisles. I find myself very enamored of all the STUFF. And I noticed something as I was browsing through the DVD's and the movies I want to buy. Looking at the CD's to see what's new out there, I came across a section that said "*the Hottest selling CD's.*" So I started browsing through to see what is the hottest selling CD? I was surprised; there is a CD I bought a while ago that is still one of the hottest selling CD's. It's the album *The Beautiful Letdown*, by a group called Switchfoot.

If you don't know about this band, let me give you a little history. This is a band that loves Jesus. These are people who have committed their lives to Christ and they have created music and it's selling to both believers as well as non-believers. And as I stood there looking at this CD, still being one of the hottest selling CD's, I asked myself "Why are people buying so many albums?" Switchfoot has even showed up on the campus of CU Boulder—I was up there visiting one of our students, and there was a Switchfoot

sticker on the wall in the restaurant where we were eating, right next to a "God is Dead!" sticker! And I thought, "Man, these guys are doing ministry! This is exciting!" What is it about this band that has struck the hearts of so many people in America and the world? While they do have a unique sound, I believe it is their lyrics. Read these words from their song entitled, "Meant To Live."

*"We were meant to live for so much more
Have we lost ourselves?
Somewhere we live inside
Somewhere we live inside
We were meant to live for so much more
Have we lost ourselves?
Somewhere we live inside."*

Everyone loves that song because it's truth... that there is a sense that we have lost ourselves. And deep down in the heart of every human being, there's a sense that we were

When we buy into the message of what we fill our lives with; it leads from one disappointment to the next, being more and more discontent.

created to live for so much more than what we are pouring our lives into. And this battle is seen, I think, all over the world, but I think it's hard to do in America, because everywhere you and I

turn, we're being told to possess things that will ultimately fulfill us. All you have to do is read the newspaper or turn on the TV. I bought into this when I was younger! We can all admit to this. I was watching TV the other day and a Volkswagen commercial came on where a man is on a test drive—have you seen it? And as he pulls around the corner, all of a sudden he tells the salesman "get down!" so the sales guy ducks, and he drives past this girl and he's like

"yeah..." pretending it's his car, hoping she's going to be impressed with him. The message was this: "Listen, if you don't have a woman, drive this vehicle and women will like you! They'll be impressed with you." But is that really true? Is buying a vehicle really going to fulfill me?

So I ask, "Why is the song I mentioned earlier so important in the life of our culture? And why is the album selling millions of CD's?" I think it is because there's a sense that the world we live in isn't as fulfilling as it promises. And as a result, there is an overwhelming sense of being discontent with the life we're living. We see it over and over again, when we buy into the message of what we fill our lives with; it leads from one disappointment to the next, being more and more discontent.

I'll never forget when we lived in our little apartment and I couldn't wait to live in a house. I thought that if I just lived in a bigger house, my life would be more content. Well, I forgot that the payment would be twice as much, so it ruined that program. I began to think, "God, if I just didn't drive this 1985 Honda, my life would be better." And so now I drive a '97 Nissan Sentra, and before you start thinking "wow that's a great car," it got nailed in a hailstorm here. It looks like a golf ball. I drive a Titleist. Not "I'd rather be driving a Titleist," I drive a Titleist! Don't be that impressed. All I have to do is walk out of the church six days a week here and think, "I could use a better car!" Discontentment is everywhere. And what I find most interesting about discontentment is that it's just not outside of these walls. It's in the church, and it's with the people of God who know His love. And we have to ask ourselves, "What do we do with this complaining discontentment in our life?" That brings us to our passage in our continuing study of the book of Exodus.

The Red Sea in the Rear View Mirror

Earlier we see God delivered His people, and they walked through water!! They didn't walk on water, they walked through it! A miraculous story of the power, provision and promise of God for His people! These people saw the sea part and then they walked across it to the dry ground on the other side. That was chapter 14. Now we come to chapter 15 and see a song of praise. We've all been there. God's given us the Red Sea, we've walked through it and we're singing! The nation of Israel is singing! They're singing about how awesome God is and about His power and His love, and I love the very end of it. Moses is singing about God's glory and then his sister sings about how the Egyptians were killed:

"Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.' "

This is a party! We can sing about people dying, and it's good! They have just seen God wipe out the enemy. God provided, but it wasn't enough. So we have to ask ourselves "What's next in the story?" After God brought them through the Red Sea, what is God going to do with His people?

The Complaining Never Ends

Look at Exodus 15: 22-27:

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?' Then Moses

cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water."

This is not how I would have written the story. I would not have taken the people of God from the top of the mountain—in the Red Sea—to the lowly desolate desert. But that's why I'm not God. Why does God take His people into the desert? Why does He take them from the Red Sea where they have seen

His presence and straight into the desert? Can you imagine? They go from all this water to NO water. What a stark contrast!

The nation of Israel is singing! They're singing about how awesome God is and about His power and His love.

Walking through walls of water to "I'm feeling a little parched Lord, three days of walking in the desert..." No water. So why the grumbling? Why the complaining?

What's awesome about the Old Testament is that it's written as a story. One of the ways we study the Bible in a story, in narrative literature, is to look for words that repeat in the story. That's why we go from 15:22 to 17:7. In these three stories, we find one word nine times: *grumbling*. It's the people of God complaining about the desert. They're extremely discontent. But what happened? God made water sweet! Is that enough? No, it wasn't enough. That's what we see in chapter 16:

"The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled

against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.' "

Can you imagine what Moses must have felt? What does the narrator, the author of this story tell us about who is complaining at first? In the first story he says "the people." In this story, it's not just some people; it's the *whole Israelite community* complaining, moaning, and whining about no food. This grumbling about no water from some of the people at the beginning has now spread to everyone! Everyone is complaining. They're not just complaining to

They are angry. Now they are putting God to the test. They're really in rebellion.

Moses, but they've brought Aaron into the story as well.

So what does God do? He says to Moses, "I

will rain down bread from heaven for you. And the people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." They were without water, and now they're without food. And God says "I am going to give you both. I gave you water and now I will give you food." And He provides. But that wasn't enough. The Israelites still lacked faith in God. And that takes us to our final story in 17:1-7:

"The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'"

Now they are not just complaining and whining, they are

quarrelling. They are angry. Now they are putting God to the test. They're really in rebellion. The life that was promised to Abraham, which I'm sure all of them thought about as they headed to the Red Sea, the Promised Land is coming... Well this is hardly the Promised Land! This is the dry desert with no water and no food and they thought they were all going to die!

Why Complaining?

So why the complaining? Why is this the story after the Red Sea? I think we have to go all the way back to the beginning in Genesis:

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' "

Complaining is a symptom from which we all suffer. And it's sin. And we have been hiding from God ever since. We get off the mountain, we walk through the Red Sea, and we walk back to life. We leave on a Sunday morning, back to our chores and issues and discontentment and reminders that the life we're living is not quite enough. And we complain! We do it because we're sinful people. I believe the root problem of complaining is that we all love ourselves way too much. We are completely obsessed with self. And that's the problem in the garden. Think about it: there was no sin and yet the serpent was crafty enough to deceive people who were in perfect relationship with God.

How much more is that true of us today in our culture? If there can be a sense of discontentment in the garden, there can easily be a sense of discontentment here and now. And so we have this issue: Who will be the captain of our ship? Do you remember when Timothy McVay died? As they read his final words, I'll never forget his opening line, "I'm the captain of my own ship." I wonder where his ship sailed that day when he passed from life to death. What about your ship? Who is the captain? This starts at a young age.

We have to decide as a complaining people, as people who live with discontentment, which road we'll choose: the Israelite road or the road of God.

My wife and I recently went out with our family to the Heritage Square Music Hall, and my mom watched our kids. She put my 2 year old, Josiah to

bed, he fell right asleep. The oldest one, Noah, who's almost 4, knew that grandma was there and he could take advantage of the situation. So he thought he would stay up for awhile, and my mom was running out of things to do to coerce him to sleep, so she thought she would sing to Noah. At this moment she couldn't really figure out what to sing, so she started singing, "Everybody loves Noah. Daddy loves Noah, Mama loves Noah," going through everyone in our family who loves Noah. And then I think something triggered in her mind—okay, we need to change the song, so she sang, "Jesus Loves Me this I Know." And Noah goes "no, no, no—sing about Noah! Sing about Noah!!" That's the song we sing in our heart from birth until death, that it's all about us. And God writes in Scriptures, "People of God, I have answers for you."

The Struggle of Being Discontent

We have to decide as a complaining people, as people who live with discontentment, which road we'll choose: the Israelite road or the road of God. What's awesome about this Old Testament picture is that we have these action words. The people of God are grumbling and God is asking them to choose Him and His plan.

Let's take the Israelite plan first. Let's just keep on complaining. How does that sound? Let's say we live for 80 years, and we complain for 80 years. I don't know if that's necessarily the right answer. Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:10:

"And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel."

Isn't it true that complaining leads to a feeling like death? Here, they physically died, but an attitude of complaining, an attitude of discontentment, leads to a life that is filled with this feeling of death! I don't want to choose that way!

So if I don't want to choose that way, what way do I choose? I think it's God's way. Before we look at what God is doing, what He's actually doing in this story to help His people fall more in love with Him, I want to look at Romans 15:4:

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

As a body of believers in this church, we should be thanking our senior pastor that he opened up what was written in the past, because it longs to give us hope. It longs to set our hearts and our minds in a direction towards heaven.

God's Purpose for the Desert

What are the messages God wants to get through to His

people? I think there are three, and we'll take a look at each narrative. The first is this: God has a purpose for the desert. It's easy for us to think about God's purposes through the Red Sea. But what about when we feel like He's not there? As we look at the first narrative, I want you to hear these words, at the end of verse 25:

"There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, 'If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.'"

God's purpose for the Israelites is to test them. Now when I say that, do we think first that He wants us to fail? We have to see that God's testing of the Israelites and God's testing of us, in the desert in our lives, is to display our weaknesses—to display the sinful attitudes of our hearts. And we see that in the Israelites's complaints in the desert, "God doesn't care! God doesn't care! God doesn't care!" And God's purpose is, "I care. I want you to be a people who listen carefully to My voice." His purpose for us in the desert is that we would hear His voice; that we would fall more in love with Him. The main point of God's testing is to show His unbelievable grace in the lives of people. He is the God who called them out of Egypt, and He has a plan, and He intends to accomplish His purpose, whether it's in the Red Sea or in the desert. His purpose will be accomplished. So I'm reminded that God has a purpose.

Pastor Nelson has talked a lot about Corrie Ten Boom, a concentration camp survivor, and I think she really says it well. She says, "Often I have heard people say, 'How good God is! We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at the lovely weather!' Yes, God is good

when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister, Betsie, to starve to death before my eyes in a German concentration camp. I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged there. Everything around us was dark, and there was darkness in my heart. I remember telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. 'No, Corrie,' said Betsie, 'He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him".' "

So are we a body of people who fear God, and in the desert, look for His purpose? Coming

The main point of God's testing is to show His unbelievable grace in the lives of people.

soon, I'll have the privilege of doing something I've never, ever done, and it's residing over the burial of one of my family members who died this last week. My aunt was an amazing woman, who has been a paraplegic for most of her life. And her inability to move finally caught up with her and ultimately destroyed her body over the last six months and she took her last breath just this last week. And God had a purpose. One of the purposes in seeing her suffer over these six last months has been to remind me of how much God suffered for me. And to watch my aunt smile and to think that she's so close to running again —God has purpose!

God's Provision

But that's not the only thing. And in fact, it's not the most important thing in this story. There's a second thing and it's His provision. Not only does God have a purpose for the desert, but He puts us there to show us that He provides. And the main message here is that God does not give us

what we want, He gives us what we need. He does not give us what we want. He gives us what we need. And this is a hard message in America. I have a lot of wants. I really, really need a diesel truck. I need to lower my handicap in golf. That's just what I want. But it's not what I need. And so as I was thinking about this part of the message that God has for His people, I began to wrestle with this, because it's not like they lacked any evidence. In chapter 16, God provides manna every morning. And He provides it in abundance for them every single morning.

So what's the point of His provision? It's not that they needed more evidence—it's that they lacked faith. And what's amazing about this story is in verses 31-35. What are we supposed to do with His provision?

"The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, 'This is what the LORD has commanded: "Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt." ' So Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come.' As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan."

God asked the nation to remember His provision. He didn't say "Pile up all the complaints on some paper, put them in a jar, and carry them with you to remind you all how stupid you are." That's not His message! His message was "Take some of this manna, and keep it before our people. And it's not just for our people, but I want it to be for the people

after us, and the people after them, and the people after them. And I never want you to forget that I provided for all of your needs." That's the message for the 12 year olds in this church. And I wonder how well I'm doing it, how well you're doing it: passing on the message that God provides for all of our needs. Do they get it —that God will meet every single one of our needs?

God's Presence

And if that's not enough, God promises us His presence. He has a purpose for the desert, He provides in the desert, and He gives us His presence:

"And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?' " (Exodus 17:7)

I wonder why we believe that the place God called us to would be the place He would leave us? Doesn't that seem strange? We find in chapter 17, verse 1, that the whole Israelite community set out from the desert of sin, *"traveling from place to place as the Lord **commanded.**"* (Emphasis added) And so we know that where the Lord leads, the Lord is. And He provides His presence. And when I think about the people of Israel moving from one side of the Red Sea to the other, we have to remember something very important about them and their relationship with God at this point. They are very young in their faith. They're very young. And so God is taking them to the desert to teach them very, very foundational truths about what it means to believe in Him and to let Him lead. God says, "I have a purpose for you." God says, "I'm going to provide for you." And God says, " I will give you My presence."

And so He turned the bitter water sweet, He gave them manna and quail, and He gave them water from a rock! Moses struck this rock, and enough water poured out to supply the whole nation and the livestock! And God said,

"I'm with you." But somehow, that still wasn't enough.

God's Ultimate Provision —The Picture of Jesus

And as we read this story about God, and we start thumbing through the pages of everything else He does in Exodus, and as we move on through the Old Testament to Joshua, what do we find? Moses never saw the Promised Land. But Joshua did. God provided His presence for His people. His provision and His purpose kept getting accomplished. Then we come to the prophets. And God knows the heart of His people. He says that one day, He will ultimately provide His presence, and He will become a human.

So the complaining people of God can look no further than God Himself, who provided Himself as an offering so that we could have life. And we remind ourselves every Sunday that our cross is empty and we're waiting to hear Jesus step into this earth.

Chapter Fourteen

The Battle Belongs to the Lord The Place of Prayer in the Battle for our Souls Exodus 17:8-16

Have you ever wondered if God is real? Have you ever thought to yourself, "What if there is no God after all?"

Some good people get the worst kinds of diseases and die while some bad people live in the lap of luxury. A missionary dies at 35 years of age in an automobile accident while a Ku Klux Klansman lives into his 80's. Some Christians who get sick pray and are healed, others pray and they die. Some Christians seem to prosper in everything they do while others languish in near poverty. And you don't have to live very long to realize these differences are not simply a matter of intelligence or industriousness.

A number of years ago a Jewish Rabbi wrote a book that didn't answer the question very well but certainly asked it well—"Why do bad things happen to good people?"¹ One response came from Ellie Weisel, a WWII concentration camp prisoner who came out of his experience convinced there could be no God. Others have clung to their belief in the existence of God but have supposed Him to be absent from their individual lives in any practical ways.

- "There may be a God, but I don't expect anything from Him."
- "The sun and the rain alike seem to fall on the just and the unjust alike."

The question is often asked in the midst of crisis or discouragement, "Is the Lord with us or not?"

How about you? Is the Lord with you? Can you and do you trust Him with your life? As you move through the mundane and the momentous experiences of everyday life, do you know that God is there, protecting and providing? In the book of Exodus the Israelites ask the very question I just asked, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

After their escape from Egypt, and God's destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, Moses led the people into the desert on their way to the Promised Land. But immediately they ran into trouble. Exodus 15:22-23 says, *"For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter."* So God made the water drinkable.

Then in Exodus 16:1-2 it says, *"The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai... In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron"* about no food. So God gave them Manna. Next, *"The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin,*

When, from our perspective, bad things happen to us, the question we ask is, "Is God here or not?"

traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink... But the people were thirsty

for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?'" (Exodus 17:1,3) And God gave them water to drink. But the text says in Exodus 17:7 *"And (Moses) called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they*

tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

When, from our perspective, bad things happen to us, the question we ask is, "Is God here or not?" It appears to me that the author of the book is attempting to answer that question when he writes of yet another incident in the lives of these, God's people. Look at Exodus 17:8-16: *"The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.'*

"So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, 'For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.' "

With the added perspective we are given by the New Testament, we can look back on the Israelites' experience of the Old Testament and see that it parallels our own spiritual experience.

- Their bondage in Egypt is like our own captivity to sin—our lives before salvation.
- Their active faith at Passover, trusting God's

provision through the sacrificial lamb is like our trust in God's ultimate Lamb, His own son, the Lord Jesus—this is justification, conversion and new life.

- The long walk from Egypt to the Promised Land is also a metaphor for the Christian life lived between conversion and being ushered into the presence of Jesus at our death or His second coming.

And this long walk, this Christian life, is God's means of fitting us for heaven, of changing us from weak, immature new believers into mature, trusting, and faithful people of God.

These experiences of Israel in the desert parallel our own Christian lives.

- Earlier we saw the Israelites, weak in faith, graciously provided for by God.
- Now we come to the first attack from outside—they meet the enemy and their lives and God's purposes in the world are on the line. "Is the Lord among us or not?"

The first thing we learn from this encounter is that the battle in life is real and it is for "all the marbles." Exodus 17:8 says, *"The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim."* Years later Moses would describe the attack again. *"Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God."* (Deuteronomy 25:17-18.) The Amalekites attacked from the rear, picking off the stragglers.

You might remember that the Israelites are the descendants of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. The Amalekites are descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau. Animosity

between these two peoples was already hundreds of years old and would continue for at least another 1500 years down to the birth of Christ when Herod (a descendant of Esau) would attempt to kill the Christ-child.² In this Exodus encounter between the Amalekites and the Israelites, people died—it was a very real battle. Not only was it real but it also had far-reaching implications. This was not simply one nomadic tribe fighting another tribe for water rights. It was a battle between Satan and God for the souls of God's people. God's plan was to take these former slaves and fit them for the Promised Land so that they might live there in His love for generations to come.

In Jewish tradition, the Amalekites became the symbol of evil incarnate. Much as the name Hitler stands for all that is evil and opposed to the Jewish people so the Amalekites were the archenemy of Israel not only then but, as I said, for generations to come. The Amalekites were the symbol of all that opposes God's saving work in the world. This was not just a tribal battle; this was

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an eruption of a cosmic battle between God and Satan. And the battlefield was the people of God.

The same is true today! We too often treat the temptation to sin and even sin itself in our lives as little matters, sometimes even funny matters. Violence, immorality, vengeance, profanity, greed, and the like have become subjects of entertainment, presented in ways to make us laugh. We forget God's word to us in 1 Peter 5:8 where He says, *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring*

lion looking for someone to devour.” The Lord said to Cain in Genesis 4:7, *“Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you.”* We hold the burning embers of lust, anger or bitterness to our chests as if they will not burn us. We forget the clear warning of God in 1 Peter 2:11: *“abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”*

Over and over again throughout the Old Testament and New Testament we are given instruction as to what we are to do. Christians are not passive, but active in the battle against the sin that Satan would use to destroy us.

Satan was out to destroy the people of God then and he is still at it. We too often think the greatest battles of our lives are for our financial security or our physical health. Lance Armstrong, 6-time winner of the Tour de France battled with cancer. I think it has

been referred to as the battle of his life. But there is another battle that is much more serious—the battle for your soul. Foolish, foolish is the man or woman who forgets this—who forgets that the enemy of God and hence the enemy of the church, the enemy of our souls, is actively working to bring us down.

Even while the Apostle Peter was taking communion in that first Lord’s Supper, even in that great spiritual experience, Jesus looked at him and said, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat”* —to destroy you as he has Judas. (Luke 22:31) The financial and physical is not most important; unless Christ comes first, our bodies will die and our wealth, such as it is, will be given to another. But we, our souls, are forever. Oh, there is a real battle alright! And it is being waged every day.

The second thing I want us to see in this encounter between the Amalekites and the Israelites is that they and we are called on to engage the enemy in very practical ways in this very real battle for our own and others' souls. Exodus 17:8-10 says, *"The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites... So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered...' "*It is instructive to note that sometimes the Lord does it all without our involvement at all. When, just a few weeks earlier, the Egyptians were pursuing the Israelites and had them cornered at the Red Sea God said this: *"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; **you need only to be still.**"* (Exodus 14:13-14)

But this time, when the Amalekites attack, God tells them to take up arms and fight. In the Bible, among other things we are told to do, we are told to flee immorality, to resist the devil, to put off the old sinful habits of life and put on new ways of acting and responding, and we are to hide God's word in our hearts that we might not sin against God. Over and over again throughout the Old Testament and New Testament we are given instruction as to what we are to do. Christians are not passive, but active in the battle against the sin that Satan would use to destroy us.

I cannot stay on this subject long because it is dealt with other places in the Bible and it is not the focal point of this passage. But before leaving it listen to Charles Spurgeon: "Young Christian, you have begun a life of warfare, rest assured of that. You would never be told to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ if it were not so. You must not put that sword up into its scabbard, but rather grind it sharp and hold it always ready in your hand.

Watch constantly, and pray without ceasing; for, till you get your foot upon the golden pavement of the New Jerusalem, you must wear a warrior's harness, and bear a warrior's toils."³

And again, "When we are delivered from bondage, although it is God's work to help us, we must be active in our cause. Now that we are alive from the dead we must wrestle with principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness if we are to overcome. "Go fight," is the command. Do not many Christians act as if sin would be driven out of them through their sleeping soundly? Let them be sure that a slumbering spirit is the best friend that sin can find. If your lusts are to be destroyed, they must be cut up root and branch by sheer force of personal exertion through divine grace, they are not to be blown away by languid wishes and sleepy desires... We shall see our sins die (only) while our minds are thoroughly active against them, and resolutely bent upon their destruction. Go, fight with Amalek."⁴

But I must move on quickly because clearly the focus of the story is not on Joshua on the battlefield but on Moses who is on the mountain: *"Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.' So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword."* (Exodus 17:9-13)

So thirdly, what I learn is that we are called on to exercise and express our dependence on God in prayer; it is our greatest “work.” Imagine the scene: Joshua and others are doing battle and at times they are winning while other times they are losing. The author specifically indicates a direct correlation between Moses’ hands and that winning or losing. When Moses’ hands are raised, Joshua is winning. When Moses’ hands are lowered, Joshua is losing. Nothing in the text explicitly says that Moses was praying. But raised hands are often an Old Testament and even a New Testament expression for praying. 1 Timothy 2:8 says, *“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer.”*⁵

We are called on to exercise and express our dependence on God in prayer; it is our greatest “work.”

Everything here says that the point of this text is to demonstrate their complete dependence on God and God’s faithfulness to provide. Moses is praying, which is the highest expression of confidence in God and God is winning the battle. The eminently quotable Spurgeon captures it succinctly: “It matters not how loudly Joshua shouts to his men, unless Moses fervently cries to his God.”⁶

God clearly ordained prayer as the primary means by which the battle would be won. Please notice I said prayer is the “means” by which God would win the battle. People sometimes speak of the power of prayer almost as if prayer were magic. And sometimes we speak of the power of prayer as being vested in the one who prays—as if by our greater sincerity or by our longer praying we accomplish the task. The power is not in the prayer or the pray-er but in God. Praying is the means of expressing our dependence on God. And so when we pray we come to God. We aren’t

just saying words that contain some code to unlock God's benevolence. We come to Him; we come as supplicants to a father who loves us more than we love ourselves. But we come seeking Him even more than we seek our own desires because we trust Him and His answers to our needs even more than our answers.

Why couldn't Moses just pray one prayer for help; why was all-day prayer needed? One author answers that question well, "God doesn't want our prayer to become nothing more than formulas that 'work' the wheels of divine power. He doesn't want us to think of prayer as some kind of magic rite which flips some switch and sends spiritual

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current through the wires of result. Prayer is not a porter's bell we ring to bid God to carry the bag of our desires... Prayer is nothing less than holy conversation with the King and Sovereign of the universe. It's an

invitation to partner with God in his eternal plan to bring redemption to this fallen and sin-sick world. God wants us to understand that prayer is not us getting our will done in heaven or by heaven but that it is the means God has chosen to get his will done on earth."⁷

And what is this about Moses' arms getting tired so that he dropped his hands and the battle would turn against Joshua? What was God doing in this? I think it dramatically demonstrates that the battle belonged to the Lord, not even to mighty Moses. Even Moses grew tired in prayer. No one would be able to say the victory came because Moses prayed so fervently. Be careful of calling attention to the

one who prays. The victory belonged to God alone. Calvin wrote that even though Moses prayed he could not “boastfully commend his own zeal in prayer, but rather (it was) the public witness and proclamation of his weakness, that the glory might be entirely attributed to the gratuitous (unearned) favor of God.”⁸

The last thing I learn and the sum of it all is this: God is with us! Remember the question? Is the Lord with us or not? God has answered it in dramatic fashion. *“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’”* (Exodus 17:14-16)

The Lord said, I want you to remember this; I want your children and their children to remember how I intervened. The Lord said He, the Lord, would defeat Amalek, that personification of evil that attempts to thwart God’s plans, that seeks to destroy your soul. The Lord said that from generation to generation, the LORD would be at war with the Amalekites—He would never stop protecting His people.

So Moses built an altar, not for sacrifice but as a memorial. And the name he gave the memorial also speaks to the truth that God was the source of the victory over evil—“The LORD is my Banner.” Just as the flag, the standard, the banner, of the United States of America stands for the presence and power of the USA so this standard, this banner, symbolized the real power behind the victory that day—The LORD.

I come nearly to the end with two applications:

1. Will I look at the evidence and conclude with Moses, Joshua and the rest of God's people down through history that the Lord is among us? The battle belongs to the Lord.
2. Will I exercise dependence on God by the primary means that God has given us? Will I pray?

I want to conclude by addressing primarily men; men who, like me, call ourselves Christians—Christ-followers. Men, what is our most important work—breadwinning or prayer? Certainly it is not either/or but both/and. But I ask you men, and fathers especially, are we engaged only in the valley with Joshua or are we also engaged on the mountain with Moses?

Why are the prayer warriors we name today most often women? It was not always so. Moses, David, Elijah, Paul, and others were fully engaged in the world as soldiers, administrators, preachers and evangelists but also, and even more so, as men of prayer—men in dependence on God.

Men, will we pray? Will we be intercessors for our families, our church, our community and our world? Without a doubt, prayer is the hardest thing that some of us do in ministry and life! One man wrote, "Beware of weariness in praying; if Moses felt it who can escape? It is far easier to fight with sin in public, than to pray against it in private. It is remarked that Joshua never grew weary in the fighting, but Moses did grow weary in the praying; the more spiritual an exercise, the more difficult it is for flesh and blood to maintain it."⁹

Will we lift up holy hands in prayer and not let down, but call on Aaron and Hur to join us, to help us? I need some Aarons and Hurs to help hold up my hands —to keep me

praying. Some of you men need the same —like me you have tried making new commitments to yourself that you will be more faithful in prayer. But it hasn't lasted. You've even asked others to pray that you would be more faithful. But one of the things I like about the OT is how concrete most things are—Aaron and Hur literally took hold of Moses' arms and helped hold them up.

I think there is something there for us. We need each other. We need each other to hold each other accountable for praying, for leading our wives and families in prayer, for praying for our mission as a church and for praying for the Kingdom of God. Find others to pray with and begin holding each others arms up in prayer.

End notes:

¹Harold Kushner, *"Why do bad things happen to good people?"*

²See Genesis 36:12-16—birth of Amalek; 1 & 2 Samuel—Saul's and David's battles with Amalekites; Esther—Hamaan an Agagite/Amalekite; and Luke—Herod an Idumean/Amalekite

³Spurgeon MTP V12 Sermon 712 p. 658

⁴Ibid, p. 662

⁵See also Psalm 28:2; Psalm 63:4; Psalm 134:2; Psalm 141:2; Lamentations 2:19; Lamentations 3:41

⁶Spurgeon, Ibid, p. 663

⁷www.calvarychapel.com/oxnard/studies/ot/exodus/intercession.html

⁸Philip Ryken, *Exodus*, p. 464

⁹Spurgeon, Ibid, p. 663

Chapter Fifteen

Obedience follows Grace Exodus 18

I know it is a well-used book but it demonstrates quite well one purpose of the biblical text before us today. It is called *Billy and the Attic Adventure*.

"There once was a little boy named Billy.

Billy loved to explore things.

One day, when Billy's father came down from the attic, Billy got an idea.

Billy climbed up the ladder,

And found all sorts of fun things to explore.

One thing was a leather aviator cap —Too big, but fun.

But when Billy tried to come down, his foot slipped.

Billy could barely hang on.

"Mom, Dad!" Billy screamed.

"I'm right here, Billy," said his dad. "Just let go, I'll catch you."

But I can't SEE you!" Billy cried. "You don't need to," said dad. "I can see you."

So Billy let go... And fell... Right into his father's arms!¹

Billy's obedience to his father's command to let go was based on trust, and Billy's trust of his father was based on his father's prior actions. The father had proven himself faithful before, so Billy trusted and Billy obeyed. Life is a school, a school in which we are progressively learning those lessons of grace, then trust resulting in obedience. For example, we know God's desire for us is to be selfless and sacrificial but much within us tells us to first take care of "number one." But do we trust God; can we trust Him even when we can't see Him or can't yet see the results?

From the 18th chapter of Exodus and its context we are going to see the provision of God's grace in times of need and we will also see the means He establishes to help His people grow in trust and obedience.

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land"; and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God. Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-

in-law in the presence of God.

The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

There are quite obviously two stories in this 18th chapter both with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, as the central character.

- First there's the story of Jethro and Moses meeting again and getting caught up on all that had happened.
- Secondly, there is the advice Jethro gives Moses about how to organize to serve the people better and not wear himself out.

13 times in the text, we are reminded that Jethro is Moses' father-in-law. And as I think about it, that does seem to be the pattern down through history—the "old man" can give all the advice he wants to as long as he "picks up the tab." Why are these two incidents recorded for us here in Exodus? It wasn't until I looked at the context that it began to make better sense to me. Let's look at what precedes these stories and then later, what follows.

After Israel left Egypt we are told of five crises they faced:

- Chapter 14—the uncross-able Red Sea with the Egyptian Army closing in;
- Chapter 15—the undrinkable water in the desert at Marah;
- Chapter 16—no food in the wilderness;
- Chapter 17—no water at Rephidim;
- Chapter 17—the attack of the Amalekites

We aren't told about much else in all the time from when they left Egypt until the text before us today—just five crises. But quite obviously we are told about the crises because each time God provided.

And it is that faithfulness of God that is emphasized in the first story of chapter 18. Evidence of that emphasis is written throughout the story:

- 18:1- "Now Jethro...heard of everything God had

done for Moses and for his people..”

- 18:1- “how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.”
- 18:4- Moses’ “other (son) was named Eliezer, for he (Moses) said, ‘My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.’”
- 18:8- “Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.”
- 18:9-11- “Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, ‘Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods.’ ”

The author uses every part of the story to emphasize the point that it was God who provided every step of the way.

Back in Exodus 2 we learned that when the Hebrew-Egyptian Moses killed an Egyptian slave driver,

We are told about the crises because each time God provided.

he fled the country taking refuge in the land of the Midianites. There he lived for 40 years, marrying a woman by the name of Zipporah who was the daughter of a Midianite priest whose two names were Reuel and Jethro. Why a Midianite? Because God is continually demonstrating throughout the Old Testament that God’s grace will extend to all the nations of the world. Yes, Israel was uniquely called but they were called, as is the church, to be the

means by which all nations would come to know the one true God. Genesis 12:3 says, "*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*"

Moses and Zipporah had two sons and together the whole family went to Egypt, at God's command for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Probably, months later, after the exodus from Egypt, after the miraculous crossing of the

God is continually
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Red Sea, and when they got closer to Midian, Zipporah and the two boys went home to visit her dad. Now in chapter 18 we find Jethro escorting his daughter (Moses' wife) and the two

sons back to the camp of the Israelites. Now it certainly must have been a happy reunion of the family and especially for Jethro and Moses who had not seen each other for quite some time. But, as we have already seen, that is not the emphasis of this text. I think Jethro had heard from his daughter and grandsons about everything God had done. He was so awed by it all that he had to come and see.

Meeting Moses again, they went into the tent and according to Exodus 18:8, "*Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.*" Can you imagine Moses telling about all God had done in the many months since they had last seen each other? (13:4; 16:1; 19:1) And Jethro's response is exactly why God had done all those things: First, Jethro was convinced of the presence and power of God. Exodus 18:11 says,

*"Now **I know** that the LORD is greater than all other gods..."* Did Jethro become a believer at that time. We don't know for certain, but it certainly appears to be the case.

Secondly, Jethro's heart welled up with emotion. *"Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel..."* Exodus 18:9 The truth about God captured his heart. And thirdly, Jethro called on everyone to worship God with him. *"He said, 'Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you...' Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God."* Exodus 18:10-12

That is what God had meant to happen in His people; that they would see the hand of God in their midst and they would believe God was with them and they would rejoice in Him. The next thing we are going to see in Exodus, after these two stories about Jethro, is the giving of the Law beginning in chapter 19. The law would spell out the character of God and the will of God for His people. But the law would seem counter-intuitive to sinful human beings. It would call on them to be selfless rather than selfish; it would call on them to put God first in their lives instead of themselves. And so they would never be willing to obey the law unless they had a trust and joy in the faithfulness of God. Never detach law and obedience from grace, or law becomes tyranny and obedience becomes legalism.

God didn't give the 10 Commandments to the Israelites while they were still in Egypt, and make a deal that if they obeyed the law he would free them from Egypt. God acted first, God redeemed them, God freed them and over the next months He showed them again and again that He

could be trusted. Then, and only then, He gave them the law. But even the giving of the law was only after He gave them a means for helping each other understand and apply the law, which we will see in the next story. But before we leave this story, have you seen its application to us? We will never be willing and able to obey God if we don't trust Him. And we won't trust Him unless we are convinced of His grace and revel in it in our worship.

What about our story of God's grace, yours and mine?

- God brought my father back alive from WWII.
- God saved my father from a nearly fatal accident and provided for my family during the months of my father's recovery.
- I had rheumatic fever three times in childhood and on one occasion my parents were told I was dying.
- God intervened in my middle-childhood years by causing my brother to see from a distance that I was drowning, and he ran to save me.
- In adulthood, God chose to save me from a diving accident that caused several breaks in my head but no paralysis.
- Not that many years ago, I got spinal meningitis while in the hospital and the doctor told my family that I was probably not going to live. But God intervened!
- I had friends in my later high school and early college years that I was sorely tempted to follow in all kinds of physically and spiritually destructive ways.
- I had girl friends with whom I was infatuated but who didn't know Jesus.

- Apart from God's care, there were too many otherwise unguarded opportunities that could have forever altered my life.
- There were bad habits that could have grown into slave masters controlling my body and spirit. But God intervened! He altered my circumstances, He removed the opportunities and He brought mature people into my life to influence me at just the right times.

Early in adulthood, rather than continuing with the former girl friends, he brought a Christ-following young woman into my life and we married. In the following years he gripped my heart with His Word, placed me in a school where I was constantly challenged with what was to be my role in God's kingdom work. He has saved my marriage, my family, my daughters, and most recently we bear witness to the intervention of God in the life of our son.

Looking back I can see
God's hand shaping,
protecting, providing, and
guiding in myriad ways
every year of my life.

Now looking back I can see God's hand shaping, protecting, providing, and guiding in myriad ways every year of my life.

Through the years I have seen God's hand save this church. I can think of at least three situations where the moral failures of staff members or those who were nearly staff members could have broken the church—but God intervened and moved them out or refused to let us hire them. John Bradish and I, among others, can testify to how God protected the church and provided for the land on which these facilities set. He closed door after door as we sought a relocation site for the church and then He provided this land at a fraction of the cost of what it had

been just a couple of years earlier. If we would but look, we would see *"everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them."*

And that is not to even count the ways God has provided through the centuries since Jesus was here.

- It is nothing short of miraculous how God took a motley crew of 12 men and by his Spirit launched a movement that within very few years had reached out across the known world.
- To mention nothing more of the next 1500 years, how can we forget the moribund church of the 16th century following the ungodly influences of the Renaissance and how God revived His church with the Reformation—a reformation that transformed Europe and formed the setting for the beginnings of our own country?
- Pastor Dan Luebcke recently led our high-schoolers through a study of church history. They saw the hand of God saving and empowering His church through the years.
- How can we forget the Great Awakening and the 2nd Great Awakening that awakened the church in the 18th and 19th centuries in America and elsewhere?
- Can we not see the hand of God moving in hundreds of men and women in the years immediately following WWII when scores of ministries began reaching out around the world? Navigators, Campus Crusade, Billy Graham, and many others.
- How can we deny the work of God in the Jesus People Movement during the 60s and 70s and the concurrent Charismatic movement? Here was a

revival of the church that, in spite of its excesses, has shaped us right up to the present time.

The church universal, our own denomination, this church itself and each Christian person and family in it has a story to tell of the good things the Lord has done and how He has rescued us time after time. From such remembering comes deeper and deeper trust and greater and greater worship demonstrated in more consistent obedience.

But the second story in chapter 18 demonstrates something else God has done **before** He asks for our

"Everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them."

obedience. Remember I said that God demonstrates His grace first, and then we move to chapter 19 where we see the law. But God does one more thing before He gets to the law and the call for conformity to His character and will: **He gives us the church.** More specifically, He establishes a way whereby His people may help each other both learn God's will and apply it to their lives. What we are going to see is discipleship, soul-care, or spiritual formation in practice.

After the family reunion, Moses went back to work. Like a good father-in-law, Jethro wanted to have a better understanding of what his son-in-law did. What he observed disappointed him because he saw that his son-in-law was not only going to wear himself out but was also unable to best serve the people for whom he was responsible. Moses would go out each day and begin meeting with the people as any had questions or disputes. He worked all day long, day after day, and there were so

many people needing to see him that they often stood around all day waiting.

So because of a good relationship with his son-in-law and/or a lot of courage, Jethro said, *"What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out."* Exodus 18:17. It's Jethro's advice I want you to hear: *"Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people--men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain--and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."* (Exodus 18:19-23)

Earlier Moses had said that the people want to know God's will in the matters of their lives. "Because the people come to me to seek God's will." (Exodus 18:15) Jethro said, "Moses, there are three things you need to do. You need to represent the people to God, you need to teach them the word of God and you need to demonstrate with your own life what it means to follow God."

And there was yet another thing Moses was to do. He was advised in Exodus 18:21 "Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens." It's not surprising at

all to find the same counsel given to the church in the New Testament. We find it first in the book of Acts when the 12 disciples of Jesus got the other believers together and said *"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to **prayer** and the **ministry of the word**."* (Acts 6:2-4) I'm not suggesting a one-to-one correspondence between the role of Moses and the role of elders in the church or between the role of the other leaders in Israel and other leaders in the church BUT the essential comparison is fair and instructive.

In the book of Acts when churches were started, leaders, called elders, would be appointed. Among many passages I could cite, listen to this advice from Paul to one of those elders

in a church: *"Watch your **life and doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."* 1 Timothy 4:16. Godly living, sound teaching and prayer (as we saw in Acts 6) were the three primary responsibilities of the elders.

"You need to represent the people to God, you need to teach them the word of God and you need to demonstrate with your own life what it means to follow God."

Important as that leadership was, the people needed more. They needed access to each other. They needed not just one person, Moses, to whom they must all go but many people who could help them. Exodus 18:21 says *"Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and*

tens."

Look at the qualifications here: The first qualification was character:

- "capable"—tested, competent
- "fear God"—one who reveres God, who is more interested in pleasing God than pleasing himself or others, has a passion for the kingdom of God, takes God seriously.
- "trustworthy"—has a reputation for being one who keeps his word, does what he says, acts out of a mature personality and mature faith.
- "hate dishonest gain"—is not influenced by those who would try to bribe him with gain or flattery into seeing things their way.
- Again from the New Testament, "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let

They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. (1 Timothy 3:8-10.) This is virtually the same list as in Exodus 18.

them serve as deacons. 1 Timothy 3:8-10. This is virtually the same list as in Exodus 18.

The second qualification was constituency: Exodus 18:21 says, "select

capable men **from all the people.**" Moses was to select men not just from among close friends and immediate family, but to choose men so that all the people would have

access. The church needs the same. We need godly men and women in every place of influence in the church—men and women to whom other believers can go to seek godly counsel. Men who know and care about other men and women who know and care about other women so well that they can speak into each others' lives, encouraging, correcting, and even rebuking when necessary. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, *"It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

As I mentioned earlier, it's called "soul-care," "discipleship," or "spiritual formation" and it happens in the context of spiritual community —people ministering to each other. It happens where people who are responding to the grace of God and who desire to follow the ways of God can help each other know and obey the will of God.

- In chapters 1-17 of Exodus God demonstrated His faithfulness, His grace.
- In chapter 18, He gave the Israelites a structure for teaching and helping each other apply God's word to their lives.
- In chapter 19 and following God will show them His will for their lives.

And as I have already said, that order is very important. Worship follows mercy and obedience follows grace! You are not ready to obey the will of God until you know the grace of God.

- Start with the knowledge of Christ's death for you!
- From there, look to the Old Testament to see His

providential working in the ages before Christ.

- Then look to the past 2000 years to see how God has worked in history to allow you to hear the good news of Jesus.
- Lastly, look to your own history to see how God has preserved you to this very day, His gracious hand on you.

How can we not worship Him?

How can we not trust Him?

How can we not obey Him?

End Notes

¹*Billy and the Attic Adventure* by Daryl Worley, Illustrated by John Daah Tyke Corporation, 1990

Chapter Sixteen

A Meeting you Won't Forget Encountering the Holy Exodus 19

Do you fear God? That is not meant to be a trick question. Some would say they definitely fear God, meaning they have always been afraid of God and afraid of what He might do to them now and in eternity to come. Others would say absolutely not; God is their all-powerful friend who would never harm them.

I know there are other possible responses but evangelicals tend to fall in the latter camp—we have been taught that God loves the world and each of us in particular. Evangelists have worked for decades attempting to dispel the notion that God is angry with people, impatiently waiting to finally judge them for their failures. For Jesus said, *"God sent his son into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world."* And in our haste to portray God as our friend and in some songs even as our lover (whatever unclear or inappropriate inferences can be drawn from that) we have tried to bring God down to our size.

Many of today's Christian books and even commentaries on the Scriptures seem to border on what I would call an "evangelical political correctness." Any time the Bible speaks of God as a fearful or even a fearsome being or of God as judge and one who will hold us accountable for our actions, it seems today's authors rush to tell us not to fear God because God is love. I get the impression that to many the love of God and the fear of God are opposite and contradictory ends of a spectrum. But back to the question, "Do we fear God?" We should! In both the Old and New Testaments, living in the fear of the Lord is a fundamental

characteristic of a true believer. Said more pointedly, if we don't fear God, we aren't Christians. Yes, I intentionally use such strong language in order to stir your thinking. This question of "Do I truly fear God?" comes from pondering the text before us, Exodus 19.

In an earlier chapter of the book of Exodus, God confronted Moses at a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula and commanded him to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites (the 2 million or more descendants of Jacob) out of slavery and to a land that God would give them—the land promised to their forefather Abraham. The chapters between then and the story we look at now tell of God's miraculous provision in their escape from Egypt and their march to the very mountain where God earlier confronted Moses. Look at Exodus 3:12: *"And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'"*

Let's look now at Exodus 19-20:18-22. *"In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain."*

"Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'

"So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the

people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, 'We will do everything the LORD has said.' So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

"The LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.' Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, "Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live." Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain.'

"After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, 'Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.'

"On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

"The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up

and the LORD said to him, 'Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.'

"Moses said to the LORD, 'The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, "Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy."'

"The LORD replied, 'Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.'

"So Moses went down to the people and told them."

Then the Ten Commandments were given in chapter 20:1-17

We pick the story up again in Exodus 20:18-22: *"Then the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'*

"Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.'

"The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites this: "You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven..."'

Did the people of Israel fear the Lord? That day they certainly did! That must have been an overwhelming experience. And I say "overwhelming" in the way we would use that term to describe actually seeing the tsunami wave that approached the Indonesian coast in 2005 and realizing

the disaster about to happen.

In the situation in Exodus 19, the people were even told God was going to visit them and they still weren't prepared for what actually happened. It was like nothing ever before experienced by a group of people and will never again be experienced until the coming again of Jesus at the end of this age. God used nearly every evidence available to express the grandeur of this event—thunder, lightning, massive thick clouds, smoke as from a furnace, loud and an ever louder trumpet sound, all of it shaking the ground. While we cannot feel what they felt that day, we can easily understand that they were filled with fear.

Did the people of Israel
fear the Lord? That day
they certainly did!

Did God intend for
them to fear Him? Oh

yes! Exodus 20:20 says, "*God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.*" And lest we think such fear is not intended for New Testament believers, read Luke's witness about the believers' response to God's capital judgment of Annanias and Saphira recorded in the book of Acts: "*Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.*" Acts 5:11. And in Acts 9:31, Luke again writes approvingly of the fear of the Lord when he says (the church) "*was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.*" This fear of God is both very intentional and very beneficial.

To describe what this fear of the Lord is I want us to note three things from the text:

- The prohibition of presumption.
- The prerequisite of preparation.
- The proof in obedience.

First of all, God was very clear about the dangers of presuming on His presence: Exodus 19:12-13 says, *"Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.'*

A second time God warns them: *"The LORD said to him, 'Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.' (Exodus 19:21-22)*

Yet a third time God says, *"...Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them."* (Exodus 19:24) To presume upon God is to assume without justification.

- It is to assume that on my own I may march into the presence of the Holy.
- It is to act as if there is no great difference between God and others.
- It is to treat God no differently than others or maybe not even with as much respect.

I was surprised the first time I heard my then preschool nephews call their parents by their first names. Greater surprise came when I heard my sister and brother-in-law encourage it. My sister and her husband are products of this egalitarian age that tries to erase all vestiges of class distinction. By showing no deference to elders or superiors we think we make ourselves equal with them. Many young

people today, with their parent's disregard, or worse yet with their blessing, take pride in calling their pastors, doctors or teachers by their first names. Children call adults by first names or even nicknames. To you adults, you do my son no favor when you allow him to call you by your first name.

We rightly loathe the artificial and meaningless hierarchies set up by the world that suggest that someone is more important or more worthy of respect just because they were born into a certain family or have much money. But in our drive for a completely egalitarian society we tend to wash out the real distinctions between parents and children, teachers and students, judges and citizens, and leaders and followers.

And that egalitarian spirit has infected even how we think about God and how we treat Him. God has

To presume upon God is to
assume without
justification.

become our "pal," our "buddy," or with a casual familiarity, He is called "my best friend." A book title many years ago asked with great impertinence: *Are you running with me Jesus?* One pastor recalls sitting at a restaurant and asking a friend to ask the Lord's blessing on the food only to have the man pray: "Yo, God, slap some blessings on these cheeseburgers."¹

God is not some overindulgent uncle or permissive grandfather. He truly is our Father in heaven but He is also still the terrible, formidable, awesome, great, holy God, exciting intense fear. Even in that great Hebrews passage where Israel's frightening experience on this mountain is contrasted with our experience now that Jesus has come the author ends it with this encouragement and warning: *"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot*

be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:28-29)

What is prohibited here in Exodus 19 is presumption.

- Someone daring to intrude into the presence of God uncalled and unprepared—a careless, thoughtless, presumptuous, rush into the presence of God.
- Someone who takes his or her access to God for granted.
- Someone who speaks and acts as if God owes them His presence.

F.B. Meyer wrote that knowing the difference between God and us “is always the first step in the soul’s deepest union with God. We must somehow be brought to the point of realizing and admitting the awful contrast between God and ourselves. There must be the bowed head, the hushed voice, the reverent obeisance, and the broken heart. We

He truly is our Father in heaven but He is also still the terrible, formidable, awesome, great, holy God, exciting intense fear.

must see ourselves, because we have seen God. We must see the King in his (awesome otherness) and cry, ‘Alas, I am (unworthy).’ ”²

We must never forget **Who** we are dealing with. Yes, we want intimacy with God (Our Father who art in heaven) but it must always come with reverence (Hallowed, holy, be thy name). Yes, God has come down to us but never forget that He stooped to do so. God prohibits presumption!

But notice also the prerequisite of preparation. Yes, my Bible teaches me that I may come boldly into the presence of God but not presumptuously and certainly not without

preparation. If we truly fear the Lord we will prepare to meet Him in our worship and elsewhere. Exodus 19:10-15 says, *"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people...' After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, 'Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.'"* An unholy people could not come into the presence of Holy God without preparation. Only two preparations are specifically mentioned but there may have been more. They are commanded to wash their clothes and to abstain from sexual relations. Why is sexual abstinence commanded? We don't know! Perhaps it is related to single-minded attention to communion with God similar to the way Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians 7:5: *"Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer."*

But the washing of the clothes and the washing of the body are often cited in the Scriptures as part of preparation for the worship of God, for being in the presence of God. But the physical washing wasn't the point in and of itself. The outward washing was to symbolize an inner preparation—confession of sin, repentance and cleansing from sin. To come into the presence of a holy God today we need that same preparation, that same cleansing. And we have it in Jesus.

The New Testament is loaded with this same symbolism of clothing and washing and cleansing from sin. Speaking of certain believers John writes: *"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* (Revelation 7:14) The author of Hebrews speaks of our

access to God because of the washing that has taken place: *"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."* (Hebrews 10:22)

Again in Revelation we see the same symbolism: *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the presence of God."* (Revelation 22:14) Our access into the presence of a Holy God has been prepared for us; it has been purchased for us at great price. By God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ our very hearts have been washed clean of the pollution of sin by the blood, the death of Jesus. We come into the presence of the Father in the merit of the Son. The Bible speaks of us as clothed in Jesus' clothes, His robes of righteousness become ours as His holiness prepares us!

To fear God means to acknowledge His power and His authority in our lives and to trust him.

We don't deserve the presence of God. Our access to God has been made possible because of preparations made

over a period of centuries and culminating in the sacrifice of Jesus. To live in the fear of the Lord means we come to the Father prepared remembering the price paid, and humbly, in Jesus' name. Did the Israelites have to literally wash their clothes? After all wasn't it simply symbolic of their heart attitude? So if they had the right attitude, did the clothes really matter?

That brings us to the third issue in the text--the proof of the fear of the Lord is in obedience to the laws of the Lord. I ask you, what do you think God would have done if some of the Israelites had said, "We don't really need to wash

our clothes—that's just symbolic?" I think God would have judged them on the spot. Why? Because the proof, the evidence of their fear of the Lord is in obedience. Exodus 19:5 says, *"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."* James said it this way, *"Faith without deeds is dead."* James 2:26. And James 2:18 says, *"I will show you my faith by what I do."*

The fear of God is evidenced in obedience to God's laws. For an Israelite to say he feared the Lord but then not obey the Lord would have been seen as a contradiction. For us to say we trust in Jesus but then not obey Him is equally a contradiction. To fear God means to acknowledge His power and His authority in our lives and to trust him. At conversion we made the decision who is Lord—obedience is simply the detailed outworking of that decision. To live in the fear of the Lord is to come thoughtfully and seriously into the presence of the Lord. It is to consider the preparation that gives us this access to the Holy. And it is evidenced, proven, by our obedience.

Let me close with what I think are some implications of having a right "fear of the Lord" especially as it relates to our worship. How do we come not presumptuously but reverently into the presence of God? How do we prepare, think, act and even dress in ways that acknowledge His holiness, humbly admit our unworthiness, and joyously accept His provision of Jesus as our access into His presence? What does it say about the way we prepare for worship?

- Are we rested and ready?
- Do we rehearse the truths that give us this privilege? The communion table set before us each Sunday is a visual reminder of the price paid to prepare us for the presence of a Holy God.

- Do we come seeking an audience with the Holy One?
- Do we come having already committed to obeying Him because we fear Him and trust Him?
- Do we take God seriously?

Let me run the risk of offending another evangelical political correctness. Those born in the last 40 years may well be the first generation in human history where this needs to be addressed. I am not an anthropologist but I think I can safely say that there has never been a culture that did not use clothing as symbolic of the seriousness of an occasion. This has been especially true of religion—one's meeting with God. Washed clothes, special robes, "Sunday go-to-meetin'" clothes, were assumed because they symbolized the importance of the occasion.

It is noteworthy that even in our culture we likewise see clothing as a very important indicator of the respect we show for an occasion or a person. With one exception—God. In our egalitarian, iconoclastic age we don't dress up to be in the presence of God, we dress down. In our reaction to those who equated special clothing with right religion, we went to the other extreme trying to prove that disregard of dress, even to the point of sloppiness, was an indication of right religion. So as not to go off the road into one ditch we drove into the other one. I'm not arguing for clerical robes or suits and ties. I have no desire going back to people trying to outdo each other in Sunday finery. But I do believe that we should consciously use every physical means available to express our hearts. That same principle is why we encourage you to kneel with us when we pray—there is something about bringing the body into conformity with the heart that validates.

On the mountain that day the people of Israel were

reminded in a very vivid way that God is holy, that they must be prepared to meet with God and that obedience is the proof of a genuine relationship with a Holy God. They were to take God very seriously. Moses said to the people, *"Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."* Exodus 20:20. It is interesting—The way to not be afraid is to fear! The fear of the Lord removes all other fears. Do we fear the Lord? Is it demonstrated in our actions, our faith in Christ and our commitment to obedience?

**(For a complete study of the Ten Commandments,
please see the series by Pastor Nelson)**

End Notes

¹ From sermon by J Ligon Duncan III from First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS

² F.B. Meyer *Studies in Exodus* , p. 223

Chapter Seventeen

God, His Law and Me Exodus 21-23

"These are the laws you are to set before them (my people):

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free. "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

"If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money. Exodus 21:1-11

"Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to one of my people

among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. Exodus 22:21-27

"Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it. Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false

What are we to do with these "laws" of God? Must we obey them or do we consider them for another people at another time and thus not applicable to us?

charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous. Do

not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."
Exodus 23:1-12

If you read the Bible at all, and especially if you are faithful to read often, you have read sections like the ones above. And if you are like many Christians, you aren't quite certain what to do with some of what you read. Sometimes it feels like you are reading someone else's mail as when you read about how to treat servants or when ears are to be pierced to indicate perpetual servitude (21:6). Sometimes you aren't quite certain how literally you should take some laws such as not charging interest on a loan you offer or better yet, whether you can demand that someone not charge you interest on the money you borrow (22:25).

What are we to do with these "laws" of God? Must we obey them or do we consider them for another people at another time and thus not applicable to us? But today I want to look again at this issue because while we consider the 10 Commandments to have an uniquely enduring quality we aren't as certain about the other laws of God such as the ones before us in Exodus 21-23 or if we were to look into the book of Leviticus. So how are we to understand these laws and their application to us?

There seem to be two extremes in thinking about the Old Testament laws: One is that Christians are obligated to obey nearly all the Old Testament laws of God. They cite such verses as 1 Peter 1:25 quoting from the Isaiah 40:8 *"The Word of the Lord stands forever."* There are good and godly people who think we should reconstruct a society based on the laws of the Old Testament. For example, as I understand it, they would argue for a civil government that stones adulterers and deals the death penalty to those who dishonor their parents. This view, promoted by some Post-millennialist and Reconstructionists has never gotten much traction in mainstream evangelicalism, I think due in part to Jesus' teaching that His kingdom, His rule in people's lives, is not of this world. That is, it is not brought about by civil

governments and laws but by His Spirit in the hearts of men and women.

But there have been many who have argued for something close to this rigid interpretation of the Old Testament laws. I vaguely remember the heyday of Bill Gothard who, like others, would dip into Old Testament passages and make it sound like the particular laws he liked were binding on believers today. He would call them principles but they were treated as law. I said I think there are two extremes when it comes to applying the Old Testament laws of God. One is that Christians are still obligated to obey those laws.

The other extreme is that we are obligated to keep none of the Old Testament laws of God. The idea is that GRACE has made the Old Testament laws largely irrelevant to today's believers. Those who hold this view cite such verses as Romans 6:14, "you are **not under law**, but under grace" and Romans 10:4 "Christ is the end of the law..."(emphasis added.) But in so doing they fail to reconcile those verses with other verses from the New Testament where, for example, the Apostle Paul says in Romans 7, *"the law is good"* and *"I delight in God's law."* Or James who says of the Law in James 1:7 *"The perfect law that gives freedom."*

And they fail to reconcile the Old Testament prophecy that we love to cite from Jeremiah 31:33, *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."* What laws does God intend to write on our hearts if not the laws of the Old Testament by which His people were to live their lives? And furthermore Jesus didn't abrogate the laws of the Old Testament; if anything He made them more radical, pointing out that the issues were not merely outward appearances but inward motivations.

Being under grace doesn't mean the law is irrelevant. But how then are we to understand such statements as "you are not under the law" that I quoted earlier from Romans? What does Paul mean when he says, "*You are not under law but under grace*?" In its context Paul is arguing against those who thought that law-keeping was the way of earning a right relationship with God.¹ He wasn't saying the law is not applicable to us as believers; he was saying it is not the way to salvation.

Jesus didn't abrogate the laws of the Old Testament; if anything He made them more radical, pointing out that the issues were not merely outward appearances but inward motivations.

So what did Paul mean when he said,

"Christ is the end of the law?" The word "end" can be understood in two ways: Either as the termination of or as the goal of. We can say "The policeman brought their car race to an end." It was over. We can also say, "To what end were they racing?" meaning for what purpose or goal. Likewise, in its context, Christ is not presented as the termination of the law but as the goal of the law, the fulfillment of the law; He is what the law was pointing forward to.² There's more that can be said about those passages and others like them but the point is that Jesus and the Apostles do not teach that the law is invalid under grace.

But there is one more thing I wish to say on this point. One of the reasons why many Christians think the law is no longer valid or applicable to us is because of a major misunderstanding of the place of the Law in the life of an Old Testament believer. I spoke of this before but again I remind you, there is a popular misconception that before

Christ came people were saved on the basis of keeping the law and that because so few were able to keep the law, Jesus came and changed the basis of salvation to grace.

The Scofield Reference Bible was for many years a purveyor of this error. In his comment on John 1:17 for example Scofield wrote that under the Mosaic covenant, "legal obedience (is) the condition of salvation."³

But that is a contradiction of the way the New Testament says Old Testament believers were saved or justified. Romans 4:2-3 says, *"If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'"*

The Law was never meant to give anyone a right relationship with God. The Law didn't save an Israelite and it doesn't save a New Testament believer. Salvation has always been and always will be by grace through faith. So

We are not saved by law keeping we are saved to law-keeping; Obedience to the Law is a response to redemption and not a condition for it.

I'm back where I began. If the Law is not obsolete, how do we Christians understand its application to us today?

I want to give you a way of thinking about and applying those Old Testament laws and then I want to illustrate that way using the texts before us. The first thing to keep in mind about the Law is what I've already described in some detail. We are not saved **by** law keeping; we are saved **to** law-keeping. Obedience to the Law is a **response** to redemption and not a condition **for** it. Always bear that in mind so that you

don't lapse into deadly legalism: thinking you earn favor with God by keeping the law.

The second thing to keep in mind about many of the Old Testament laws is that they were written for a particular people at a particular time in their experience together. The instruction would change when the circumstances changed. That understanding is not strange to us. We know that is true even when it comes to New Testament commands. Look at 1 Corinthians 11:4-5: *"Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved."* We understand that these instructions were peculiar to the Corinthian church and we don't demand the same in churches today.

Or look at 1 Timothy 2:8-9: "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes..." Look around, we don't forbid braided hair or pearls today.

Mark 10:21 says, "Jesus... said. *'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'*" We don't demand that every Christian sell everything to be called a disciple. And 1 Corinthians 14:33-35: *"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."* The Bible is not an owner's manual as some like to refer to it.

Even those sections that are codes of conduct are written to real people in real time and place. So we must consider the historical and relational context in which the laws were written. Whatever it means when it says, "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" in Exodus 23:19, it doesn't apply directly or literally to me today.

A third thing to keep in mind when looking at the laws of the Old Testament is that they reveal something of the heart of God for His people. Certainly one purpose of the Law is to show us how sinful we are and in need of a Savior. But once the Savior has graciously met our need, the law becomes a window into the soul of God. That's why David loved the law of God (see Psalm 119 and others). God's laws are not contradictions of His grace. He has said, *"Without holiness no man will see the Lord."* We were redeemed to be a holy nation, God's people. The commands allow God's people to know how to act toward Him and each other. Without them, we would flounder and founder.

So the Law is liberating not burdensome. That's why God would say in Deuteronomy 32:47, *"They are not just idle words for you—they are your life."* How do we know what God expects of us unless He tells us? The "law" serves the same function today—it demonstrates the character of God that we may emulate Him. The law is God's expression of Himself, in part.

So, it is not, which laws must I obey. It is not even, what underlying principles must I observe in my culture. We are not bound, in some legalistic way, by Old Testament laws (or even the principles behind them) but we are informed by those laws. The Law is a window into God's thinking; it is insight into God's values and perspective. So when I read those laws written for the Israelites or written for the

Corinthian church, what do I learn about the nature of God and how His people were to reflect Him in their conduct? I can ask how can I do likewise in my culture.

When I read Exodus 21-23 I see a wide array of life situations. How to treat others at work, in the home, in the neighborhood, in disputes; what to do with the poor, the disadvantaged, even what to do with animals. And even though not every

situation is considered, one of the things it teaches me is that all of life is spiritual. God has a right to every part of my life and we are called to be holy like

So, it is not, which laws must I obey. The Law is a window into God's thinking; it is insight into God's values and perspective.

our God is holy. The law gives me a way to think about my relationship with God and others in the concrete circumstances of life. I have said that the laws are a window into the soul of God. And so it is not obedience to a principle or a law, it is obedience to the God who has liberated us and loves us.

I was surprised when I read these chapters of laws over and over again, how much God put Himself right into the laws.

- 20:22-25 - God often refers to Himself
- 21:13 - "If God lets it happen"
- 22:11 - "oath to God"
- 22:23 - "They cry out to Me" (widows or orphans)
- 22:27 - God will hear the poor man who has been misused
- 22:29 - Give God the firstborn of your sons and

cattle

- 23:7 - "I (God) will not acquit the guilty"
- 23:13 - "Everything I have said."
- 23:14 - Regarding the feasts we are to do as "I commanded you"
- 23:20ff - God's promises of guidance and protection.

This is not a codebook; it is instruction for relationship. Barbara and I have rules for our son in our household. His adult sisters think we have far fewer rules than we used to. But our love for our son Paris is not conditioned by his

Keeping the law is not
meant to earn a
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Christ.

obedience to those
rules. We love him
and want the best for
him and that is why
we have rules.
Furthermore, we don't
want him to respond
to the rules as some
kind of legal code but

as an expression of our love and a guide to a healthy life and relationship. And we are much more concerned with his maturing and living in harmony in the family than with whether every jot and tittle of the rules have been observed.

"Come immediately when we call you" is a rule. But what if I call and he doesn't come immediately. He says that he was putting the dog away because it was harassing his little niece. I must decide if that was simply a stalling technique where his intention was to violate the rule and the dog and niece were a convenient excuse or if it was truly a benevolent act only incidentally resulting in his unwillingness to obey the rule immediately. I don't want a

robot; I want a relationship. But relationship doesn't mean there are no rules to guide us. I've quoted him before, but author Terrance Fretheim captures it well when he writes, "The will of God does not lose its particularity in the (broader) command to love; it simply opens up those particularities to limitless possibilities. Love always means going beyond whatever laws may be articulated, but it needs their particularity for instructional purposes, charting something of what love may entail in specific situations."⁴

Now briefly I want us to use these three understandings of the law and think about Exodus 23:

1. Keeping the law is not meant to earn a relationship with God; I already belong to Him by His grace through Jesus Christ.
2. These laws are written to a particular people at a particular time and must be understood in their context.
3. These laws are a window into the mind and heart of my God whom I desire to emulate.

So read and listen carefully as we seek to be like our God.

Look first at Exodus 23:1-3: *"Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit."* My God is truth and calls me to not be prejudiced by either seeking to find favor with the crowd or siding with a man falsely simply because he's poor. My words are to bear truth and justice.

Next look at Exodus 23:4-5: *"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you has fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be*

sure you help him with it. "My God is forgiving and gracious to me and calls me to be forgiving and gracious to my enemy. The situation was such that I didn't even have to do anything to get back at my enemy; it would be easy to let loss or harm come to that "turkey" by doing nothing. But that is not the way of God. Romans 5:10 says, *"When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."*

Look at Exodus 23:6-8: *"Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous."* No matter how much I stand to gain, I must not pervert justice by lying or even remaining silent.

And finally, look at Exodus 23:9-12: *"Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."* These words are not first of all about the letter of the law in keeping Sabbath years and days but it is about God's heart for the displaced, the poor and even animals. And the instruction comes down to much more than sympathy. It includes actual sacrifice on my part so that the needs of others may be met.

I don't own oxen or donkeys and I don't have tillable

ground or vineyards. I'm not often in court and I don't have slaves. But what do I learn about my God in these laws? My God is truthful, unbiased, fair, forgiving, gracious, concerned for the poor and displaced, and kind even to animals. And what do I learn about God's call on my thoughts, words and actions? The Law of God is a window into the very soul of God.

The next time you read the laws of the Old Testament or the New Testament, don't allow yourself to get sidetracked by all the things you don't understand or by wishing that God had said more or said it differently. Instead, as the Apostle Paul said it in Colossians 3:16, "*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.*" Or as King David said it in Psalm 119, "*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long... I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.*"

End Notes

¹ See Morris Romans 259 or Dunn Romans p. 340

² For a fuller treatment of this see Kaiser's chapter in Strickland's *The Law, the Gospel and the Modern Christian*, p. 181

³ F.B. Meyer suggests the same in *Studies in Exodus*, p. 220

⁴ Terrance Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 223

Chapter Eighteen

Pentecost **Exodus 23:16; Acts 2**

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate one of the three most significant days in our history with God along with Christmas and Good Friday/Easter. Due to the neglect of many of us in the evangelical church in America, and to our shame, many of us don't even know that day marks such a significant day in our history. I can easily imagine that the election of Nelson Mandela as President of South Africa, a number of years ago, is seen as the most auspicious day for black South Africans after so many years of apartheid. For many in Eastern Europe, a landmark day is when the Soviet Union collapsed in the summer of 1989, symbolized in the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Certainly for us Americans, the War of Independence marks our birth as a nation. More particularly we look to the beginning, not the end, of that war as the day—the day the Declaration of Independence was made, July 4, 1776.

For Israel, the greatest day in their history was Passover. God told them that from that day forward they were to annually mark that day with special sacrifices and celebration. It recalled the day when God caused the plague of death to pass over His own people and strike only unbelieving Egypt. It marked the day of the beginning of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. It marked the birth of a people of God.

What day marks us as the new people of God? Many, I suspect, would quickly say Easter marks that day for us. That would not be wrong but it would not be as precise as it ought to be. And it would miss a significant aspect of our

history with God for which Easter provides the foundation. So what day does mark us as the new people of God? It is Pentecost! Just as Passover marked the birthday of Israel as the people of God, so Pentecost marks the birthday of the church as the new people of God.

In Exodus 23:16 God commands His people to "Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the first-fruits of the crops you sow in your field." This Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) is also called the "day of first-fruits" and the "feast of weeks" (Numbers 28:26). So how is this related to Pentecost? In

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the Leviticus instruction about this celebration we read, *"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty*

days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD." (Leviticus 23:15-16) Or as God repeated this instruction in Deuteronomy 16:9-10, *"Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD."*

The Israelites were told that when they got into their own land, on the Sunday following Passover, they were to bring the first of their new harvest to the Temple and offer it to the Lord. Including that Sunday (day after Sabbath) they were to count off 50 days. On that 50th day they were to celebrate the "Feast of Harvest" or "Feast of Weeks" or "day of firstfruits."

Many of you know that Pentecost is the English

transliteration of the Greek word meaning 50th day. Israel's Pentecost was the holy day that fell roughly 50 days after Passover. It was anchored in Passover and it celebrated the harvest, the provision of the Lord. What God began in Passover He continued by giving His people what they needed. They celebrated God's provision by giving back to God an offering from their harvest. They knew they were responsible to plant the seed but God gave the harvest and their offering represented the whole harvest.

Now fast-forward about 1500 years to the book of Acts chapter 2:

"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4) 50 days earlier the Jews celebrated Passover. But more significantly the Passover lamb, Jesus, had given His life as a sacrifice for His people and then rose again from the dead. This was to prove the sufficiency of His sacrifice and give eternal life to those who would repent and trust Him.

Now 50 days later the Jews were celebrating their Pentecost but God took hold of that day and gave it fuller and richer significance. On this Pentecost, 2000 years ago God gave His people:

1. A new Status
2. A new Relationship and
3. A new Mission

A New Status

I start with the new status that is ours since Pentecost. Notice that I call each of these three "new." By that I

intend to communicate that what happened at the Acts 2 Pentecost was unique but also continuous with the past. It was “new” because there was an “old.” Let me explain that this way:

The Kingdom of God

Old Covenant

Israel

Passover

Jews and Proselytes



New Covenant

The Church

Pentecost

All ethnicities

The Kingdom of God is a way of speaking of God’s rulership over all. God’s kingdom is eternal. Within God’s kingdom rule He has chosen to deal with people in different ways in different times. Thus we speak of the “Old Covenant” which is other words for Old Testament and using Jesus’ words, we speak of a “New Covenant” described in the New Testament. (*Testament and Covenant are nearly synonymous words.*) Now we know that the New Covenant is related to the Old Covenant but it is also a significantly new thing God is doing.

But before describing the difference, please note, as I pointed out earlier, the Old Covenant was anchored in the yet-to-come death and resurrection of the true Lamb of God, Jesus, and the New Covenant is anchored in the completed death/resurrection of Jesus. But while the basis of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is the same, the outworking of the two is very different:

- Under the Old Covenant the group that belonged to God was Israel.
- The day that marked their beginning as the special people of God was Passover.
- And the only way of belonging to that people was

either by being a believing Jew or a proselyte, a convert, to true Judaism.

- Jews and Gentiles could only belong to God through Judaism.
- Under the New Covenant the group that belongs to God is the church.
- The day that marks our beginning as that special people of God is Pentecost.
- And now ethnicity and religious Judaism no longer play any part in who may belong to the people of God.

Now Jews and Gentiles alike belong to God as part of the church.

The major point I make in all of this is that Pentecost marks a change in status—now it is through the church that we are the people of God. Under the Old

The Old Covenant was anchored in the yet-to-come death and resurrection of the true Lamb of God, Jesus, and the New Covenant is anchored in the completed death/resurrection of Jesus.

Covenant Israel alone was called the people of God.

Now the Church is called the people of God. 1 Peter 2:9-10 says, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the **people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* (Emphasis Added)

In Trinitarian fashion we are also called:

1. The body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 says, *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed..."* The church is the center of Christ's activity in the world now just as His physical body was when He was physically present.
2. And we are called the temple of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, speaking of the church, *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."* And in Ephesians 2:21-22 we see the same: *"In (Christ) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."* Were it not for this change, we would still be sacrificing sheep and goats and living under the Jewish civil and ceremonial laws.

But there is more.

A New Relationship

Secondly, because of what happened at Pentecost, we now have a new relationship with God. Acts 1:3-5 says, *"After (Jesus') suffering, he showed himself to (his disciples) and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' "* (Emphasis Added) How could they not remember His earlier words just before His crucifixion: *"And*

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”(John 14:16-18)

If Jesus were crucified on Passover and it was the 3rd day (counting Friday and Sunday) that He rose from the dead plus 40 days during which He showed Himself before His ascension, the words of Jesus in Acts 1 would be about a week before Pentecost. Pentecost fell “on the day after Sabbath” (Sunday), 50 days after Passover. Acts 2:1-4 says, *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

Because of what happened at Pentecost, we now have a new relationship with God.

In Acts 2:33 we are told that this happened in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, the wind and the fire are clearly symbolic of divine presence and specifically the divine presence of the Holy Spirit.¹ And what is interesting is how what seemed to be tongues of fire separated and came to rest on each of them. The Spirit’s presence was not only in the room, but consistent with what Jesus promised, the Spirit came to all of them. John 14:16-18 says, *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you...the Spirit... He lives with you and **will be in you.**”*(Emphasis

Added)

When Jesus met with His disciples before the crucifixion, He told them He was going back to the Father but that He would send the Holy Spirit. I suspicion the disciples didn't

The Holy Spirit is Jesus—
God with us. It is a
relationship so close that
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describe it is as "in" us.

think that was a good trade. But here's the point: after Pentecost, never again in the New Testament will you hear the disciples lament the absence of Jesus. Why not?

Because with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples experienced again the presence of Jesus.

- As I said, they never again wished Jesus were with them.
- They never again wished they could talk to Him or hear from Him.
- They never again expressed disappointment that Jesus wasn't there to teach, encourage, protect or guide them.

Jesus was again "with" them in the person of the Spirit.

After the coming of the Spirit, the disciples realized and experienced that to have the Spirit was to have the Son—they weren't missing anything. And it was not that they now talked to the Spirit in hopes that He would convey the message to Jesus. No, to have the Spirit was to have Jesus—He was with them. The Spirit comes to be Jesus "in" us. Theologian J.I. Packer put it this way: "The truth of the matter is this. The distinctive, constant, basic ministry of the Holy Spirit under the new covenant is...to mediate Christ's presence to believers—to give them...a knowledge of Jesus presence with them as Savior, Lord and God."² We

are describing a relationship with a Person—the Person of Jesus in the Person of the Spirit.

Writing 20 years ago, Richard Lovelace said this relationship “involves moving about in all areas of our life in dependent fellowship with a person: ‘So I say, live by the Spirit.’ When this practice of the presence of God is maintained over a period of time, our experience of the Holy Spirit becomes less subjective and more clearly identifiable...A normal relationship with the Holy Spirit should (include) a profound awareness that we are always face to face with God; that as we move through life the presence of his Spirit is the most real and (influential) factor in our everyday lives; that underneath the momentary static of events, conflicts, problems, and even excursions into sin, he is always there...”³ The Holy Spirit is Jesus—God with us. It is a relationship so close that the only way Jesus can describe it is as “in” us.

As Robertson McQuilkin put it, “Incredible as it may seem, God has planned my life around Himself—uninterrupted companionship with the greatest Love who ever lived! No getting an appointment a month in advance. No taking a number and waiting my turn. He doesn’t just tolerate me. Outrageous mystery—God actually desires my company.”⁴ Because of the coming of the Holy Spirit into every believer, it is now possible for every believer to have an intimate relationship with Jesus.

How can we have such a relationship? Let’s be clear on what this relationship is and what it is not. In our psychological and consumerist age, image is more important than substance and feeling something is more highly sought than having something. In the rush to fill some felt-need for intimacy we run from conference to conference and read book after book trying to find the

secret to feeling something about the Holy Spirit. We want the feelings of joy, peace and intimacy more than we want the true relationship with the Spirit that brings joy, peace and intimacy. I suggest that joy, peace and intimacy are by-products of a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

So then how do we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit? First of all know that you already do.

- Nothing less than the person and work of the Spirit are involved in you becoming a Christian.
- In saving us, God imparts His Holy Spirit to us.
- That is not something we pray for or wait for or do something special to get—God does it.
- As an adopted infant has no feeling of adoption, so we are given the Holy Spirit regardless of whether that experience is felt or not.

But you say, “I know that. I’m talking about a day-to-day awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit. How do I have the kind of life the disciples had following Pentecost?” Someone wrote, “We can be no more spiritual than we are scriptural.”⁵ This means we will only experience a true relationship with the Spirit to the extent that we let the Bible shape our thinking and acting. I suggest that instead of looking for some secret, let’s simply look at how the Bible describes the person and work of the Spirit and then begin to act, in faith, on those truths.

Author Myron Augsburger wrote, “In relating to a person, we open our life to that person... We are consciously identifying and sharing...”⁶ Isn’t that true of our human relationships? The relationship deepens when we consciously identify and share with that person. Even when we are physically separated so that we can’t sense them with our five senses, we can still read their words,

remember common events, and recall what draws us together. I don't mean to reduce our relationship to the Spirit to simply recalling biblical facts because I know that the Spirit is present and active not only in the recalling but also in the applying of the truth to our hearts.

So how do we identify and share with the Holy Spirit? I think I can say with a high degree of confidence that if we would reflect intentionally

and regularly on the following biblical truths our experience of a relationship with the Holy Spirit would grow.

We will only experience a true relationship with the Spirit to the extent that we let the Bible shape our thinking and acting.

I think of the Holy Spirit as the one who gave me birth into the family of God —the church.

John 3:5-8 says, *"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'*"

I think of the Spirit as the one who confirms that I belong to God.

Romans 8:15-16 says, *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."*

I think of the Spirit as Jesus in me, with me, and by me always.

John 14:16-20 says, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever...I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."*

I think of the Spirit as fully sovereign and benevolent and present in every situation I encounter.

Romans 8:28: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

I think of the Spirit as the One who is constantly praying to the Father for me and shaping my prayers to conform to the will of the Father.

Romans 8:26-27 says, *"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us... The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."*

I think of the Spirit as the One who authored the Scriptures.

In 1 Peter 1:20-21 we read, *"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

I think of the Holy Spirit as the One who helps me

understand the spiritual significance of the scriptures and think "Christianly."

1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says, *"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."*⁸

I think of the Spirit as One who is changing me—conforming me to the character of Jesus:

Romans 8:9,13-14 says, *"You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you...For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*⁹

I think of the Spirit as the One who enables me to serve others in the family of God.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 it says, *"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*

I think of the Spirit as the One who empowers me for service to a world around.

Acts 1:8 says, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends*

of the earth.”¹⁰

I think of the Spirit as the One who lives in my body as the sacred temple of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reads, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*

I think of the Spirit as the One who guarantees my future.

Look at Ephesians 1:13-14: *"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."*¹¹

Can you imagine how your daily relationship with Jesus would change if you thought of the Spirit in these ways? Again from McQuilkin: "Incredible as it may seem, God has planned (our lives) around himself, uninterrupted companionship with the greatest lover who ever lived. No getting an appointment a month in advance. No taking a number and waiting my turn. He doesn't just tolerate (us). Outrageous mystery—God actually desires (our) company!"¹²

A New Mission

Pentecost marks not only a new status and a new relationship but it also marks a new mission. Again I emphasize that this relationship with the Spirit is not just for our psychological satisfaction, though it is a very

satisfying relationship, but the relationship has a definite kingdom orientation. We are related to Him for service. Under the New Covenant, the mission of God in the world is clearer and the outcome, certain. Again I quote Acts 1:8: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (See also John 14:12) Compare that to Matthew 24:14 where it says, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."*

Pentecost—does it matter? Oh, yes on that day we were given **a new status** (the new people of God), **a new relationship** (the Spirit of God is now so present that the best way to describe it is to say He lives "in" us), and we have **a new mission** (Make disciples in all the world and I am with you always even to the end of the age).

250 years ago, hymn writer Joseph Hart wrote:

Come Holy Spirit come!
Let your bright beams arise;
Dispel the sorrow from our minds,
The darkness from our eyes.

Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood,
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret love of God.

Revive our drooping faith,
Our doubts and fears remove,
And kindle in our breasts the flame
Of never-dying love.

Show us that loving Man
That rules the courts of bliss,
The Lord of hosts, the Mighty God,
Th' Eternal Prince of Peace.

'Tis Thine to cleanse the heart,
To sanctify the soul,
To pour fresh life in every part,
And new-create the whole.

Dwell, therefore, in our hearts,
Our minds from bondage free;
Then shall we know, and praise and love,
The Father, Son and Thee.

Joseph Hart 1759
The Lutheran Hymnal

Pentecost—God in us!

End Notes

¹ Cf. John 3:8; Matthew 3:11 along with many Old Testament passages

² J.I.Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 50

³ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p. 131

⁴ Robertson McQuilkin, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 79

⁵ Source unknown

⁶ Myron Augsburger, *Practicing the Presence of the Spirit*, p. 30

⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:3 "No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."

⁸ Cf. 2 Timothy 1:13-14

⁹ Cf. Galatians 5:22-26

¹⁰ Cf. John 14:12

¹¹ Cf. Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 5:5

¹² McQuilkin, *Ibid*, p. 79-80

Chapter Nineteen

A Time to Decide Exodus 24

Today may be a special day for some of you. Today may be the day you move from religion to relationship; the day you move from merely calling yourself a Christian to being one.

Today may be the day you stop simply hearing about being a Christ-follower and actually begin to follow Christ. Today may be the day you stop waiting to decide and instead you make a commitment.

Today may be the day you declare your loyalty to God. Today you may be the day you say, "From this day forward I belong to Him and live for Him." You've grown up with Christianity, you maybe had some moving religious experiences as a child—you remember praying a prayer to ask Jesus into your heart when you were younger; You live with Christians, maybe you even married a Christian. You've gone to a Christian church much of your life and you've sometimes read the Christian Bible. You've sometimes prayed to the Christian's God and you've usually tried to live by Christian principles, but you have never committed yourself to Jesus—not really.

You have never, with an adult perspective, driven a stake in the ground and uncompromisingly committed yourself to following Jesus no matter the cost. Christianity is all around you but it is not in you. You have a measure of religion—you attend church, you give some of your money, you take the Lord's Supper, you might even give some of your time in service. You're counting on your proximity to Christianity to be sufficient when you finally meet your Maker.

You've spent a lot of time around Christianity but you're not sold out.

You've been challenged before in this way, but you've held out.

- You aren't quite certain you believe it all.
- You aren't quite certain you are ready to give up what you know is contrary to what Jesus teaches.
- You aren't quite certain you dare to trust God in the way Jesus talked about it.
- You're afraid that if you make a commitment you will be doomed to sacrifice, poverty, and boredom.

Well today is different!

- Today may be the day you make and declare a commitment—Today you may accept your covenant relationship with God.
- Today you may respond to the grace of God with the only response that matters—you will commit to trust and follow Him.

In this matter of making such a commitment, I want us to see and learn from others who have gone before us.

When Jesus was here He said something that sounds strange to our ears: *"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* John 6:53-54 Just as your physical body needs food and drink, likewise the you that is not flesh and bones, needs spiritual food and drink. Jesus is saying that to have life, that is not just physical, you need Him. To wholly trust and follow Jesus is the way to life.

Most of those who heard Him make that call to a commitment to Him left Him at that point: *"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."* John 6:66 Jesus turned and asked the few who remained the same question I am asking you today. *"You do not want to leave too, do you?"* (John 6:67)

Can you imagine the thoughts that swirled through the minds of those followers? "Hey, this is too much; this is too intense." "I don't mind hearing what he has to say, but commit to it—I don't know!" But there were only two options open to them: leave or follow. That is where I hope God will put some of you today—right into that place where you realize you can't ride

To wholly trust and follow
Jesus is the way to life.

the fence any longer. You can't just hang around Christianity any more; it's time to paint or get off the ladder. It is time to decide! Please understand, I am not addressing you who are new to Christianity, who are just learning what it is all about. I'm addressing myself today to you who are "lifers"—you who have dabbled for years but have never dug in, you who have hung around the edges of the crowd that surrounds Jesus, but have never committed to Him. I'm not saying you don't have a modicum of religion (after all you're a religious person in your own way); I'm saying you've never sold out to Jesus.

But it is another group that I most want us to learn from today. For 400-plus years the people had lived in slavery in Egypt. Now just a few months before where our story picks up a man named Moses, who grew up as the Pharaoh's son but was actually an Israelite, returned to Egypt after living in exile for 40 years for killing an Egyptian. There is only one word to describe what happened in those next few months: miraculous. That man Moses convinced the slaves,

the Israelites, that he was sent by God to liberate them from their slavery and lead them to a land of their own. One awesome experience after another resulted in 2 or 3 million Israelites literally walking out of Egypt and into the Sinai desert.

Look at Exodus 19:1-6: *"In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai...and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is*

The God who moved His
people out of Egypt is the
same fearful, awesome
God today who offers
Himself and His grace to
us.

*what you are to...tell
the people of Israel:
"You yourselves have
seen what I did to
Egypt, and how I
carried you on eagles'
wings and brought
you to myself. Now if
you obey me fully and*

*keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my
treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,
you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'"*
Then through Moses, in verses 7-15, God told the people,
to prepare for God's appearance.

We pick it up again at verse 16: *"On the morning of the
third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick
cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast.
Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people
out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the
foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke,
because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke
billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole
mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet*

grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him."

Move to chapter 20: *"And God spoke all these words: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 'You shall have no other gods before me.'* " There's that loyalty issue. And at that the people heard (see also Deut 4:33) the voice of God speaking the 10 Commandments which we have looked at in detail in another story.

But let's go back to the story: *"When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'* " I can't reproduce for you the same experience they experienced but I can declare on the basis of God's word that it actually happened and that the God who did that is the same fearful, awesome God today who offers Himself and His grace to us.

Look at verse 20: *"Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. God has come to test you (give you a direct experience), so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.'* The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. Then the LORD said to Moses, *'Tell the Israelites this: "You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings..." ' "* And then in Chapter 21 verse 1 he says, *"These are the laws you are to set before them."* And chapters 21-23 set forth those laws.

And so we pick up the story again in chapter 24 verse 3: *"When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.' Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.' Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"*

Back at the end of chapter 20, the people were awestruck by what they had just seen and heard—the smoke, the fire and the voice from heaven declaring God's call on their lives, His call for their loyalty. God had declared that He loves them; that He delivered them. Earlier He had said in Exodus 19:4, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." Now it is decision time. Now is the time to respond to God's grace. And the proper response is loyalty. So in Exodus 20:22 He says, "You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me..."

Then, as we have seen in previous weeks, the commands God spells out are in part what loyalty looks like: If you accept My grace, if you trust Me, you will follow Me. And following looks like something—it has specificity—it means you think and act in certain ways and don't think or act in other ways. It means you imitate God's character and

pursue God's goals in the world. And notice this is not just obedience to abstract principles or compliance with a code of conduct but is loyalty to the God who loves them and liberated them.

Many years later, Jesus was equally clear about what following means: *"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate

"We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ...In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.'" (Luke 14:25-28,33) This isn't irrational loyalty; this is carefully considered loyalty.

Elsewhere Jesus said, *"If you love me you will keep my commands."* (John 14:15) Notice He doesn't say, "If you keep My commands you will earn My love" but "If you love Me," if you respond to My grace, if you trust Me, you will keep My commands. Obedience, following, and loyalty are expected in Christianity! This is basic to any relationship with God. The fundamental relationship is that God loves and redeems and we love and follow. Following is assumed; it is axiomatic. Loyalty is the logical and natural consequence of redemption.

The story is told that Abraham Lincoln visited a slave auction on one occasion and was appalled at what he saw. His heart was especially drawn to a young woman on the

block whose story seemed to be told in her eyes. She looked with hatred and contempt on everyone around her. She had been used and abused all her life, and this time was but one more cruel humiliation. The bidding began and Lincoln offered a bid. As other amounts were bid, he counter-bid with larger amounts until he had won. When he paid the auctioneer the money and took title to the young woman, she stared at him with vicious contempt. She asked him what he was going to do next with her and he said, "I'm going to set you free."

"Free?" she asked "Free for what?"

"Just free," Lincoln answered. "Completely free."

"Free to do whatever I want to do?"

"Yes," he said, "Free to do whatever you want to do."

"Free to say whatever I want to say?"

"Yes, free to say whatever you want to say."

"Free to go wherever I want to go?" she added with skepticism.

Lincoln answered, "You are free to go anywhere you want to go."

"Then I'm going with *you!*" she said with a smile.¹

That is the only legitimate response to grace.

What grace looks like has been seen in their deliverance from Egypt and God's protection of them in the desert. What loyalty looks like, at least in part, has been spelled out in the commandments of God. Now, it is decision time. So God next calls on the Israelites to enter into a covenant with Him: "*Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings...*" (Exodus 20:24) God is asking them to decide; He wants them to make a commitment. He wants that commitment ratified, formalized. He wants us to make a covenant here and now—He loves you and is calling you to follow Him—will you?

But this is not just an emotional response to what they had seen. I find it interesting in the text that twice Moses spells out what commitment looks like. In Chapter 24:3 he told the people all the words and laws of chapters 20 through 23. And the people respond, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." Then the next morning, verse 4, Moses built an earthen rock-altar the way the Lord had earlier told him. The altar would represent God and His grace. He also set up twelve stone pillars to represent the 12 clans of Israel. So here was a meeting of God and His people. Altars and sacrifices were not new to these people and they were keenly aware of what was going on. Now was the time for them to decide if they were in or out—God was calling them to make a commitment.

What grace looks like has been seen in their deliverance from Egypt and God's protection of them in the desert. What loyalty looks like, at least in part, has been spelled out in the commandments of God.

Next, young Israelite men were sent to get the young bull calves to offer as sacrifices. Two specific kinds of sacrifices are mentioned: **burnt** offerings and **fellowship** offerings and they signified different things. The calves were killed and the blood was drained into containers—bowls. Half of the blood Moses sprinkled on the altar. And consistent with burnt offerings, the bulls dedicated to that offering were burned up completely on that altar. The symbolism is clearly spelled out in other parts of the Bible. These animals' lives were given for the people. The animals died, their blood was shed, to atone for, to make possible, the forgiveness of the sins of the people.

No one could have a relationship with a holy God unless his

or her sins were paid for. And God has determined that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. And God declared that the lives of the animals would substitute for the lives of the people. But the Covenant wasn't completed. From a human perspective, the question remained, would the people respond, would they trust God in this, and would they commit their loyalty to Him in obedience to Him?

The life of another had
been given for their lives.
The sacrifice of another
made possible their
relationship with God.

Now interesting to me is that before going further with the sacrifices, Moses read the commitment one more time. The "Book of the Covenant" is a reference to the commands of Exodus

20-23. He read to them again what loyalty looks like.

- Are they serious about this?
- Do they understand that trusting God is not just about warm feelings of acceptance and security but is also about life-changing loyalty to this God who loves them and called them to His service?

What will the people do? In Exodus 24:7 it says, "*They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'*" They declared their commitment, their loyalty to God! And with that Moses took the blood of the "fellowship offerings" and sprinkled it on the people. As gross as that sounds to us, it was very effective in symbolizing what was happening. The blood on them connected them to the blood on that altar. The life of another had been given for their lives. The sacrifice of another made possible their relationship with God.

I'd like you to notice that relationship was consummated before the Israelites had actually done anything. They hadn't obeyed the laws yet because they weren't accepted by their ability to keep the laws. They were accepted by God's gracious provision of the lives of the animals that died for them. But it is also true that the covenant was completed when they received that sacrifice as for them when they decided to trust and follow Him.

Now the other offerings, the "fellowship offerings," were placed on the altar but not consumed; they were cooked and the people ate together in the presence of God and one another as part of God's family. Now this is where it gets very interesting because with Moses' final words in the covenant ceremony, he brings us right up to the time of Jesus and consequently to us. I'm referring specifically to chapter 24 verse 8: *"This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

We find those words again 1500 years later in Hebrews 9:19-20: *"When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves...and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you...' "* With that event in mind, the author links to Jesus: *"But now Jesus has appeared once for all...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of **himself**. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed **once** to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."* (Hebrews 9:26-28)

Using the same language of sprinkled blood that God used with the Israelites, we see that now Christ's death and

blood is applied to us: *"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience."* (Hebrews 10:22) "Having our hearts sprinkled" is in the perfect tense—a past act with continuing results meaning Christ has done it for us and we now live in the on going results of His sacrificial death and resurrection. And so the Bible says, in 1 John 1:7, *"if we walk in the light, as he is in the light (as we follow Jesus), we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies (keeps on purifying) us from all sin."*

Because of what He has done we now have the right to draw near to God with full assurance. It doesn't mean we won't feel appropriately guilty for doing wrong things but that the larger issue of our relationship with God has been settled. Romans 5:1 says, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* God calls us into a covenant relationship with Himself through His son Jesus.

Somewhere along the line Christianity got cheapened and we got cheated. Christianity was turned into a religion of asking Jesus to forgive our sins so we wouldn't go to hell when we died, when all along it was really God calling us to Himself. We turned it into getting our Christian "Costco card" so we could get whatever we wanted or a Christian "get out of jail free" card that we could turn in when we died. That kind of Christianity has little or nothing to do with biblical Christianity, with following Jesus, with commitment, with loyalty, and with God's calling on our lives.

But God calls us to a real Covenant, a covenant He has made possible by the sacrificial death of His own son. That's why, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with

His disciples, we find this: *"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'"* (Luke 22:19) As the bodies of those bulls were offered to atone for the sins of the people in Moses' day, so the perfect Christ was offered once only for the sins of all God's people of all the ages.

Luke 22:20 says, *"In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"*

He held up that cup containing blood red

wine and He said, in essence, this represents my blood, which was poured out for you so that you can enter into a new relationship with God—a Covenant of grace and loyalty. That blood of Jesus was sprinkled on the last altar of God—the cross. The cross is our altar and the sacrifice has been made. And God now calls you to that altar, to His Son. It's decision time! Will you receive His grace and follow His Son?

I began the message with these words:

- Today may be a special day for some of you.
- Today may be the day you move from religion to relationship; the day you move from merely calling yourself a Christian to being one.
- Today may be the day you stop pretending to be a Christ-follower and actually begin to follow Christ.
- Today you may say, "From this day forward I belong to Him and I will live for Him."

Christianity was turned into a religion of asking Jesus to forgive our sins so we wouldn't go to hell when we died, when all along it was really God calling us to Himself.

And for you who have been, up until now, merely “hangers on,” will you today enter into the covenant offered by God, receiving Jesus and committing to be a follower of His. I implore you to make that commitment today.

End Notes

¹ Ryken, *Exodus*, p. 707

Chapter Twenty

When God Draws Near Exodus 25-31; 35-40

My parents mostly encouraged *spontaneous* prayers of thanksgiving at meal times but when I was younger they also taught my siblings and me some very simple prepared prayers. One of them was this: "God is great, God is good and we thank him for our food." Because I most often heard or said that prayer around mealtime, I thought it was mostly about thanking God for our food. While it certainly is that, and appropriately so, the prayer is much more about the first two clauses, "God is great, God is good." In fact I dare say that if we understood and believed those two truths they would address most of what confuses and causes anxiety in our lives.

Imagine a simple mental grid through which you could run all the issues of life and gain both real perspective and even peace. Or to change the metaphor, imagine seeing all of life through the eyeglass lenses of the greatness of God and the goodness of God. Life without that perspective ought to be filled with terror. Oh I suspect that many of us grew up feeling we could take on the world and win. But life has a way of soon cutting us down to size and were it not for ignorance or denial many would give up on life. But there is another way—it is to know and believe these two truths about God—God is great and God is good.

How do we keep that perspective? That, in part, is what worship is about! Oh, I know we can miss it so easily on Sundays, but what happens here on Sunday mornings is vitally important to our lives. Here we are reminded of and we respond to these two great truths again and again—the

greatness and goodness of God. Has there ever been a time when God's people didn't need to be continually reminded of these two truths? I think not! If I truly believe God is both sovereign and benevolent, all-powerful and wholly good, omnipotent and gracious, I can face anything life has to offer.

Certainly the people of Israel struggled with believing in that God.

- No sooner had they seen God deliver them from the Egyptian army by allowing the Israelites to cross the Red Sea on dry ground than they complained about God not caring for them.
- No sooner had they stood trembling at the foot of Mt Sinai as the presence of God thundered above them than they panicked and said they needed a God they could see and who would lead them.

As with us, in situation after situation they found themselves doubting either the greatness or the goodness of God.

It was after one of their panic modes, when they built a golden idol in the shape of a bull-calf and after God forgave them and renewed His covenant with them, that God instructed them to build the Tabernacle—the very special place of worship. In Exodus chapters 25-31 we see the instructions given and in chapters 35-40 we see Israel carry out those instructions. Nearly one-third of the book, 13 chapters, are given to the subject of the Tabernacle. I will refer to some of the detail of those instructions later but for now I want you to see the outcome of the matter.

Tabernacle: 150' long and 75' wide.

The Holy Place was 30' by 15'

The Holy of Holies within The Holy Place was 15' square

Look at Exodus 40:1-2,17-38:

"Then the LORD said to Moses: 'Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the first month...' Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded him.

"So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year. When Moses set up the tabernacle, he put the bases in place, erected the frames, inserted the crossbars and set up the posts. Then he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering over the tent, as the LORD commanded him.

"He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark, attached the poles to the ark and put the atonement cover over it. Then he brought the ark into the tabernacle and hung the shielding curtain and shielded the ark of the Testimony, as the LORD commanded him.

"Moses placed the table in the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the tabernacle outside the curtain and set out the bread on it before the LORD, as the LORD commanded him.

"He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle and set up the lamps before the LORD, as the LORD commanded him.

"Moses placed the gold altar in the Tent of Meeting in front of the curtain and burned fragrant incense on it, as the LORD commanded him. Then he put up the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle.

"He set the altar of burnt offering near the entrance to the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, and offered on it burnt offerings and grain offerings, as the LORD commanded him.

(Is there a phrase you keep hearing over and over again? "As the Lord commanded him.")

"He placed the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing, and Moses and Aaron and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet. They washed whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses.

"Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

"Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels."

What is the end result of all the instructions and work in building the Tabernacle? The glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle; God is dwelling among them! Earlier, God had chosen to come and go but now, He was with them permanently. I wish I could demonstrate before your eyes as dramatically as God did what took place that day. I can't! But I can point out to you the significance of the presence of God; it was a continual reminder of those two truths I have mentioned so often—God is great and God is good. Before I attempt to show you that more fully, I want you to see something of the literary context—the way the author develops the story.

Back in chapter 31, after God gave the instructions about how to build the Tabernacle, in chapters 25-31, He reiterated His command about keeping the Sabbath. *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, 'You must*

observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy”.’ ” (Exodus 31:12-13)
The Tabernacle and its rituals became the media, the means, of worship.

While they were His people every day of the week, they needed this one-day-in-seven reminder of the presence, the greatness and goodness, of the Lord.

The next thing that happens in the text, in chapters 32-34, is the rebellion of the people in the making of the golden calf, which we looked at

“As the Lord commanded him.”

earlier. Immediately following that rebellion and God’s gracious forgiveness, God picks up, as it were, where He left off, on the subject of worship. Exodus 35:1-2 says, *“Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them, ‘These are the things the LORD has commanded you to do: For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death.’ ”*

Following that, in chapters 35-40, is the actual construction of the Tabernacle according to the instructions God had already given in chapters 25-31. God gave the Tabernacle to His people to be the place of worship; where God would dwell in their midst and as they worshipped, God would continually remind them of His greatness and goodness.

Let me briefly describe how the Tabernacle did that. There are some who take these chapters apart verse by verse and find some spiritual significance in every part of the Tabernacle from the cloth that formed the curtains to every piece of furniture in it and every design on them. For

example one author suggests that the curtain over the outer entrance to the Tabernacle was fashioned with fine linen colored in red, blue, purple and white. He then compares words from the New Testament with words from the Old Testament to indicate that this was why the certain colors were chosen.

He writes, "Each of the colors has a significance:

- *Red* signifies blood: "Behold My servant" (Isaiah 52:13 & 53:5), pointing to Mark's gospel, where Jesus says He "came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- *Blue* indicates heavenly and godly.

The Tabernacle as a whole is the message having to do with worship—believing and responding to the greatness and goodness of our God.

- *Purple* signifies kingship.

- *White* signifies purity and a right humanity.

"These four colors are woven together to become the complete

Door, just as the four gospels combine to give a complete picture of Jesus. Jesus Christ is pure and righteous, kingly and godly, and this is *how* He as a man can be our ransom, the Door for us to enter into God's presence in the Tabernacle.¹ The problem is that there is no biblical support for this kind of free association.

The book of Hebrews and a few other places in the New Testament do make direct reference to the Tabernacle or Temple especially as they relate to the sacrifices that were offered there in anticipation of the perfect sacrifice of God the Son, Jesus. But I am convinced that the reason the Tabernacle instruction is included in the Bible is not to

make a color-by-color or even metal-by-metal analogy of some New Testament theme but instead the Tabernacle as a whole is the message. And that message has to do with worship—believing and responding to the greatness and goodness of our God.

- The greatness is revealed in both the materials that were used to construct the Tabernacle and most obviously in the visual glory of the Lord that shone out of the Tabernacle after God indwelt it.
- The goodness is revealed in both the sacrificial system to atone for the sins of the people and in the nearness of God to His people, guiding them on their way.

Let's look at each of these a little more closely. It is readily evident that God instructed them to build the Tabernacle in such a way that the closer they got to the Holy of Holies, the central feature of the Tabernacle, the more expensive and beautiful were the materials used. The outer court and outer materials were less expensive; the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies were made of gold and the most exquisite fabrics and colors. The closer they got to God, the more special it became.

The text also makes it clear that coming close to that center was to be done only very carefully in exact accordance with the instructions God gave. Failure to do otherwise meant death; this was a holy place. And when, after construction, God came down to dwell in the Tabernacle, it was obvious to all that someone holy, wholly other, had moved in. All together there was a vivid sense of the greatness, the holiness, the transcendence of God. Everything about the Tabernacle including the materials, the construction, the rituals necessary to approach it, and even the way it was to be carried spoke to the transcendence, the "otherness" of God—His greatness.

Do you think the people had a holy fear of God? I do. That translated into a respect for, an awe of, a reverence for, and a careful attention to God. I know it is a common lament but I think it bears repeating. One of the problems of Christians today is the reduction of God to a buddy, or a friend —someone like us. Psalm 50:21 says, "*...you thought I was altogether like you.*" A.W. Pink wrote, "The 'god' of this century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The 'god' who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School and mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day...is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside of Christendom form 'gods' out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a 'god' out of their own worldly mind. In reality they are atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A 'god' whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, and whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity..."²

And the Bible says in 1 Chronicles 29:11:

*"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all."*

Our God is not a "run of the mill" Deity. He is the great God of the universe. Understanding His transcendence is essential for us to both worship Him properly and to trust Him fully. That Tabernacle with its exquisite design, with God's holy warnings, and with the cloud and fire were constant reminders of the greatness of God.

What reminds you of the greatness of God when you come to worship on Sundays? When we worship God we worship a being we can't get our heads around. If we could, He wouldn't inspire awe. In his book entitled *Blue Like Jazz* Donald Miller wrote, "I can no more understand the totality of God than the pancake I made for breakfast understands the complexity of me."³

He went on to tell of a time when his friend Jason and he made a trip to Death Valley. He said Jason had a map folded across his lap nearly the entire trip. "Jason liked to know where we were on the map. But I was afraid to tell Jason about the universe, of how scientists haven't found the edge of it, of how nobody knows where we are on the map." Miller said,

"Too much of our time is spent trying to chart God on a grid, and too little time is spent allowing our hearts to feel awe...There are things

The people's fear of God translated into a respect for, an awe of, a reverence for, and a careful attention to God.

you cannot understand, and you must learn to live with this. Not only must you learn to live with this, you must learn to enjoy this."

"At the end of the day, when I am lying in bed and I know the chances of any of our theology being exactly right are a million to one, I need to know that God has things figured out, that if my (theories) are wrong we are still going to be okay...I don't think there is any better worship than wonder."⁴ Do you know and believe that God is God; that he is transcendent, holy, wholly other, the great, sovereign God of the universe?

At the same time do you know and believe that He is not

only out there but that He is also right here? Do you know and believe in the immanence of God? Immanence is His "here-ness" and nearness. As I said earlier every time an Israelite looked at the Tabernacle there were immediate reminders of the presence of God. Of course the greatest reminders were the phenomenal cloud by day and pillar of fire by night over the Holy of Holies. Also reminding them of God's nearness were the continual sacrifices being made for the sins of the people—a constant reminder of the grace of God to forgive their sins and keep them in right standing with Him. All of it unearned, all of grace! And then there

"The Word (God the Son) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only.

was the direction God provided day after day. When the cloud moved, they moved. When it stopped and stayed they stopped and stayed. There was more but let this suffice to say they

had visual reminders of the very presence of God *with* them.

Later Moses would speak of this way: *"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us..?"* (Deuteronomy 4:7) Indeed! It was unheard of. That God would come down and dwell or live with His people was unique. Each morning the Israelites could look out and say with confidence, the transcendent God of the universe is with us; He is here.

What reminds you of the nearness of God when you come to worship on Sundays? When Jesus came to earth the New Testament writers used language obviously linked to the Tabernacle when they said in John 1:14, *"The Word (God the Son) became flesh and made his dwelling ("Tabernacled") among us. We have seen his glory, the*

glory of the One and Only..." Immanuel—God with us. But Jesus went back to the Father; so what now? In John 14:16-17 Jesus promised, *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives **with** you and will be **in** you."*(Emphasis Added)

The Apostle Paul using Tabernacle/Temple language of the church said it this way: *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?... for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."* (1 Corinthians 3:16) The people of God, the church, is now the Tabernacle, the dwelling place, of God.

It is even more intimate than what the Israelites experienced; God is not just with us in a physical Tabernacle but He is in us! Think of it! That transcendent God, who is so holy that we rightfully fear Him, has also, in love, condescended to be so close to us and gracious to us that the only way to describe it is to say He is IN us. And each Sunday as we see the Lord's table and together take the bread and wine, we are visually reminded of the gracious provision and presence of our Lord God WITH US.

Hebrews 10:19-25 says, *"Therefore, brothers, **since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...*

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of

doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Emphasis Added) For Israel, worship was the weekly reminder of the greatness and goodness of God. In that which could be seen, touched, carried, and offered the people experienced the presence of God.

That’s why we worship! And worship is necessary in the life of the believer. One man confessed: “I don’t always feel like going to church. Sometimes it is boring (to me). Sometimes I just want a break...At times like these I preach to myself, encouraging myself about what going to church means. I remind myself of the profound mystery of God’s dwelling among his people. Church is not a place just where programs happen. It is not a place to go and be noticed by others. It is not a place just to meet people. It is not even just a place to listen to sermons. It is where heaven and earth meet... Christians come together to experience communally the reality that God dwells with us. That is why we go to church—not because we have to or because we will feel guilty if we don’t. We do it because it is the ordained manner by which we enter into God’s time and space. Sunday is a foretaste of eternity... We go to church regularly...because the weekly rhythm becomes part of us; it seeps into our routines, not so that it can simply become routine, but so it can shape us into the people of God.”⁵ Shaping us into people who know and believe that God is both great and good. In one way it is a contradiction in terms but the transcendent God is also the immanent God; He is there but He is also here. He is great and He is good!

With your imagination, I want you to go with me to worship God. Today we are going to the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. or Notre Dame in Paris, or St. John’s in downtown Denver. Hopefully you’ve been in such a church

and you can see it now. We enter the sanctuary and we immediately feel little as the immensity of space surrounds us. And immediately our eyes are drawn up, up, and still further up so high we can't any longer measure the height, and so high that a sense of vertigo flits past.

As we look, we see sunlight streaming through windows high above. The light pours in as if it is continually filling the space and yet it is never too full

In that which could be
seen, touched, carried, and
offered the people
experienced the presence
of God—Church!

to take more. As you stand feeling smaller than ever before, you hear organ music begin to swell. You don't see where it is coming from but you are immediately surrounded by melody and even enveloped by it. Then the sound of many voices begins to fill the space and as you hear the words, you feel compelled to slowly bend to your knees and close your eyes and drown in the sound and space. "Holy, Holy, Holy" are the words you hear in sounds so majestic and yet so soothing that you don't know whether to weep or sing along. The presence of the Holy overtakes you and you are filled with awe and joy, both at the same time.

Then for the first time you are aware of the presence of hundreds of others doing exactly what you have done—on their knees in worship of the One and Only God of heaven and earth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the music finally subsides, you stand to your feet and your eyes are drawn to the baptismal where men, women and children speak of God's forgiving, renewing grace as they step into the baptismal waters. There they dramatize the internal working of the Spirit of God whereby they have been brought to life out of death. And you are struck that new lives have begun, lives yet in the world to be sure, but lives

with God in the world.

No sooner does this end than you are invited to come to a table where bread and wine have been prepared. As you approach the bread and the cup you realize again that it is Jesus' body and blood that makes your relationship with this Holy God even possible. Suddenly you are aware that hundreds of people you've never even met are going with you to the same table to share in the same sacramental meal—all saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus and His finished work on the cross. You realize you are part of a special people—a people not determined by family, ethnicity, occupation or intellect but a people determined by grace and together belonging to God forever. You look around and realize that not only are you now holding the body of Christ in your hand as you take the bread, but that these people together with you are the body of Christ.

And even as you still stand in awe of the majesty, the greatness, of God experienced in the sights and sounds you have known, you realize the nearness, and the goodness of God in these, His people, standing with you at the table. You have a compelling desire to **sing** your praise, to **pray** your praise, to **give** your praise in your offering, to **listen** to your praise in your hearing from God's Word and in **doing** your praise in how you live when you leave this place. You can hardly wait to stand and sing with all your heart and voice, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow..." Nothing is more real to you in that moment than the presence of God and His people and you can imagine no better place to be.

Whether it is the Tabernacle, a Cathedral, or a Worship Center, that is our privilege and that is our calling—to experience the presence of God and to know and believe He is great and He is good.

End Notes

¹ <http://www.domini.org/tabern/outdoor.htm>

² A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 29

³ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, p. 202

⁴ Ibid, p. 204-6

⁵ Enns, *Exodus*, p. 558-559

Chapter Twenty-One

He is not safe, but He is good **Exodus 32-34**

When you think of God, what do you think about Him? Is He distant, holy and just; a righteous God commanding righteousness? Or is He near, loving and forgiving; a compassionate God providing for us even in our failings? Or is He both and more? With the release of the latest film version of C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" I thought it appropriate to borrow from one of its well-known lines to describe the God I see in our text for today—"He is not safe, but he is good."

Consider these biblical references to our God: From the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 4:23-24 it says, *"Do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire..."* The same idea is virtually unchanged in the New Testament, it reads, *"Worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.' "* Hebrews 12:28-29

But also hear Exodus 34:6-7: *"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..."* In keeping with His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob 500 years earlier, God raised up Moses to lead His people, the descendents of Jacob called Israel, out of Egyptian slavery and to a land of their own—the Promised Land. In our study of that exodus from slavery, in the book by that name, we have followed the people of Israel out of Egypt, miraculously across the Red

Sea, and to the Mountain of God also called Mt Horeb or Mt Sinai. There in the hearing of the people, God gave the law, summarized in the 10 Commandments in chapter 20 and then spelled out in more detail in chapters 21-23. Then, in chapters 25-31, God called Moses to come up on the mountain again and God would give him the Commandments on tablets of stone.

They'd prefer their own god, one they could manage. So they took the gold that God had given them when they left Egypt and they shaped it into an image of a young bull calf.

But what happens next, in chapter 32, is startling and tragic for these people who say they belong to God. Let me tell you the story with comments: *"When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down*

from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' Aaron answered them, *'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.'* So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, *'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'* When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, *'Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.'* So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." (Exodus 32:1-6) It had probably been a month since Moses left and here the people were in the middle of nowhere with no idea

of what to do next except wait. Well they had waited and it was becoming increasingly obvious that Moses had either deserted them or something had happened to him.

What we see next is that the people may have been taken out of Egypt but clearly Egypt had not been taken out of them.¹ They wanted to go back. (see also Acts 7:39-41) They had heard God's promises but ultimately they didn't trust God. So the people went to Aaron, who had been left in charge, and they demanded (maybe even threatened?) him to give them gods they could follow. Moses was gone and the God they had before they couldn't see. That God asked them to obey and move ahead by faith. Furthermore that God had laid out His holy instruction regarding their conduct and even their attitudes toward Him and each other.

They'd prefer their own god, one they could manage. So they took the gold that God had given them when they left Egypt and they shaped it into an image of a young bull calf—a common symbol of virility and strength. They don't think they are totally rejecting the one true God; they are just remaking Him to their liking. Rejecting all the rationale of the 2nd commandment about not reducing God to something created, they do exactly that. They want a religion that is more hospitable to their perception of reality. They can see they have no visible means of support but they can't see God, or even Moses. So they will change things just a little. They think they are still worshipping the one true God. They build an altar and sacrifice the offerings they had sacrificed before (see Exodus 24).

If they were in our context, it is as if they still go to church, they still take the Lord's Supper, they are baptized, and they do the things of their religion but they changed it at its root; they aren't following God, rather they have made up

their own idea of God and they are following it. R.C. Sproul captures it when he writes, "The (bull calf) gave no law and demanded no obedience. It had no wrath or justice or holiness to be feared. It was deaf, dumb and impotent. (And thus) it would not intrude on their fun and call them to judgment. This was a religion designed by men, practiced by men, and ultimately useless for men."²

The Psalmist put it this way: *"At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass."* (Psalm 106:19-20) They went from experiencing the very presence of God Himself to the mere presence of the lifeless likeness of a bull. What a terrible trade! But it felt good at the time. After doing their religious duty they "got up to indulge in revelry." When, earlier, they had made their offerings to God it says they responded very differently: Exodus 24:7 says, *"Then (Moses) took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.'"* This time, after making God the way they wanted Him to be they got up, as the New Testament says it, to indulge in pagan revelry. (see 1 Corinthians 10:7) This wasn't God-centered celebration; this was man-centered self-indulgence. And it seems that often leads even to perversion.

With echoes of Psalm 106, Paul writes in Romans 1:22-24, *"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and **exchanged the glory** of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity..."* Later we learn that *"Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control."* Exodus 32:25 (See also Ex. 32:18; the "singing" is "haphazard singing of wild debauch.")

They got the god they wanted, they worshipped the way they wanted, and they lived the way they wanted. What they didn't realize was that they had given away the farm. What WERE they thinking? That God wouldn't mind? That a little religion is enough? That "close" is good enough for God? Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* What they didn't think about was that when they stopped trusting and following God they were on their own. God didn't move away from them; they moved away from God.

Meanwhile, *"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become*

This was a religion
designed by men, practiced
by men, and ultimately
useless for men.

corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." 'I have seen these people,' the LORD said to Moses, 'and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.'" (Exodus 32:7-10) Moses is not privy to what is taking place below, but God is. And God in His anger apparently disowns Israel. God won't even call them His own saying, *"Moses YOUR people have become corrupt"* and *"THESE people...are stiff-necked (hard-headed)."* The people don't see it this way but so quickly have they turned, so great is their offense, and so complete is their rejection of God that God says He plans to destroy them and start over with Moses alone. What we are seeing is the holiness and justice of God.

When you think of God, what do you think about Him? Exodus 32:11-14 says, *"But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. 'O LORD,' he said, 'why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: "I will*

When Moses actually saw the golden calf and the wild activity of the people, he joined God in his appraisal of the situation and Moses burned with anger.

make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever'." Then the LORD

relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened."

Moses doesn't take God's offer as we see in verses 11-14. Like the mediator God has called him to be, Moses pleads with the Lord to stay the execution.

- He appeals to all the effort God has already put into these people.
- He appeals to God's honor—the Egyptians will ridicule you.
- He appeals to God's earlier promises.

God had said, *"Moses, YOUR people have become corrupt."* Moses dares to say, *"Lord, why should your anger burn*

against YOUR people." At that, the Lord "relented"; He said He wouldn't bring the disaster on the people that He had threatened. Are we now seeing a different side of God?

Does Moses actually talk God out of something? Does God actually change His mind? Not in the way we might think. Through the centuries, the rabbis said, "God speaks the language of man." He condescends to our level and understanding. God speaks as we would speak in order to lead us to understanding. God is leading Moses and us step by step through the event to teach us about Himself. What are we to think of God; does He judge sin or does He overlook it?

We might be tempted to think the crisis is over until we see what happens next in verses 19-24: *"When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. He said to Aaron, 'What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?'"* (Exodus 32:19-24) When Moses actually saw the golden calf and the wild activity of the people, he joined God in his appraisal of the situation and Moses burned with anger. It was only after seeing it for himself that Moses understood the seriousness of the sin of the people in the face of the holiness of God? And in Moses' righteous anger, he shattered the tablets of the law, and whether he meant it this way or not it was certainly symbolic of the shattered relationship between Israel and God.

It was those very instructions about living in relationship with God that the people had so flagrantly violated. Like Jesus, centuries later overthrowing tables in the Temple,

you can see Moses striding into the midst of that debauchery masquerading as religion and pushing over the golden calf and then with some instrument smashing it to smithereens.

Why have them drink the pulverized idol? The only clue we have is in Number 5:11ff where someone suspected of adultery is required to drink water mixed with dust from the Temple floor. From Moses' point of view, the people have committed adultery against God. *"He said to Aaron, 'What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?'*

'Do not be angry, my lord,' Aaron answered. 'You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me, "Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." So I told them, "Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off." Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!' " (Exodus 32:21-24)

But now, please forgive
their sin—but if not, then
blot me out of the book
you have written.'

Then we see in verses 21-24, it is probably when his initial anger cools just a little that

Moses turns to Aaron, the man he left in charge, and asks, "What did they do to you that you led them into this great sin?" I think that is very gracious of Moses to think Aaron was coerced. But the little "weasel," Aaron, takes advantage of the suggestion and blames the people—after all, Moses, you know how prone these people are to evil. And furthermore if you hadn't been gone so long this might not have happened. And then silliest of all is his excuse that all he did was throw the gold into the fire and "what do you know," out came this calf. The people are to blame, you, Moses, are to blame, and fate is to blame, but not me.

"Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, 'Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.' And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor."' The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died." (Exodus 32:25-28)

For reasons we are not told, in verses 25-28, Moses lets Aaron off the hook but turns his attention to the people, commanding that whoever is on the Lord's side should stand by him. Then reminiscent of Jesus' statement that 'if a man does not love Jesus even more than close relatives, he cannot be Jesus' disciple, Moses commands those who claim allegiance to the one true God to exercise judgment on their own relatives and neighbors.

"The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses went back to the LORD and said, 'Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.' The LORD replied to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.' And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made." (Exodus 32:30-35)

Was Moses attempting to appease the anger of God by carrying out some of the judgment himself? It appears that way when, in verses 30-35, Moses tells the people that he is planning to go back to God and attempt to make atonement for the sin of the people. Moses does go back to God and agrees with God about the sin of the people. But now Moses uses a new tack with God—he offers himself as a substitute for the people. But God rejects the offer for reasons Moses doesn't say. We now know, of course that Moses wasn't a sufficient substitute; only the PERFECT Son of God (Jesus) could be that. But while God has relented of instantly and totally destroying the people on the spot, the people will still experience a tragic consequence of their sin.

*"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants." I will send an angel before you... Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. **But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.'** When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments."* (Exodus 33:1-4 Emphasis Added)

In chapter 33 the Lord said to Moses, Leave here and go to the land that I promised your forefathers. I will send my angel to lead you but (and here is the tragic consequence of their sin) I will not go with you because if I did I would probably destroy you. Israel, I won't kill you all, and in fact you will experience the common grace I shower on all people but you will not have the special relationship we enjoyed before. They had rejected God and wanted to go on their own terms with their own idea of god and so God is letting them go. God is holy and He commands the allegiance of His people.

Next is a major turning point in the story. When the people hear this they begin to grieve and we must wonder if they began to understand the gravity of their sin and the futility of their choices. While the text doesn't call it such, I have to wonder if this is the true repentance that God has been waiting for. *"When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments."*

"Moses said to the LORD, 'You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found

favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.

Remember that this

nation is your people.'" (Exodus 33:12-17) The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14)

We now know, of course, that Moses wasn't a sufficient substitute; only the PERFECT Son of God (Jesus) could be that.

At that, in verses 12-17, Moses once again goes before the Lord pleading for mercy. And this time the Lord responds, *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* I would think that Moses would jump for joy at this news but it is almost as if the rightness of God's judgment is so evident and the certainty of it so immanent that Moses doesn't even hear the good news. For Moses says in verses 15-17, *"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked,*

because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

Again, the Lord assures Moses, but again it is as if Moses' own faith is now in crisis and he pleads for reassurance. And what follows is that great passage when God shows Moses God's glory.

The LORD, the LORD, the
compassionate and
gracious God, slow to
anger, abounding in love
and faithfulness,
maintaining love to
thousands, and forgiving
wickedness, rebellion and
sin.

But in the midst of that experience, God writes again on stone tablets renewing His covenant with His people. Exodus 34:1-7 says, "*The LORD said to Moses, 'Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on*

the first tablets, which you broke.'" And what follows in the next verses and the rest of the book of Exodus is nearly a repeat of everything that happened before the people's rejection of God in the making of the golden calf. God again gives the commandments on stone tablets. Moses again comes down from the mountain and reads them to the people in the remainder of chapter 34. God again gives instructions about the worship in chapters 35-40. Repeating it all over again, Moses emphasizes that they are starting again by God's grace.

But in the midst of that marvelous passage where God shows Himself to Moses, this is what God says of Himself. And it is this, which I find to be the point of the retelling of the whole event: "*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving*

wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..."(Exodus 34:6-7)

God points out two measures of His character—compassionate mercy and righteous judgment. And in the story just retold, God dramatically demonstrated both. When I say, "dramatically demonstrated both," I mean when the people sin, God clearly indicated the potential disaster of such sin against a holy God—God is to be feared. At the same time He slowly reveals an understanding of His great mercy—God is compassionate.

There are those who teach the law and severity of God to the end that many sensitive believers are only fearful of God. But there are more who teach the love of God to the end that many believers live presuming on the grace of God. The story in Exodus goes on for some time; I think very intentionally the outcome is left hanging to the very end. Is God a God of judgment or a God of mercy?

When you think of God, what do you think about Him? We see that the people have abandoned a real faith in God; that they have substituted their own god for the real God of their lives. We are left wondering if God will destroy His own people because of their sin. We want to believe, for our own sake, that God will forgive them but we understand that He is under no obligation to do so. He would be right, just and fair to judge them. And even when He forgives them it doesn't mean there are no consequences for their sin.

But we also see a God, who for reasons found only in His compassion, shows mercy to those who deserve judgment. We see a God who forgives when there is no reason in the forgiven for God to do so. We see Him promise to be with them and bless them when they have given Him every

reason to do otherwise. In fact it is this very incident that the Apostle Paul has in mind when he writes in 1 Corinthians 10:6-7, *"These things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.'* " It is some understanding of both the compassionate mercy of God and the righteous

Where else can I go when I sin, but to Him? Everything in me wants to flee from His holy presence but I know that only in Him can be found the mercy and grace I so desperately need.

judgment of God that keeps us turning away from sin and turning to God.

When I was in those early years of life, probably between about 3 and 11, when a father is omnipotent and his word is law, I feared my father but

it was a healthy fear. I also knew beyond any doubt that my father loved me and would do nothing that would truly harm me (Hurt? Yes! But not harm). Even when I did wrong the judgment was tempered with mercy. That's what I see in Exodus 32-34. I am left with a holy fear of God, a respect that He is not to be trifled with nor presumed upon. I am also left with a trust that God will always temper His judgment with mercy because His love for me will never fail.

My God is holy and righteous and He calls me to that same righteousness in my relationship with Him and others. And as the Bible says, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* But where else can I go when I sin, but to Him? Everything in me wants to flee from His holy presence but I know that only in Him can be found the

mercy and grace I so desperately need. And so in fear and trust I cling to Him for His blessing. When you think of God, what do you think about Him?

In my study I came across a poem written 1000 years ago. It captures something of this fear of God's judgment and love of God's compassion that I think we should hold in proper tension all our lives.

"Lord, if my sin is great—too great to bear—
How wilt Thou shield thine own yet greater name
From Obloquy (abuse)? And if I may not dare
Hope for thy mercies, on whom have I claim
For pity, save on Thee? Nay, then, I say,
E'en though Thou shouldst slay
Natheless my hope on Thee should still abide;
And if my sin Thou searchest, then away
From Thee I flee—to Thee, myself to hide
In thy shade from thy broiling wrath, and cling
Fast to thine apron-string
Of mercy, till Thou bidst thy mercy hold
Me firm, nor will I let Thee go, unless
Like Jacob's angel Thou does deign to bless."¹

I have watched that in my own children. They intentionally break the rules, they are caught and discipline follows. At first their demeanor is rebellion, but as punishment comes and they realize the hopelessness of their position, and hopefully the wrongness of their sin, they yield. You can see them abandon the rebellion and melt into submission, falling on mercy and love. My God is holy in righteousness, consuming in His wrath against sin, and at the same time He is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. It is that God I fear and love! I commend Him to you! He is not

safe but He is good!

End Notes:

¹ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, p. 253

² R.C Sproul in Ryken, p. 977, chapter 85 footnote 17

³ Solomon Ibn Gabirol in Goran Larsson *Bound for Freedom*, p. 250-1

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Tabernacle, the Cross and Me Exodus 40 & Hebrews 9

What does God think of you? Does God like you? I'm not asking if you think He loves you; I'm asking if He likes you. I start with some assumptions, some premises, that I think can be amply demonstrated but which I don't have time to prove:

- My 1st premise is that God exists and that He is personal and not just an impersonal force.
- My 2nd premise is that having a relationship with that personal God is essential to our well being both now and forever.

The logic goes something like this: If there is a God and if the word "God" means anything like someone with a will and the power to enforce that will, it certainly seems to our advantage to know that God and His will and comply with it. Man may be able to exist without God but he cannot "live" without God. Of course he can breathe, eat and sleep for a season. But life is more than that and longer than that. Again, if there is a God, we need to know Him and be in right relationship with Him.

If you will grant for the sake of discussion that such a God exists, it then seems reasonable to ask: What does that God think of you? So back to my first question: Does He like you? Many, if not most, of us, are professing Christians. We believe Christ died for us and that we will be with Him when we die.

But how does God feel about you now? Do you ever suspect He is angry with you? Maybe you've repeatedly

"blown it" in the past and you suspect God has never quite gotten over it. Oh, you say God has forgiven you but you think He still has every right to still be angry with you. Or maybe you would say, "No, God is not angry with me but I suspect he's usually just a little irritated with me? I'm not a terrible person and never was but I've never been able to quite get it all together spiritually and I keep falling short in so many ways—my devotional life is intermittent and lackluster, my giving is the same, I'm not an evangelist or a teacher; in fact I don't know what "gifts" I have. I find that I'm angry a lot, and I end up saying things I shouldn't. I

These people had been saved, provided for and blessed with the presence of Almighty God but they were still sinners .

know God loves me but I suspect He's not pleased with me; I feel like He's disappointed in me."

Maybe I haven't described exactly how

you feel about your relationship with God but maybe I've at least made you think about it. Consider this: Why would ANYONE want to be around someone who is angry with them or disappointed with them, or even is judgmentally waiting for them to get it right? We don't like being around a person who is critical of us, who is judging us or is angry with us, even if that person is God. Too often in our minds, our failings, great and small, stand between God and us. But based on the Bible, I believe God wants something very different in His relationship with us than what I've just described. In our study of the Old Testament book of Exodus, we have see that:

- God delivered His chosen people from Egyptian slavery.
- He guided and provided for them on their way to a new land, a new home.

- He gave them His laws by which they could construct a new society and live in right relationship with Him and each other.
- God gave them instructions about the construction of a tabernacle—an intricately designed tent-structure, where God would take up residence in their very midst. The transcendent holy God of the universe would come to them and live among them.

Exodus 40:16-17, 34 says, *"Moses did everything just as the LORD commanded him. So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year...Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."* God had saved them, He's provided for them, and He was with them. It was perfect, right?

Not quite. In fact, not even close to perfect. These people had been saved, provided for and blessed with the presence of Almighty God but they were still sinners—they would still violate their relationship with God and each other. God was under no delusion about this. In fact in the very instructions about the tabernacle where God would dwell with His people, God made two things clear:

- The people could get close to God but not too close;
- Atonement was necessary for the sins of the people.

It isn't until the next book of the Bible, the book of Leviticus, that we see this unfold. There we are told about the sacredness of that innermost chamber of the Tabernacle—the Most Holy Place.

Within the 150' X 75' courtyard was the 15' X 45' tent of meeting. And within the tent of meeting were two chambers—one was 15'X30' and was called the Holy Place;

the other was 15'X15' and was called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place. The people could not even enter the outer chamber—the Holy Place; only certain priests were allowed in. They went in to keep a special candle lit and to offer incense on a special altar and only under very rigid rules. They could not enter the Most Holy Place. And as to that Most Holy Place—The Holy of Holies—only the high priest could enter and he could enter only once each year, as I will describe shortly. God was with them, but the people couldn't get too close.

As to the sins of the people, in the courtyard was a large altar on which animal sacrifices were made. And when people sinned they were to bring special animals and there in the courtyard they were to lay their hands on the heads of the animals indicting the transfer of their sin to the animals and then the priest would sacrifice the animals on the altar sprinkling the blood on the corners and base of the altar. The animal would die in the place of the person. This would be done morning and evening, day after day.

Then once each year, other very special sacrifices would be made for the sins of the people. In Leviticus 16 we are told that on the 10th day of the 7th month was the Day of Atonement. On that day only, after elaborate personal preparations and putting on clothing designed at God's instruction, the high priest was first of all to select a young bull and sacrifice it for his own sin. He then took some of the blood of that animal and carefully entered the Most Holy Place where he put the blood on the top of the Ark of the Covenant, the place called "the mercy seat" or the "atonement cover" atoning for his own sins.

Then he went back out and took two goats. One he sacrificed for the sins of the people. And again he entered the Most Holy Place, this time to put the blood of the

sacrificial goat on the same “mercy seat” or “atonement cover” atoning for the sins of the people.

Then he would go out to where the other goat was tied. Leviticus 16:21-22 says, *"He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert."*

In these ways the sins of the people were atoned for, covered over and forgiven, so they could continue as

The holiness and justice of God were far more evident than the nearness and intimacy of God.

the people of God and in relationship with one another.

But there were two problems: While it was true that God was near, even in their midst, the people were still separated from God by the Holy Place and by the Priests. The people could get close but not too close. The holiness and justice of God were far more evident than the nearness and intimacy of God. And the second problem was that everyone knew that sacrifices of animals for the sins of the people could only be symbolic and temporary at best.

Now with that background, I want you to read from Hebrews 9:1-14:

"Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of

manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

"When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room (The Holy Place) to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room (The Most Holy Place), and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle (The Holy Place) was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

In Hebrews chapters 9 and 10 the author goes into some detail to show the superiority of Christ's work over the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. He does not

discount the old system but he shows that it was intended to be symbolic, an illustration, a foreshadowing, of the real action that would eventually take place and did take place in Christ. One chapter earlier in Hebrews 8:5 the Bible says that the Old Testament priests, *"serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make*

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'" That Old Testament Tabernacle was patterned after the ideal dwelling place of God in heaven. Now I don't need to imagine a physical tabernacle in heaven to understand this.

And so our text, in the book of Hebrews, contrasts the earthly tabernacle constructed by Moses with the "greater and more perfect tabernacle" of heaven. Hebrews 9:11 says, *"Christ...went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation."* Earlier he wrote of Jesus in Hebrews 1:3 and 8:1: *"After (Jesus) had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven... We (have a) high priest...who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man."* Later he would write on this same subject: *"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."* (Hebrews 9:24) Christ Jesus didn't enter

only a tent building in the desert, which was symbolic of the real thing, he entered into the real thing and remains in that real and most intimate presence of the Father. That is significant for us and so we will come back to that.

Not only does he contrast the place, the Tabernacle, but he also contrasts the sacrifice. Hebrews 9:12 says, "*(Jesus) did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place **once** for all **by his own blood**, having obtained **eternal** redemption.*" (Emphasis Added) Here is how the author says that in different words just a few verses later: "*Nor did (Jesus) enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own...But now (Jesus) has appeared once for all (time)...to do away with sin by **the sacrifice of himself**. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the*

God the Son, who became man, perfect, unblemished by sin, perfectly fulfilling the law of God, offered Himself as the sacrifice for all of God's people.

sins of many people." (Hebrews 9:25-28 Emphasis Added) Or as he says it earlier, if the blood of bulls and goats can cleanse the sinner at least outwardly, "*How much more, then, will*

the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrew 9:14)

God the Son, who became man, perfect, unblemished by sin, perfectly fulfilling the law of God, offered Himself as the sacrifice for all of God's people. Remember those sacrificial animals on whom the people would lay their

hands transferring their sin to the animals? 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Isaiah the prophet predicted this 800 years before Jesus:

*"Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed."*(Isaiah 53:4-5)

Jesus, the perfect high priest, offers the perfect sacrifice, Himself, and goes into the perfect "holy of holies," the very presence of the Father Himself, in heaven, and makes atonement for our sins. Now those are the facts; what I want you to see next are the intended results.

When an Old Testament believer sinned, why did he offer a sacrifice? Because he knew that without the shedding of blood there was no atonement, forgiveness, or covering for his sin. And if there were no forgiveness it would mean a barrier remained between God and him. The Old Testament believer wanted the barrier removed; he wanted the relationship with God restored. But here is the interesting thing about the Old Testament believer's experience: The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament is "*an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered **were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper.** They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—**external** regulations applying until the time of the new order.*" (that is, until Christ came) (Hebrews 9:9-10 - Emphasis Added)

Hebrews 10:1-4 says, that old system, *"can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship."* (That "make perfect" means they can never provide inward cleansing of the conscience, final and complete removal of guilt, full-unencumbered access to God)

"If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Even though the Old Testament believer offered the sacrifice, he or she was still left with a guilty conscience. The days of atonement were actually an annual reminder that their sin was a barrier between them and God. The

In Jesus, we can come
confidently into the very
presence of God.

annual sacrifices
reminded them that
they were still without
an unbroken and
u n b r e a k a b l e

relationship with God. There was still a distance between them and God that couldn't be overcome. I think they understood that those sacrifices weren't finally and fully dealing with the sin that separated them from God? They'd met the requirements, but it wasn't done.

In contrast to that, look at our experience through Christ's death for us. Hebrews 9:14 says, *"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death (from sin that separates us from God), so that we may serve the living God!"* Speaking of the same conscience, he says:

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience." (Hebrews 10:19-22—Emphasis Added) Do you see it? We aren't kept at arm's length from God, we aren't kept out of the holy place or even the MOST holy place. In Jesus, we can come confidently into the very presence of God. Our consciences have been cleansed—something is supposed to have happened to our consciences.

Now I'm back to where I started this sermon: Does God like you? I think that most of the time when we do something wrong toward another person, even if it is just not meeting their expectations, we assume that a barrier has come up between us. Knowing that we have done something wrong we expect that the other person is now angry with us or at least irritated with us or at the very least disappointed in us. Our consciences cause us to think that way. So it is in our perceived relationship with God. We sin and we assume that God is angry, peeved or disappointed in us. We assume He draws away from us and so we draw away. Furthermore we assume that we must make up for this sin in some way or God will remain distant.

Now if we were Catholics we would think to do penance. But being good Protestants, we know we can't do anything, so we just feel miserable for a while until we think we have felt miserable long enough to convince God we were sincere in our "miserableness" and He will take pity on us and forgive us—I call that Protestant penance. And of course the more offensive the sin, the longer we think we

must feel guilty to be adequately repentant. But even that doesn't end it, because when we remember our past sins, Satan tempts us, and depending on our personalities, we are inclined to feel more or less guilty all over again leading us to more "Protestant penance." What's the antidote to such guilty feelings about our relationship with God and others? The antidote is TRUTH!

God's feelings toward me are not dependent on me. The Father's attitude toward me is dependent only on Jesus. My trust is in Jesus and here's what the Bible says about my relationship with God:

- Christ's death paid the full penalty for my sins.
- Christ's death forever removed the barrier of sin and guilt between God and me.
- I am in Christ, I belong to Him, I'm now part of Him, or to use Biblical terminology, I'm part of His body, I'm part of His bride, I'm part of His family. I'm His child and I'm part of His people and if you are trusting Jesus, I want you to see you are connected to Him!

Then realizing that we are part of Him, look what happened in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus: *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive **with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and (here's the part I most want you to see) and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."* (Ephesians 2:4-7 Emphasis Added) We have been brought right into the Most Holy Place—the Holy of Holies—the very presence of the Father. When Jesus was baptized the Father said, *"This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17) When three disciples joined Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, they heard the Father say, *"This is my Son,*

whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 17:5)
What do you suppose the Father felt when the Son returned to heaven following his death, resurrection and ascension? Do you think He felt pleasure, acceptance, and delight? Absolutely!

In this day of frequent travel most anywhere in the world, it would not as likely happen this way, but imagine a much-loved son leaving his home to serve the Lord in a distant place. Years later, after marrying and having children of his own, he returns home, with his family, to visit his father.

What do you think the father's feelings are toward the son? Now to the point, what are the father's feelings toward the son's wife and children? Even in this homely

What's the antidote to such guilty feelings about our relationship with God and others? The antidote is
TRUTH!

illustration you can see how readily the father accepts the children **because of the son**. I love the old King James translation of Ephesians 1:6: "*He has made us accepted in the Beloved.*"

On the authority of God's word I can say to you, if you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your saving-Lord, God likes you! He finds you acceptable! He's not waiting around for us to change to be more acceptable to Him. He will change us but not so we will more acceptable to Him but so we will better enjoy who He is and what He has for us. He's not dissatisfied with you. Your sins, your failings, don't make you less liked or loved. Your conscience is clean. Oh, you *were* guilty to be sure, but the guilt is removed and you may now live as if you had never sinned in the first place. Well, you say, my problem is not that I think God won't forgive me but that I can't forgive myself. Many would

suggest that not forgiving oneself is a matter of low self-esteem. I've often wondered if it is truly the opposite—we think too highly of ourselves. When we say, "How could I have done that?!" one possibility is that we are really saying, "I'm not that kind of person, that action is totally out of character—it's not like me." The truth of the matter is that we ARE sinners just like everybody else, and it was totally in character. We need to get over ourselves and recognize that nothing we can do could ever make up for what we have done—there is only one remedy and that is grace based on Christ's death in our place.

Or maybe when we say, "How could I have done that?!"—we might be thinking, "I always do the wrong thing. Truth is, I'm no good and never will be." Underlying that statement is the pride that says, "I ought to be better on my own. Surely there is something I can do to improve my condition." But the truth of the matter is we are no good and we never will be on our own. Again, we must get over ourselves and truly admit before God what we have been saying about ourselves all along—that we are no good and never will be without help—we need grace. We must quit trying to forgive ourselves and claim the forgiveness that is in Christ alone.

When those feelings of guilt over past sins plague us, we have only one place to go with them. We go to the MOST Holy Place, and in faith, we enter into the presence of the Holy Father in Jesus. We claim our place: forgiven, not guilty, fully a child of God. And we hear the Father say, "This is my much loved child, in him or her I am well-pleased." And that is the voice we listen to.

If you are trusting in Jesus, you can say with all the authority of God's own word, "Yes, God likes me!" But if today, you are not trusting in Jesus, I urge you to go to him, to seek His forgiveness and His grace.

Appendix A

A Short History of God's Work in the World

Have you ever wondered how the books, stories and teachings of the Bible fit together? There is one main storyline running throughout the pages of Scripture. Following is a very short summary of "his" story and its gracious impact on us.

Creation (? B.C.)

"In the beginning, God." Before anything else was, there has always been one Supreme Being, God. Existing as three persons who nonetheless constitute a perfect unity, this God was sufficient within himself. He lacked nothing for his satisfaction or joy. Because his very nature is love (an unselfish concern for another) and because he is three-persons-in-one (thus fulfilled within himself), he did not "need" to create anything. Yet, in his outgoing, altruistic nature, he chose to bring into existence finite entities. He created a physical universe, together with light and energy. He constituted it with certain natural laws, which produced a regularity of action. Beyond that, he furnished the physical universe, populating it with plants and animals. He furnished the place called heaven with spiritual beings, angels, who worshiped and served him. And he created human beings, capable of knowing and obeying him, to dwell on his earth. And when he completed this creation, he looked upon it and pronounced his perfect judgment, "It is good."

Sin

Initially, God's plan for humanity proceeded smoothly. The

first man and his companion, the woman, were happy to obey God and have fellowship with him. They accepted their responsibility of naming and governing the creatures. They were satisfied to be his children. Then, however, a disruption of this perfect relationship occurred. At some unspecified time, but apparently after the completion of the rest of the universe but before this human disobedience, a rebellion had taken place within God's angelic forces, led by one of their number who aspired to be equal with God. Those who had participated in this unsuccessful coup were cast out of heaven, and from that time have lived, not to obey, but to oppose, the causes of God.

It was not that some small element of sin existed that infected and contaminated otherwise pure beings. Rather, when they used their freedom in a way contrary to its intended purposes, a relationship was broken and became twisted and perverse. Not as a new substance, but as a distorted relationship, sin became a genuine reality in the world. And one of the efforts of this supreme demon, Satan, was to pervert the rest of God's perfect creation, beginning at the very pinnacle, with humans. So it was that he planted the seeds of sin in the mind of the first woman, Eve, creating doubt about the correctness of God's statement and leading her to eat the fruit of the one forbidden tree, in violation of God's prohibition. Eve soon encouraged her husband to do the same, and he quickly followed.

When this happened, however, severe disruptions occurred throughout the entire creation. Nature, which had been the servant of the humans, now at times became their enemy. Evils such as disease and death, which had previously been only potential, now became realities. Humans became enemies of other humans, and treated them with cruelty and exploitation.

Noah (? B.C.)

The human beings' now perverted natural tendency was to focus on their own wants and desires, at the expense either of God or of other humans. At one point the wickedness became so repugnant to God that he resolved to send a flood, which destroyed all except a few righteous people, Noah and his family, as well as the animals he had brought into the ark (the great boat God had commanded Noah to build for his deliverance).

Abraham (c.2000 B.C.) /Moses (c.1500 B.C.)/Joshua

Out of (the subsequently) rapidly growing human race, God selected one person, Abraham, and made a unique agreement with him. Abraham and his descendants were to be God's special covenant people, those who would have a unique relationship with him. He gave them a particular land to be their home. He delivered them from bondage to the Egyptians (through Moses) and brought them back to that sacred land, giving them victory over the people who occupied it (through Joshua).

The Kings (David (c.1000 B.C.), Solomon, et al.

Again, however, God's people turned from him, following false gods instead, and God allowed them to be taken into captivity again (to Babylon). Even then, he remained true to his promise, and delivered them from that captivity, to return to the Promised Land.

Babylon (c.600 B.C.), Persian (c.500 B.C.), Greek
(Alexander the Great c.400 B.C.), and Roman (c.100 B.C.)
Empires

The nature of the way God spiritually organized the world he created was that sin, as a violation of God's law and the relationship with him, brought liability to punishment. To die without having been forgiven and restored by God was

to be subject to eternal death, which meant endless separation from the God with whom one had been created for fellowship. No human being could offer anything to God to negate this punishment. God, however, decided in eternity past that when this point came he would do for humans what they could not do for themselves.

Jesus (B.C./A.D.)

And so the triune God determined that one of him, God the Son, would, without ceasing to be divine, add humanity to his deity and be born into the human race. This he did, being born in Nazareth as Jesus, the son of a virgin, Mary. He lived a life of perfect holiness and obedience to the Father. Then, in an act of perfect self-sacrifice, he died an undeserved death, thereby taking on himself all the guilt of all (his people) who had ever lived or ever will live. He then physically rose from the grave conquering death and sin and after showing himself to his disciples and many others he ascended into heaven to the right hand of God the Father. As he promised he sent his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to indwell, encourage and guide his church. And he has also promised that he will physically return one day to gather believers of all the ages to be with him for eternity on the new earth.

Any human who voluntarily acknowledges to God his or her own sin, turns from and accepts this sacrificial provision of Christ, is immediately forgiven, granted eternal life, restored to fellowship with the triune God, and welcomed into the church universal.

Taken from pages 283-285 of Dr. Millard Erickson's *Truth or Consequences*

Edits and additions by Dr. Jerry Nelson
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Appendix B

Probable Time-line: c. 2000 BC Abraham

Genesis 15:13 "Then the LORD said to him, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.' "

Abraham the father of Isaac the father of Jacob (Jacob means "deceiver" and was renamed "Israel" by God. Israel means "struggler and overcomer." So his descendants become known as Israelites rather than Jacobites.)

1875 BC

Joseph and Jacob to Egypt under ethnic Egyptian rulers¹

1730 BC

Hyksos rulers (Semitic, not ethnic Egyptians) come to power²

Many, many years are represented by verses 1:8-14 that describe the growing hostility toward the Israelites and time for the Israelites to grow to over 603,000 men plus women and children (Numbers 2:32).

1559 BC

Hyksos expelled by 18th Egyptian Dynasty (Amenhotep I 1559-1539 and Thutmose I 1539-1514) The ethnic Egyptian rulers continue the slavery of the Israelites.

c. 1500 BC Moses

1527 BC

Moses is born under Thutmose I (1539-1514)

Thutmose II (1514- ?) A sister (Hatshepsut, maybe the princess who found and reared Moses). She ruled after Thutmose II and was co-regent, for a while before her death with her stepson Thutmose III. Thutmose III despised his stepmother and thus would likely have sought to kill Moses forcing Moses to flee Egypt.³

430 years from 1875 to 1450

Exodus 12:40-41 says, *"Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt."*

- Thutmose III (1501-1447) continues oppression of Israelites.
- When Moses kills an Egyptian it is c. 1487 and Moses is 40 when he flees from Egypt. (Exodus 2:11)

1447 BC

Moses (now 80) returns to Egypt under Amenhotep II 1447-1421)

- Exodus 2:23—"During that long period, the king of Egypt died..." (Thutmose III)

1445 BC

Exodus from Egypt—Amenhotep II the Pharaoh of the Exodus

- Thutmose IV (1421-1412 BC) succeeded Amenhotep II but he was not the oldest son since the oldest son died during plague on first-born males (Exodus 12:29)⁴

1405 BC

Conquest of Jericho (after Israel's 40 years in the desert)

- 480 years from Exodus to Solomon's Temple is begun. 1 Kings 6:1—"In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of

Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD."

966 BC

Solomon's Temple

Kingdom divided into Israel in the north and Judah in the south

722 BC

Israel defeated by the Assyrians

606-586 BC

Judah defeated by the Babylonians

536 BC

Temple restored under Ezra and Nehemiah

400s BC

Alexander the Great

Rise of the Roman Empire

0 BC/ 0 AD

Birth of Jesus the Christ

End Notes

¹ Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, p. 229

² Exodus 1:8-10—"Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.' "

³ Ron Youngblood, Exodus , p. 24

⁴ Archer, Ibid, p. 245

Appendix C

PROVIDENCE **From the New Bible Dictionary**

The universal providence of God is the basic assumption of all Scripture. The meaning is "prearrangement." As used historically the theological term "providence" means nothing short of "the universal sovereign rule of God."

The definition of the answer to Question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism expresses the view of all Bible-believing Christians: "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." Divine providence is the outworking of the divine decrees, which are "the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:11).

The biblical doctrine of divine providence does not imply a mechanistic or fatalistic view of the processes of the world or of human life. This may best be summed up by a quote from The Westminster Confession. "Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

"God's providence includes the permission of all...sins of angels and men, and that not a bare permission, but such permission as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and

not from God; who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin" (Westminster Confession, ch. V., paragraphs II and IV).

"Second causes" are the ordinary forces and events of nature that God usually employs to accomplish his purposes. That God's providence includes his decree to permit sin should not seem strange or paradoxical (Gen 50:20).

It is customary to distinguish *special* providence from *general* providence. The former term refers to God's particular care over the life and activity of the believer (Ps. 37:23; Rom. 8:28; Phil. 1:28). The entire Book of Job is devoted to the temporal sufferings of a godly man under divine providence. Hebrews 11:40 tells us that providence, for men of faith, includes something far better than experiences of this life. General providence includes the government of the entire universe, but especially of the affairs of men (Deut. 10:14; 32:8; cf. Neh. 9:6; Dan. 4:35).

Although God's grace is always offered to all people (Acts 10:34-35), yet the *main stream* of historical revelation and blessing for the world, through the instrumentality of Israel and the church, is a principal theme of all Scripture (Acts 7:1-60; 13:16-43; Rom 3:1-2; 9:3-6; 11:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; cf. Heb. 11:38a). To this end God sometimes moves in unrecognized events and processes (Isa. 40:1-5; 44:28-45:4).

Not only is the general course of nature sustained by God's providence, but the moral order and its logical consequences are as well (Gal 6:7-8). Divine providence sustaining the moral order is the principal theme of the Book of Proverbs.

The distinction between God's immanent or natural action and his transcendent or supernatural action is of supreme importance in the understanding of the doctrine of providence. See MIRACLES. The case of Christianity depends entirely on the miracles of the incarnation and the resurrection of Christ. Nevertheless, as the article on miracles shows, godly faith has always existed in a world in which there are long periods of time, even in Bible history, in which God does not choose to give "signs" or display miracles as evidences. It is imperative that we learn to see the glory of God in the regular works of providence as well as in the miraculous.

