



# Servants' Preparation Program



Coptic Orthodox  
Diocese of the  
Southern  
United States

*"For I have given you an example,  
that you should do as I have done to you"  
John 13:15*

**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States of America**

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**COMMENTARY ON THE HOLY BOOK OF EXODUS**

**BY**

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## **Pharaoh's Fears and Israel's Faith (Exodus 1)**

### **1. Linking the Past and the Present (1:1-7)**

Verses 1-7 serve to link the events of the Book of Genesis and those recorded in the Book of Exodus. These two books were intended to be understood in relationship to each other. Verses 1-6 sum up the history of Israel as a clan, as described more thoroughly in Genesis, chapters 12-50. Most importantly, this portion of the introduction to the Book of Exodus (Exod. 1:1-6) links the existence and rapid growth of Israel as a nation to the covenant which God made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3.), and which He reiterated to the patriarchs (Isaac: Gen. 26:2-5, 24; Jacob: Gen. 28:13-15). The sons of Israel and their families numbered 70 (v. 5) when they arrived in Egypt. But when the "sons of Israel" leave Egypt, they do so as a great nation (Exod. 1:7, 12, 20; 12:37).

### **2. A New King and a New Policy (1:8-14)**

When Joseph brought his family to be with him in Egypt, they came to the "best of the land" (Gen. 47:6,11). Even at this time there was an underlying prejudice against the Israelites as Hebrews (Gen. 43:32) and as shepherds (Gen. 46:34). An Asiatic people of Semitic origin (thus, related to the Hebrews) began to migrate into Egypt, eventually gaining control of the government at a time of weakness and confusion during the Second Intermediate Period. The Hyksos ruled for about 150 years during the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, from about 1700 to 1550 B.C. The Hyksos kings were "Egyptianized," assuming the title of Pharaoh, and adopting the gods of Egypt. The Hyksos capital was very close to Goshen where the Israelites had settled in Egypt. It would seem that the "new king" of Exodus 1:8 was a Hyksos king, and he would thus truly be "new" as Moses has indicated, especially if he succeeded an Egyptian king. It would also explain the fear of the Hyksos king that the Israelites might join with their enemies (the Egyptians) to overthrow their (foreign) rule.

The fears of the Pharaoh are of interest: 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" (Exod. 1:9-10).

He feared the numerical strength of the Israelites, and sought to diminish them. He feared that they would become allies with the enemy against their rule, and would overcome them and leave Egypt. Interestingly, everything Pharaoh feared came to pass, in spite of his diligent efforts to prevent it. The reason is, of course, that the Pharaoh's plans were contrary to the purposes and promises of God with regard to His people.

Pharaoh's plan, which was readily adopted by the people, was to enslave the Israelites, and to tighten their control over them. In addition, their value as slave labor would be utilized to strengthen the nation both economically and militarily. The storage cities of Pathos and Rameses were built by the Israelites with brick and mortar, and they worked the fields as well. The Egyptian response to the continued phenomenal numerical growth of the Israelites was to increase the workload and to intensify the harassment and cruelty imposed on them by their taskmasters (1:14).

### **3. Pharaoh and the Midwives (1:15-21)**

The birth rate of Hebrews must be dramatically changed. To bring this about, the Pharaoh turned to the Hebrew midwives, two of who are mentioned specifically here, either as specific examples, or as leaders. The

midwives feared God more than Pharaoh, and so they refused to put the infant boys to death (1:17). This infuriated the Pharaoh, who summoned the midwives and demanded an explanation. They respond that the Hebrew women were in such good physical condition that their children were born too quickly, before they could even arrive to help (1:19). For their fear of God, these midwives were rewarded in two ways. The first blessing is more immediately evident than the second. The first blessing was that of being fruitful themselves: “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” (Exod. 1:20-21). There is another blessing not as apparent but very significant, the Bible mentioned their names, “Shiphrah and Puah.” However, it even didn’t mention the name of pharaoh at that time. What a gracious gift of God to these two God-fearing Hebrew midwives—He records their names for an example to believers throughout the centuries. God doesn’t really care that much about the name of the king, but He is intimately concerned with Shiphrah and Puah, for their trust and obey Him. What better honor than to be known and remembered by God.

#### **4. A Final Futile Effort (1:22)**

After Pharaoh’s attempt to indirectly destroy the Israelite boy children had miserably failed. He planned a new plan: “Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every boy that is born you must throw into the river, but let every girl live’” (Exod. 1:22). The decree to murder the boy babies by drowning them is a part of Satan’s diabolical plan to destroy the seed, which will destroy him.

## **The Preservation and Preparation of Israel’s Deliverer (Exodus 2)**

### **1. Moses—Out of the Water (2:1-10)**

The previous chapter ended with the decree of Pharaoh to all of his people: “Every boy that is born you must throw into the river, but let every girl live” (Exod. 1:22). This command is the backdrop for the first 10 verses of chapter 2, where Moses, a newborn Hebrew baby boy, is “thrown into the Nile” in a basket, in token obedience to the Pharaoh, and taken out of the river by none other than the Pharaoh’s daughter. A particular Hebrew man of the tribe of Levi married a woman who was also of the same tribe (v. 1). Later on, we learn that the man’s name is Amram and the mother’s is Jochebed (Exod. 6:20).

Moses’ parents feared the God who created their son more than the Pharaoh who wished to kill him. Thus they hid the child in their home for the first three months of his life (Exod. 3:2). Keeping the boy-child from being discovered eventually became impossible. The time came when something different had to be done. The result was a feigned obedience to the letter of the Law of Pharaoh. Moses was “thrown into the Nile” but in a woven “ark,” which was sealed with tar. The sister of Moses was tasked to stand at a distance to “see what would happen to the child” (Exod. 2:4).

In the providence of God, Pharaoh’s daughter arrived at the banks of the Nile to bathe. She saw the basket, sent one of her maids to fetch it, and discovered a Hebrew baby boy inside. At this point we should remember the order which the Pharaoh, this woman’s father, had given to **all** of those in his kingdom which would include his daughter: “Every boy that is born you must throw into the river . . .” (Exod. 1:22). Now, the Pharaoh’s daughter came face to face with the implications of her father’s policy. Looking into that basket, she saw a Hebrew baby—there was no mistaking its identity (v. 6). Moses’ sister suggested to Pharaoh’s daughter a lactating woman to feed the child. How gracious of God to give this child back to his parents for a

time and even to pay the mother wages for keeping him. This must have given a year or two, or more, during which they enjoyed their son with the protection of Pharaoh's daughter. Depending on the age of Moses and the amount of ongoing contact his parents had with him, they must have had some opportunity to instruct him in the ways of the Lord. Let us not forget, however, that God's plan for the education of Moses included years of instruction at the feet of pagan Egyptians, too (Acts 7:22), which greatly facilitated his future leadership. When Moses was weaned, he was taken into the household of Pharaoh, where he became her son. She named the boy Moses, a name rooted in the event of her finding him as a baby at which time she "drew him out" of the Nile's water. The writer to the Hebrews chose to cite the hiding of Moses for the first three months of his life as an evidence of his parents' faith: "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict" (Heb. 11:23).

### **2. Moses' Trial of Leadership (2:11-15)**

Verse 11 passes over nearly 40 years (Acts 7:23), taking up the story of Moses as an adult. Preceding the events of verses 11 and following is a decision which is made by Moses described in the Book of Hebrews: "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 (Heb. 11:24-26)". This seems to mean that Moses had already made the critical decision to identify with his people, before he went out to observe the affliction of his brethren. Hebrews informs us that the reason Moses visited his brethren was due to his decision to identify with them and even to suffer with them. Thus, Moses did not lose his status as a son of Pharaoh's daughter by the killing; he gave that up before the killing. Moses' visit to his brethren backfired, in one sense, but it was used providentially to prepare him for his future calling. Moses killed the Egyptian who fought the Hebrew man. Moses' method of dealing with this problem was wrong. When he sought to rebuke his Hebrew brother for wrongly mistreating another Hebrew (v. 13), Moses revealed, once again, the disposition of a deliverer. Moses' motivation was right, but his methods and his timing were altogether wrong. Moses ran for his life, away from his people, to the land of Midian.

### **3. Moses—The Waterer (2:16-25)**

Fleeing to the land of Midian, Moses ended up at a well, to which the daughters of Reuel, a Midianite, had come to water their father's flocks. At this well, the character of Moses as a deliverer of the oppressed is once again manifested. The seven daughters of Reuel arrived at the well, where they apparently waited in line for the well to be opened. Moses clears the way for the ladies to get to the well first. Reuel asked his daughters what had happened. When they had told him the story of their rescue, Reuel gently chastised his daughters for not extending the hospitality of a meal to this stranger. With great economy of words, Moses briefly records that this "chance encounter" led to a lengthy stay in Midian, his marriage to Zipporah, and the birth of a son, Gershom. Moses named the child Gershom because, he said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land" (v. 22).

## **The Burning Bush (Exodus 3)**

Moses led his father-in-law's flock to the west or backside of the wilderness, to Mt. Horeb (his father-in-law is now referred to as "Jethro," which seems to mean "excellence" or "superiority. Little did he know that here he was going to come face to face with God. In the distance, something caught the keen eye of Moses

and snapped him out of his thoughts. Something was burning in the distance. A more careful look proved it to be a bush. In and of it, this would hardly be the cause of much excitement or interest, but as time passed the bush seemed unaffected by the flames. It burned, but did not burn up. Since there was no real hurry and the sight of the bush had aroused Moses' curiosity, he set out to have a closer look. Verses 4-15 contain a description of the God of the burning bush. Verses 16-22 contain specific instructions concerning the task, which God has for Moses, along with God's brief summary of what is going to take place in the rescue of the nation Israel from their bondage in Egypt. There are several dimensions to the description of the God of the burning bush, which we will briefly consider.

**The God of the burning bush is the holy God.** The flames which encompassed (but did not consume) the bush, along with the warning issued by the Lord from within the flames, impressed Moses with the holiness of the One who was manifesting Himself. Moses was deeply impressed with the holiness of his God. The God of the burning bush is the covenant making, covenant-keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In verse 6, God identified Himself to Moses in this way: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. 3:6).

**The God of the burning bush is a compassionate God.** God's intention to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is not only motivated by His holiness, or by His covenant with Abraham and the patriarchs—God's deliverance of His people is also based upon His compassion for them in the midst of their affliction: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ..." (Exod. 3:7-8a).

**The God of the burning bush is a God who commissions people to participate in His purposes.** While God is going to be directly involved in the deliverance of His people, He will do so through human instruments. Specifically, God has manifested Himself *to Moses because He intends to manifest Himself through Moses*.

**The "I AM" is the God who is, that is, the God who exists.** There were many "no gods" in both Egypt and Canaan, which were worshipped, but in contrast to all of these "gods" were the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who is, the only true God.

**The "I AM" is the God who exists independently.** Theologians speak of God as self-existent. God is the Creator, but has no creator. He exists apart from any dependence on anything or anyone. He is a God who does not need help, either to exist or to accomplish His will.

**The "I AM" is the God who exists independently and unchangeably.** As the "I AM," God is not the God who **was** anything, in the sense that He changes. Whatever He was, He continues to be, and He will be forever. The God who is exists not only really, and independently, but also unchangeably. Therefore, whatever God has begun to do He will bring to completion, because there are no changes, which necessitate any alterations in His original plans and purposes.

## **Beating Around the Burning Bush (Exodus 3 and 4)**

### **1. Moses' Marching Orders (3:16-22)**

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

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

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

**(3) Finally, God instructed Moses to "collect," as it were, the wages the Israelites had earned in Egypt** (Exod. 3:21-22). This was to be accomplished by asking the Egyptian women for articles of silver and gold and putting them on their children.

### **2. The Five Points of Moses (3:11-4:17)**

Moses responds to the commission of God five times. The first two responses we have dealt with previously, but we shall briefly review them so that we can view Moses' response as a whole.

**(1) Who am I?** (Exod. 3:11). After prematurely and presumptuously asserting himself as a deliverer (Exod. 2:11-15), and being rebuffed by a fellow-Israelite ("Who made you ruler and judge over us?" Exod. 2:14), Moses was not so full of self-confidence. Moses, we are told in Scripture, was the "meekest man on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). To the degree that Moses' question reveals true humility, it is legitimate. But in this instance, I fear that his humility is out of bounds. The issue here is not **who** Moses is, but **whose** he is. God has sent him, and it is God who will be with him. Moses' authority is based upon his divine call and the divine presence with him as he goes (Exod. 3:12).

**(2) Who are you?** (Exod. 3:13). If Moses' authority is wrapped up in the God who has called and commissioned him, then it is surely worthwhile for him to inquire as to the nature and character of God.

**(3) What if they do not believe me or listen to me?** (Exod. 4:1). God still graciously deals with the weakness of Moses here. In response to his question, God grants Moses the ability to perform three signs. The first two Moses performs on the spot, at God's instruction, so as to assure him. The final sign (turning water from the Nile to blood) has to wait until the raw materials (Nile water) are available. For the Israelites these signs were visible evidence that God had appeared to Moses in the burning bush. For the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, these signs were evidence of the "finger of God" (Exod. 8:19). Not only did they emphatically prove the existence of the God of the Hebrews, but also they gave evidence of His superior power. More than this, these three signs were of a similar kind. At the word of Moses, a staff could become a serpent, leprosy could be inflicted, and water contaminated. The three signs were therefore very significant, both to the Israelites, and to the Pharaoh.

**(4) But I am not eloquent!** (Exod. 4:10; 6:12,30). Moses is still hung up about his inability. Rather than acting on the basis of whom the God is who commissioned him, Moses is now retreating on the pretext that he is not a gifted communicator. The Lord's response reveals His displeasure and has the tone of rebuke. Little wonder! Moses is talking to His creator. He is saying, in effect, "God, I can't do what you ask because you did not make me well enough." God reminds Moses that, as his Creator, He fashioned him precisely as He intended, and he was therefore fully able to carry out his commission. The problem of what to say is one that the Lord will handle in due time. He will teach him what to say (Exod. 4:12).

**(5) Please send somebody else** (Exod. 4:13). Here is the bottom line. Moses does not want to go. It is not that he lacks the assurance or the authority; he simply lacks the courage to act. No reason is stated here as to why God should send someone else, because Moses is all out of excuses. And so Moses pleads with God for someone else to go. God is longsuffering and patient, but now He is angry. God's anger was not only reflected in some visible way, but it was evident in the answer, which God gave to Moses (vv. 14-17). Aaron could speak fluently, so let him speak for Moses. As later events will indicate, the presence of Aaron was a burden for Moses and a stumbling block for others. Among other things, Aaron fashioned the "golden calf" and led Israel in false worship (Exod. 32:1-6).

### **3. Moses' Request to Return (4:18-20)**

Clutching his staff, Moses set out to ask Jethro's permission to leave, along with his wife and two sons. Moses' request was evasive, even deceptive: "Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive" (Exod. 4:18). Moses avoids telling Jethro of God's appearance in the burning bush and of the commission he had been given. Avoiding the true (or the whole) purpose of his return Moses told Jethro that he wanted to learn if any of his people were still alive. Verse 19 seems to serve as a kind of explanation for the reason which Moses had given Jethro for returning to Egypt: "Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead'" (Exod. 4:19). Jethro, who seems to be a wise and gracious man, grants Moses' request, wishing him well (v. 18). And so it was that Moses set out on his way back to Egypt, taking along his wife and two sons.

### **4. Matters Between Fathers and Sons (4:21-26)**

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant, an evidence of the parents' faith in the promise of God to Abraham that through his seed blessings would come to Israel and to the whole world (Gen. 12:1-3). As a testimony of the parents' faith in God's covenant promise, every male in Israel was to be circumcised: "Every male among you shall be circumcised. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant" (Gen. 17:9-14). Moses was to go to Egypt and tell the Israelites that God was about to fulfill His promises, based upon His covenant. And yet Moses had not yet circumcised his son. According to the word of the Lord recorded in Genesis 17, his son should have been "cut off from his people." The holiness of God is clearly manifested in the near fatal illness of Moses. God does not look lightly on any sin. Moses' wife rightly perceived the problem and spared the life of her husband by her prompt action (She circumcised her son and touched her husband's feet so God healed Moses). The great man Moses was saved by his wife's keen perception and decisive measures. Her rebuke was well-deserved, and Moses was man enough to record it for posterity.

### **5.Reunion (4:27-31)**

By divine revelation God instructed Aaron to meet Moses in the wilderness (4:27). They met on the holy mountain of God. At least 40 years would seem to have passed since they had seen each other. Most of all,



Moses had to share the most recent events of his life, especially his encounter with God at the burning bush, the commission he had been given to deliver Israel, and the part which Aaron was to play in it all. Together Moses and Aaron went back to Egypt and met with the elders of the Israelites, telling them all that God had said to Moses and performing all the signs which God had given Moses (4:29-30). Both the elders of Israel and the people believed Moses and bowed down to worship the God of their fathers (4:31). This brief account of Israel's belief and worship underscores the fact that all of Moses' fears were unfounded.

## **The Finger of God (Exodus 7:14–10:29)**

In response to the suffering of the Israelites (chap. 1), God has called Moses, whom He has divinely protected and prepared for the task of delivering His people from Egypt (chaps. 2-4). After considerable resistance, Moses has returned to Egypt, where he has been received by the elders and the people of Israel, rebuffed by Pharaoh, to the consternation of the Israelites. In chapter 7 we come to the beginning of the plagues, which God will bring upon Egypt through Moses and Aaron. The resistance (hardened heart) of Pharaoh and the resulting plagues come as no surprise, either to Moses or to the reader. God had foretold the necessity of the plagues, which were to be brought upon Egypt: "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" (Exod. 3:19-20).

### **1. The "Miracles" of the Magicians**

In addition to determining how "miraculous" the plagues of Moses and Aaron were, we must come to some conclusion as to the nature of the "miracles" performed by the magicians. The first two plagues were, to Pharaoh's satisfaction, reproduced by his magicians. There are several ways to understand what was accomplished by the magicians. At the bottom line, we have but two options:

**(1) The "miracles" were only apparent miracles, performed by some kind of illusion or sleight of hand.** Either by trickery, deception, or sleight of hand, the magicians appeared to reproduce the miracles of Moses and Aaron. We are told, for example, that the cobra can be made rigid by applying pressure at the proper spot at the back of the creature's head. Thus, the staffs of the magicians were really serpents all along, only appearing to be sticks.

**(2) The "miracles" were supernaturally empowered, by Satan or his demonic helpers.** It would appear that the magicians actually did reproduce the first two plagues, but were prevented from removing any of the plagues or of reproducing any others. In the case of the plague of the gnats, the text seems to indicate that the magicians thought they could produce gnats and tried, unsuccessfully, to do so (Exod. 8:18). There are several lines of evidence which incline me toward the view that Satan was, indeed, the means of the magicians reproducing the first two "miracles."<sup>i</sup> This is more than just a contest between Moses and the magicians; it is God challenging the gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12), behind, which are Satan and his demonic assistants. False worship is often demonically inspired (1 Cor. 10:20-21; I Tim. 4:1).

### **2. The Pattern of the Plagues**

As one views the first 9 plagues as a whole, there is a distinct pattern to them. The 9 plagues can be grouped into a series of 3 contests, each composed of 3 plagues. The first plagues (1-3) produce discomfort; the next 3 bring about greater damage or destruction (4-6); the last 3 (7-9) produce the added dimension of

downright dread. So the plagues progress from discomfort to destruction to dread. The first plague of each series (plagues 1, 4, and 7) begins with the expression “in the morning.” The last plague of each sequence (3, 6, and 9) comes unannounced and without the warnings of the others.

In the first series of plagues (1-3), the staff is stretched out by Aaron. In the second series (4-6), no staff is used. In the third series (7-9) Moses uses his staff. As the plagues progress, Pharaoh’s heart becomes increasingly hardened. When the king of Egypt bargains with Moses for relief, he agrees to grant more and more concessions, but he fails to keep his promises. In the first series of plagues, no mention is made of the Israelites being distinguished from the Egyptians so far as experiencing the plagues is concerned. From the second series onward, a distinction is either clearly made or implied.

The plagues begin with the magicians imitating the miracles of Moses and Aaron; then they themselves move to admitting the hand (or finger, to be more exact) of God in the plague; next, they are themselves so afflicted that they cannot stand before Moses. The “officials” of Pharaoh (who seem to be a different group from that of the magicians) have within their number those who heed the warning of Moses and put their slaves and cattle under cover (9:20). Finally, all of Pharaoh’s officials plead with him to release the Israelites before Egypt is completely ruined (10:7).

#### **4. The Plagues in Particular**

Having considered the plagues as a whole, we will now briefly consider each of the plagues individually. Each of the plagues conveys a message from God.

**PLAGUE ONE: THE NILE TURNED INTO BLOOD** (Exod. 7:14-25). The Nile is virtually the “life blood” of Egypt. Without the silt provided during its times of overflow and the water with which it constantly sustained life, Egypt would be almost uninhabitable. The meaning of this miracle of turning the Nile to blood can best be understood in the light of the later prophecy God gave through Ezekiel: “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. Speak to him and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams. You say, ‘The Nile is mine; I made it for myself.’ But I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales. I will put you out from among your streams, with all the fish sticking to your scales. I will leave you in the desert, you and all the fish of your streams. You will fall on the open field and not be gathered or picked up. I will give you as food to the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air. Then all who live in Egypt will know that I am the Lord”’ (Ezek. 29:2-6).

**PLAGUE TWO: THE FROGS** (Exod. 8:1-15). Frogs were also regarded as having divine power:

In the Egyptian pantheon the goddess Heqet had the form of a woman with a frog’s head. From her nostrils, it was believed, came the breath of life that animated the bodies of those created by her husband, the great god Khnum, from the dust of the earth. Therefore **frogs** were not to be killed.

Frogs were not uncommon in Egypt, especially around the Nile River. But there had never been so many. The account of the frogs is almost humorous. One can visualize them hopping and croaking all over Egypt. They got into the food, into the kneading troughs, ovens, everywhere. The fact that the magicians of Egypt could produce even more frogs must have been a real delight to the Egyptians. What they wanted was no frogs, not more frogs.

Only Moses could take the frogs away. Moses gave Pharaoh the option of naming the time for the frogs to be removed. Pharaoh chose the next day. He did not ask for the frogs to be removed immediately, hoping that they would go away by themselves, before the appointed time, thus showing that Moses was not in con-

trol of the situation. Egypt was rid of the frogs through their death, which meant that huge heaps of frogs were piled all over the country, creating a stench that was a plague in and of itself.

**PLAGUE THREE: THE GNATS** (Exod. 8:16-19). The gnats plagued both men and animals. The Egyptians (and their animals) constantly scratching themselves (or swatting away at the creatures), trying to get some relief. The importance of this plague is that the magicians of Egypt were unable to produce these gnats, even though they tried. This was convincing enough for the magicians to say to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (v. 19). Nevertheless, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he refused to listen.

**PLAGUE FOUR: THE FLIES** (Exod. 8:20-32). With this plague, the second sequence of three plagues is commenced. Here, discrimination is made between the Egyptians and the Israelites. While we cannot be certain of the exact species of flies that plagued Egypt, we would probably be safe in assuming that they were bigger, and bit harder than the gnats previously set loose on the Egyptians.

The flies were so bothersome; Pharaoh was willing to negotiate with Moses. He offered to let the Israelites have time off to worship their God, but only if they were to stay in the land of Egypt (8:25). When Moses refused this offer, Pharaoh countered with an offer that they could “go into the desert, but not very far” (8:28). Pharaoh’s request, “Pray for me” (v. 28), indicates his self-centered interests. Moses left, but with the warning that there must be no more deceit on Pharaoh’s part regarding his promise to let Israel go. But when the flies were gone, so was Pharaoh’s motivation to let Israel go.

**PLAGUE FIVE: LIVESTOCK KILLED** (Exod. 9:1-7). The fifth plague was one that was directed against the livestock of the Egyptians, but which did not affect the cattle of the Israelites. God virtually wiped out the cattle of the Egyptians. Since wealth was measured largely in terms of cattle, this was an economic disaster. The gods of Egypt were once again proven to be lifeless and useless: . . . many animals were sacred (8:26), particularly, as stated earlier, the bull which represented the god Apis or Re, and the cow which represented Hathor, the goddess of love, beauty, and joy. Hathor was depicted in the form of a woman with the head (or sometimes only the horns) of a cow. Also Khnum was a ram-god.

**PLAGUE SIX: BOILS** (Exod. 9:8-12). “The Egyptians, fearfully aware of epidemics, worshiped Sekhmet, a lion-headed goddess with alleged power over disease; Sunu, the pestilence god; and Isis, goddess of healing.” There is another humorous note here. The magicians are not only unable to rid the land of Egypt of the boils; they are also so afflicted themselves that they cannot even show up to stand before Moses. The expression, “Physician, heal thyself,” surely applies here.

**PLAGUE SEVEN: THE STORM** (Exod. 9:13-35). In reality, the plague is the worst thunderstorm in Egypt’s history (9:18). The death and destruction, which occurs, is the result of both hailstones and lightning (v. 24). This plague begins the third and final trilogy of plagues. Things get considerably worse, and the account of the plagues becomes more lengthy and detailed. These last plagues begin with the warning that unless Pharaoh releases the Israelites, God will “send the full force of His plagues against Pharaoh and Egypt” (v. 14). Now, if Pharaoh persists in his hardness of heart, things will get considerably worse. In verse 16 Moses explains why God has allowed Pharaoh’s stubbornness to persist. God raised Pharaoh up for the purpose of hardening his heart and thus of providing the occasion for God to manifest His power to men. That God is free to do so is the point Paul makes in Romans chapter 9, citing this statement to Pharaoh as an example.

**PLAGUE EIGHT: LOCUSTS** (Exod. 10:1-20). The previous plague of the thunderstorm had destroyed the flax and barley crops, but the wheat and spelt crops were not destroyed, because they matured later on (9:31). The locusts would wipe out the wheat and the spelt crops. This plague would, God said, give the Israelites something to tell their grandchildren about (10:1-2). When Moses foretold of the coming of the

locusts on the next day, Pharaoh's officials pled with the king to let the Israelites go (10:7). Egypt, they protested, was ruined, so why incur any further disasters? Pharaoh offered to let the men go, but not the women, and then drove Moses and Aaron out of his presence (10:10-11). When the plague struck Egypt, Pharaoh confessed that he had sinned against God and against the Israelites. He asked Moses for forgiveness, and that he pray for the plague to be removed (10:16-17). A strong west wind carried the locusts into the Red Sea. When the plague was removed, Pharaoh returned to his old ways, and would not let Israel go (10:20).

**PLAGUE NINE: DARKNESS** (Exod. 10:21-29). The ninth plague was that of darkness so intense that it produced a dread in the hearts of the Egyptians. For three days the Egyptians and the Israelites were confined to their homes. For the Egyptians, it would seem that their homes were darkened as well, but for the Israelites, there was light in their homes (10:22-23). The three days of darkness must have had a tremendous emotional and psychological impact on the nation as a whole. The experience may have been something like the 3-day period of blindness, which Saul experienced prior to his conversion (cf. Acts 9:8-12).

This plague of darkness struck hard at the Egyptian deities:

This plague was aimed at one of the chief Egyptian deities, the sun god Re, of whom Pharaoh was a representation. Re was responsible for providing sunlight, warmth, and productivity. Other gods, including Horus, were associated with the sun. Nut, the goddess of the sky, would have been humiliated by this plague.

The ninth plague, like the third and the sixth plagues, came upon the Egyptians without warning, which would have given them no opportunity to prepare for the disaster, either physically or psychologically. Pharaoh's response to the plague was to offer to allow all the Israelites to leave Egypt to worship God, but that the cattle must remain behind (10:24). When this offer was rejected, Pharaoh hotly warned Moses that he must leave his presence, and to return would be his death. Moses agreed, but he had yet one more plague to proclaim before his final exit from Pharaoh's presence. This tenth plague, he threatened, would bring about the release of the Israelites.

## **5. The Point of the Plagues**

The plagues came from God upon the Egyptians for specific purposes. Let us briefly review what these purposes were.

**(1) The plagues were an indictment and judgment of the gods of Egypt.** "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" (Exod. 12:12).

**(2) The plagues were a demonstration of God's existence and power.** Pharaoh rejected Moses' request that he allow the Israelites to travel three days into the wilderness to worship God (Exod. 5:1-2). The plagues were a rebuttal to Pharaoh's response. They proved that Israel's God alone was Lord. "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" (Exod. 7:5).

**(3) The plagues were a judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their cruelty and harshness.** "But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:14).

**(4) The plagues were God's means of forcing Pharaoh to release Israel from Egypt.** "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” (Exod. 3:19-20).

THE PLAGUES					
Level of Pain: Discomfort					
Plague	Verses	Warning	Conditions / De-tails	Application to Egyptian Gods	Outcome / Responses
Nile turned to blood	7:14-25	Pharaoh as he went to get water from Nile in the morning.	“In the morning”	Hopi (Apis), the bull god of Nile; Isis, goddess of Nile; Khnua, ram god, guardian of Nile	Magicians duplicated; Pharaoh refused to listen; People dug along Nile for water
Frogs	8:1-15	Let My people go, or else ...		Heqet, goddess of birth—frog head	Magicians duplicated; Moses petitioned to remove frogs; Pharaoh to set time
Gnats	8:16-19	None		Set, god of desert	“This is the finger of God”
Level of Pain: Destruction					
Flies	8:20-32	Pharaoh as he goes to get water in early morning	“In the morning” Time specified, Goshen exempted	Re, sun god; Uatchit, possibly represented by fly	Moses summoned / Pharaoh bargains: “Don’t go far”
Livestock killed	9:1-7	If you refuse...	Israel’s cattle exempted, Time of plague	Hathor, goddess with cow head; Apis, the bull god (fertility)	Pharaoh informed, no repentance
Boils	9:8-12	None	Soot of furnace tossed in air	Sekhmet, goddess over disease; Sunu, pestilence god	Magicians afflicted, could not stand before Moses. Pharaoh hardened.
Level of Pain: Dread					
Storm	9:13-25	“Let my people go, or else... Plagues full force!”	“In the morning” worst storm in Egypt’s history. Time set. Bring in livestock.	Nut, sky goddess; Osiris, god of crops, fertility; Set, god of storms	Some officials brought in servants, cattle. Goshen exempted Pharaoh: “I have sinned—We are wrong” King & officials hardened hearts
Locusts	10:1-20	“Let my people go ... if you refuse. . .”		Nut, sky goddess Osiris, god of crops, fertility	Officials plead for release of Israel before plague. Pharaoh bargains, “Men, only” “I have sinned”
Darkness	10:21-29	None	Total darkness.	Re, sun god	“Go, without herds”

			Light in Israel's homes	Nut, sky goddess Hathor, sky goddess	"Out of my sight" "Don't come back"
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**(5) The plagues were a prototype, a sample of God's future judgment.** The plagues which came upon the Egyptians for their sin were like those which Israel would experience, if this nation disobeyed the Law which God was soon to give them: "The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured" (Deut. 28:27). There is also much similarity between the plagues of Egypt and the plagues described in the Book of Revelation, which are poured out upon the earth in the last days, just preceding the return of our Lord. Thus, in the Book of Revelation we find the victorious tribulation saints singing the "song of Moses" (Rev. 15:3).

## **The Passover and the Plague of the Firstborn (Exodus 11:1–13:16)**

### **1. The Plague of the Firstborn and the First Passover (11:4-8; 12:1-13, 21-23, 29-30)**

The tenth and final plague is described in several phases. The first is the pronouncement to Pharaoh by Moses that this plague is about to come upon all of Egypt. The second is the instructions given to the Israelites regarding the Passover, which is God's means of protecting His people from the plague. Finally, there is a brief account given of the plague itself, just as God had said through Moses.

**Moses' pronouncement to Pharaoh: the coming of the final plague** (Exodus 11:4-8). Pharaoh had just demanded that Moses leave his presence, and warned that to return would mean death (10:28). Verses 1-3 of chapter 11 inform us of a revelation God had given Moses sometime before, in which the details of the final plague had been outlined. In verses 4-8, Moses declared the essence of this revelation to Pharaoh, as it related to him. At midnight, God would go throughout Egypt, slaying the firstborn, from Pharaoh's own son, to the firstborn son of the lowest slave. No grief will have ever been greater for the Egyptians, and yet not the least evil would fall upon the Israelites. After this blow, Pharaoh's own officials (who must have been standing there in Pharaoh's court during this confrontation) would come to Moses, begging him to leave, with the Israelites. Moses then left the presence of Pharaoh.

**Moses' pronouncement to Israel: instructions regarding the Passover** (Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23). Chapter 12 can be divided into four major sections. (1) Verses 1-20 contain the revelation, which God had given to Moses and Aaron. (2) Verses 21-30, the revelation that Moses conveyed to the Israelites. (3) Verses 31-42 give a historical overview of the exodus, from the command to leave issued by Pharaoh to an account of the departure, showing that God's promises had been carried out in accord with His schedule—to the very day. (4) Verses 43-51 conclude with further instructions for the Israelites regarding the celebration of the Passover in the future, especially focusing on the participation of foreigners.

The instructions for the celebrations of the first Passover were specific, and dealt with several aspects of the feast. We will briefly review these:

**(1) The time of the Passover meal.** A new religious calendar was given to the nation at this time. Since the Passover was the commencement of a new life, the month (of Abib, 13:4) was to be viewed, from this time forward, as the first month of the year (Exod. 12:1-2). The Passover lamb was to be purchased or selected on the 10th day of the month, and slaughtered at twilight<sup>ii</sup> on the evening of the 14th.

(2) **The Passover lamb (12:3-8, 21-23).** The Passover animal was to be a male yearling, either a goat or a sheep (12:5). There was to be one sacrificial animal per household, unless the family was too small to consume one. Under such circumstances, two families could share one (12:4). There was to be provision of enough meat for each person to be adequately supplied. The blood of the animal was to be put on the sides and tops of the doorframes where the animal was to be eaten (12:7). This blood was to serve as a sign, which would protect the Israelites from the death angel (12:13, 23).

(3) **The Passover meal.** The Passover meal was largely provided by the Passover sacrifice. The animal was to be roasted whole over the fire, not boiled or eaten raw. Each household was to eat the meal inside the door on which the animal's blood had been placed. The meat was eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (12:8). Surplus food was not to be kept overnight, but was to be burned (12:10). There would be no "leftovers" for dinner because they would be long gone before another meal could be eaten. This is why the meal was to be eaten with an atmosphere of readiness and anticipation. They were to eat the meal in the same way we would eat in an airport restaurant, knowing that the departure of our flight was about to be announced. In that day, they were to have their cloak tucked in (so they could hurry without tripping over it), their sandals on their feet, and their staff in hand (12:11).

(4) **The participants of the Passover.** The Passover was a corporate celebration in that all Israel observed the meal, just as Moses had instructed them (12:28, 50). On the other hand, the meal was a family matter. Each family was responsible for its own sacrificial animal, its own act of placing the blood on the doorframe, and its own celebration of the meal. There is no specific mention of any Egyptians celebrating the first Passover, although this is possible, even likely.

**The account of the Passover plague** (Exodus 12:29-30). There is absolutely no sensationalism here, but only the most cursory account of the fulfillment of the Word of the Lord, spoken through Moses. At midnight, the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain, from the king of Egypt to its cattle, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh to that of the prisoner. The weeping and wailing that night was not like anything ever heard in the land before. At the same time, none of Israel's firstborn, whether man or beast was smitten. God's promises, for pleasure or pain, of prosperity or peril, are certain.

## **2. The Purposes of Passover Celebrations (12:21-27, 43-49)**

We will briefly survey the principle purposes of the Passover.

(1) **The Passover was a memorial of the deliverance of Israel, accomplished by the mighty power of God:** "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" (Exod. 13:9; 13:14, 16; 3:20).

(2) **The Passover and its related celebrations, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the redemption of the firstborn, were intended to serve as a means of instruction for the future generations of Israel** (Exod. 12:26-27; 13:8, 14-16). God directed that the meaning of the celebration be to be explained to the children (13:8). Also, when a child asks the meaning of a celebration, the parent is to teach its significance (12:26-27; 13:14). God therefore designed these celebrations as occasions for instruction. Thus the story of the Exodus was to be retold, and its meaning reinforced. The "bitter herbs" (12:8) would certainly help the children gain some sensory stimulation in this educational endeavor.

(3) **The Passover celebrations was a means of incorporating or excluding the Gentiles in the covenant of God to Abraham** (Exod. 12:38, 43-49). Those who ate anything leavened during the week of

the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to be excluded from the community of Israel, whether this person was an Israelite or a foreigner (12:19). No uncircumcised person could partake of the Passover, but by receiving circumcision—that is, by identifying oneself with the Abrahamic Covenant—even a foreigner could partake of Passover, and with no distinctions between this individual and an Israelite. Thus, circumcision enabled one to participate fully in the Passover celebration. Passover thus was a kind of dividing line between a true believer and an outsider. Since a number of foreigners accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt (12:38), this was a necessary distinction.

**(4) The Passover Lamb was a model, a prototype (a type) of the Messiah, the “The True Lamb of God” through whom God would bring redemption to both Israel and the Gentiles** (Exod. 12:5-7, 46-47). This was likely not immediately perceived, but there are several similarities between the Passover lamb and the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The sacrificial lamb was to be without defect (Exod. 12:5), just as the Lord Jesus was without blemish (1 Peter 1:19). It was the shed blood of the lamb, which saved Israel’s firstborn from the plague (Exod. 12:12-13, 22-23), just as it is the shed blood of the Lamb of God, which saves men from the judgment of God (1 Peter 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). As there was to be no bone broken of the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:46), so no bone of our Lord was broken (John 19:32-36). Thus, the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, could speak of Israel’s Savior as a lamb:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her Shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa. 53:6-7).

### **3. The Passover in the New Testament (John 1:29, 36; Luke 22:1-23; 1 Cor. 5:1-8; Rev. 5:6-14)**

John the Baptist could thus identify and introduce our Lord as Israel’s Messiah by the words, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Thus, in the gospel accounts, we find the death of our Savior corresponding with the sacrifice of the Passover sacrificial lambs and the Passover meal (cf. Luke 22:1-23). Paul clearly identified the Lord Jesus as the Passover lamb: “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). One can see that the first Passover, along with each subsequent annual remembrance of Passover, was an event of great significance, one that was to be celebrated from that time on.

### **4. The meaning of the Passover plague for the Egyptians**

The Passover and the plague of the firstborn had several purposes with regard to the Egyptians.

**(1) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn was a defeat of Egypt’s gods:** “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” (Exod. 12:12).

**(2) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn served as the final blow, which compelled the Egyptians to let the Israelites go** (Exod. 3:20; 6:1; 11:1; 12:31-32).

**(3) The plague of the firstborn was an appropriate punishment of Egyptians for their oppression of Israel** (Gen. 15:14; Exod. 1 and 2; 7:14ff.). God had told Abraham that the oppressive nation (which we now know to be Egypt), which would enslave Israel, would be punished (Gen. 15:14). The plague of the firstborn was exceedingly appropriate since the Egyptians were seeking to kill all of the male babies born to the Israelites (cf. Exod. 1:22).



**(4) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn was an act of grace, as well as an act of judgment.** The plagues revealed the powerlessness of the gods of Egypt, and the power of the God of Israel. The plagues pointed out the sin of the Egyptians and their need to repent and believe in the God of Israel. In the first place, an announcement and a warning preceded most of the plagues. Each succeeding plague was further proof of God's existence and power, and gave greater substance to the warnings, which followed. All of the Egyptians came to respect Moses (11:3), and some took heed to his warnings (9:13-21). Provision was also made for non-Israelites to partake of the Passover, if they were circumcised (acknowledging their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant, cf. Exod. 12:48-49; Gen. 17:9-14). Since there were many non-Israelites who left Egypt with Israel (Exod. 12:38), it is likely that a number were converted and physically spared from death through the process of the plagues and the provision of the Passover.

**(5) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn was an occasion for God to manifest His great power:** "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" (Exod. 9:16). Like it or not, God is the Creator of the universe (in general) and of man (in particular). As man's Creator, God is absolutely justified in dealing with His creation as He sees fit (Romans 9). When the sinfulness of man is added to his creatureliness, God's wrath is even more clearly seen to be right.

### **5. The meaning of the Passover for the Israelites**

The Passover and the final plague also had great meaning and significance for the Israelites.

**(1) The Passover and the tenth plague served as a judgment on the gods of Egypt, whom the Israelites had worshipped in Egypt** (Josh. 24:14).

**(2) The Passover was for Israel a manifestation of God's power.** One of the most commonly repeated phrases employed in conjunction with the Passover is "with a mighty hand" (Exod. 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 15:6, 12; 16:3). The power of God was made manifest by the Passover and the plagues.

**(3) The Passover and the plague of the firstborn was proof of God's possession of Israel.** When Moses spoke to Pharaoh about the Israelites, he said, "Let My son go, that he may serve Me" (Exod. 4:23).

**(4) The Passover was another evidence of the grace of God in the lives of His people.** The firstborn of Israel were not spared because they were more worthy or more righteous than the Egyptians. Like the Egyptians, the Israelites were sinners, fully deserving of divine wrath. Had Israel been worthy, there would have been no need of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, with its blood applied to the doorframe. The firstborn of Israel were spared due to the grace of God alone. God's provision of a means of escape was based upon His grace, not Israel's merits.

### **6. The meaning of the Passover for Christians**

The New Testament teaches a number of practical applications of the Passover for contemporary Christians. Let me outline some of them briefly.

**(1) Because Christ is our Passover Lamb, we are God's possession.** The firstborn of Israel had to be redeemed because God had spared them, and thus they belonged to Him. While only some of those Israelites who were in Egypt were firstborn, and thus in need of being redeemed, all of us who have trusted in Christ belong to Him. Every child of God belongs to God, and must live in the light of belonging to Him. "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). Since the firstborn of the Israelites be-

longed to God, they had to sacrifice them (in the case of an animal, except for the donkey, 13:13), or (in the case of a son) to offer a sacrifice to redeem them. Because God has spared us from His wrath by His mercy, we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Because the Lamb of God has redeemed Christians, they do not belong to themselves, and they must therefore live out their lives as a living sacrifice to God.

**(2) Because Christ is our Passover lamb, we must live our lives in purity, in holy living.** In the first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, we read, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8). The principle on which Paul based his instruction was that of the relationship between the sacrifice of the Passover lamb and the observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb set in motion the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Since Christ is our Passover lamb, and He has already been sacrificed, the Corinthians should begin the Feast of Unleavened Bread, looking for any sign of leaven (a symbol of sin) and putting it far away from them (5:7-8). Thus the fact that Christ is our Passover lamb necessitates maintaining purity in our lives, and in the church as well.

**(3) The Passover teaches us the important role played by liturgy in the Christian’s experience.** By the annual observance of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God not only reminded His people of His mighty deeds in the past, but also taught them concerning the future. The institution of the communion serves the same purposes. The observance of the communion reminds the Christian of the salvation, which our Lord accomplished by His death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Lu. 22:14-22; 1 Cor. 11:17-34).

## **The Red Sea: Israel’s Deliverance and Egypt’s Defeat (Exodus 13:17–14:31)**

### **1. Charting Israel’s Course (13:17-22)**

There were three possible land routes for Israel to take, by which they could have reached Canaan. The shortest route would have been to follow the “way of the land of the Philistines” (v. 17), but God deliberately avoided this road. The reason given is that they would have encountered war and this would have caused them to lose heart and turn back to Egypt (v. 17). Note is made of the fact that the “bones of Joseph” were taken along. This was a reflection of the faith of Joseph, and the carrying out of his instructions that his remains be preserved and carried from Egypt to Canaan (Gen. 49:26; 50:24-26). The fulfillment of Joseph’s request is recorded in Joshua 24:32. St. Stephen also refers to this in Acts 7:15-16. The exodus of Israel is thus linked historically to the Abrahamic Covenant and to the faith of the patriarchs of Israel.

Verses 21 and 22 describe one of the primary means God employed to guide the people as they traveled. A pillar-shaped cloud, in which God was present (14:24), served to guide the people both day and night. In the daytime the pillar took the form of a cloud; at night the pillar was a pillar of fire, thus being visible as a guide, as well as providing light for the people as they traveled. Later, this pillar would serve as a protective buffer when moved between the Israelites and the Egyptians (14:19-20). The important thing to observe, I believe, is that God was faithful to provide the Israelites with a visible manifestation of His presence, protection, and guidance. The pillar, we are told, was constantly with them and never left (or failed) them. God continually gives His people evidences of His presence with them.

## **2. Changing Israel's Course (14:1-4)**

The Israelites were instructed to “turn back” and to camp near Pi Hahioroth, between Migdol and the sea. First, the Israelites were going to “turn back,” that is, to reverse their direction. Why in the world would they possibly retrace their steps backwards? Instead of fleeing from Pharaoh, it might look as though they were making it easy for him to catch up with them. Second, the course, which they were about to take, would be one that would place them in a very dangerous position. God explained through Moses that this change of course was indeed intended to encourage Pharaoh's pursuit. Pharaoh, God knew, would think that the Israelites were miserably lost or misguided, and that recovering them as a work force would be like “taking candy from a baby.” Pharaoh's attack would result in his defeat, to the glory of God (v. 4).

## **3. Changing Pharaoh's Mind (14:5-9)**

Pharaoh was ready for any sign of hope that he might recover the slave labor, which he had released. Shortly after the Israelites had departed, Pharaoh and his officials had second thoughts about the wisdom of releasing this valuable economic resource—slave labor (v. 5). Pharaoh mustered his entire division of chariots and went after them in hot pursuit, six hundred chariots in all (v. 6). Pharaoh's decision was not only hard-hearted, it was hard headed. Six hundred chariots (with 2, or at the most 3 men per chariot) would hardly seem to be a match for 600,000 men. The change of course of the Israelites seemed to be playing right into Pharaoh's hands. He overtook the Israelites at Pi Hahioroth. How could he possibly fail?

## **4. Calming Israel's Fears (14:10-14)**

Israel was in trouble now. “To the east was the sea, to the south and west were the mountains, and the north was blocked by Pharaoh's armies.”

The Israelites were shaken by the sight of the rapidly approaching chariots of Pharaoh and his men. They were terrified (v. 10). At first, the people cried out to the Lord (v. 10), but as the troops drew nearer and as Israel's hopes of escape faded, their fear turned to bitter regret, focused toward Moses. Were there not enough graves in Egypt? Had they not told Moses to leave them alone, and not to meddle with Pharaoh? What had Moses done to them now? They would have been better off to stay on as slaves in Egypt. Such is the reasoning of fear and unbelief.

Moses was much more calm, at least initially. Confident that God would deliver them from the Egyptians, Moses sought to reassure the Israelites of God's protection, and of the defeat of the Egyptians. They were told to “fear not.” They need not fight, but only to stand firm and observe God's victory over the Egyptians. They would never see these Egyptians again.

From what God had revealed to Moses, he was confident of the defeat and destruction of the Egyptian army, now hotly pursuing them. What Moses was apparently not aware of was how and when this victory would occur. As the Egyptians drew closer, Moses probably expected to see them wiped out before the eyes of all, perhaps by some plague. Instead, they only got closer—much too close for comfort. Moses may have raised his staff, pointing it in the direction of the Egyptians. At some point, Moses began crying out to God, not unlike the Israelites had done before him (compare 14:10 with 14:15). The man who had begun “cool and calm” had begun to lose his grip.

## **5. Divine Instruction and Intervention (14:15-20)**

God's mild rebuke to Moses in verse 15: “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.” In spite of Moses' lack of faith, God graciously responds to his cry for help. He specifically instructed Moses

to raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea, so as to divide the water, making it possible for the Israelites to pass through on dry ground (14:16). The Egyptians, God informed Moses, would enter the sea behind them, due to their hearts being hardened, but this was to result in their destruction and God's glory (v. 17). The nation of Egypt will know for certain that God alone is Lord through this event (v. 18).

God did more than just speak. The angel of the Lord, manifested in the pillar of cloud and/or fire, moved from in front of the Israelites to become their rear guard. He stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians. Throughout that night the pillar brought darkness to the Egyptians and light for the Israelites, thus enabling the Israelites to see as they passed through the sea, and perhaps preventing the Egyptians from seeing the sea as they followed after them (v. 20).

### **6. Israel's Deliverance and the Egyptians' Destruction (14:21-31)**

Moses did as he was instructed, stretching forth his hand over the sea. This brought about a "strong east wind" which drove back the sea all night long, even turning the seabed to dry ground (v. 21). This was no doubt to facilitate the need of the Israelites to quickly pass through the sea with their goods, which were likely loaded on wagons or carts of some sort.

The destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea causes us to look seriously at the judgment of God. Several principles of divine judgment are evident in the events of the exodus as described in our text.

**The judgment of God begins sooner than His final destruction.** To put it differently, the judgment of God begins with the hardening of men's hearts. God had begun to judge the Egyptians at the time that Moses returned to Egypt and appeared before Pharaoh, and the plagues were commenced. Each plague was a judgment of the gods of the Egyptians (Exod. 12:12). For about a year, the ten plagues had been poured out upon Egypt. The destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea was the culminating act of divine judgment.

**The final judgment of God comes suddenly and unexpectedly upon those whose hearts have been hardened by sin.** The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him (Deut. 28:20). He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon". Amen. Come Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20). Throughout the Scriptures the judgment of God falls quickly and unexpectedly on the unbelieving, whose hearts have been hardened to sin and to the judgment to come. On the other hand, the Bible speaks of the saints as being ready, expectant, sensitive to sin, and pursuing and promoting purity as the day of the Lord's return draws near (1 Thes. 5:4-11; 2 Pet. 3:8-18; 1 John 3:2-3).

**The ultimate issue, which determined the destruction or deliverance of God, was this: ON WHICH SIDE OF THE CLOUD DO YOU STAND?** The sea was the instrument of God's wrath, which destroyed the Egyptians. But that sea was also the instrument of Israel's deliverance. Today, the dividing line between those who will be saved and those who will suffer God's wrath is not a cloud, but the cross. God's righteousness demands that sin must be paid for. The sinner must face the wrath of a righteous God. But in His grace, God has provided salvation, by pouring out His wrath on His Son, Jesus Christ. This he did nearly 2,000 years ago on the cross of Calvary. All those who accept Christ's sacrifice on that cross are saved, and all those who reject it (either actively or passively), must bear the coming wrath of God, which will come upon them just as quickly and unexpectedly as God's wrath fell on the Egyptians.

## **The Song of the Sea (Exodus 15)**

### **1. God's Victory Over the Egyptians in the Red Sea (15:1-12)**

Generally speaking, the structure of the “Song of the Sea” is straightforward. The simplest division of the song is two-fold: (1) What God had done for Israel by drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea (vss. 1-12); (2) What God will therefore surely do for Israel in the future (vss. 13-21). Moses apparently wrote the song, and may have led Israel as they sang it. The first refrain, “I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea” (v. 1) is echoed by Miriam, who led the women in singing almost the same words and dancing: “Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea” (v. 21). While this song was sung corporately as Israel’s expression of praise and thanksgiving for God’s deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea, verses 1 and 2 express this praise in a personal and singular. The first person pronouns “I” and “my” make the praise here personal. The Lord is said to have “hurled the Egyptians into the sea” (v. 4). They sank to the depths “like a stone” (v. 5). The winds are described as coming from the “nostrils of God” (v. 8). The waters “congealed” so as to “pile up like a wall” (v. 8). God’s sovereignty is evidenced by His control over the forces of nature (e.g. the winds), and by His ability as the Creator to cause nature to act unnaturally (e.g. the “congealing” of the water, so as to pile up like a wall). In verses 9 and 10, the sovereignty of God is seen in His ability to prevail, as a mighty warrior (v. 3) over the Egyptians, the mightiest army on the face of the earth. They arrogantly pursued the Israelites, confident of victory (v. 9). In spite of their power and confidence, God simply “blew them away,” causing them to “sink like lead” in the sea (v. 10). The greatest army on the face of the earth was no problem for the God of Israel to dispose of. Verses 11 and 12 summarize the implications of the mighty acts of God at the Red Sea, focusing upon God’s nature and character: “Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.” The greatness and the goodness of God are thus recognized by the Israelites as they reflect on God’s victory over their enemies, the Egyptians.

### **2. God's Victory Over the Enemies of Israel in the Future (15:13-21)**

The first half of the “song of Moses” emphasizes the defeat of Israel’s enemies, the Egyptians. The second half of this song, in verses 13-21, is upon the defeat of those who would oppose Israel in the future. To state the matter differently, the first half of the song dwells on the Egyptians’ defeat, while the second half focuses on Israel’s deliverance, especially that deliverance which was yet to come, the defeat of those enemies who would resist Israel’s possession of the land of Canaan, which God promised He would give them.

Verse 13 therefore begins with a summary statement of what God is yet to accomplish for His people. The hope expressed in verse 13 will require the defeat of Israel’s enemies, the Canaanites, who will resist their entrance and possession of the land. Verses 17 and 18 conclude with a confident affirmation that God will bring His people in to the Promised Land, where He will plant them on His holy mountain. Verses 19 and 20 serve to emphasize the fact that Israel’s hope for the future is directly related to God’s act of deliverance at the Red Sea. Miriam, a prophetess and the sister of Aaron led the women as they repeated the first refrain of the “Song of the Sea.”

The “Song of the Sea” and the exodus experience, which it describes, is an excellent illustration of a principle, which is taught in the New Testament: And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our

hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Rom. 5:2b-5). Here, Paul is teaching us that the joy of the Christian remains, and even grows, in the midst of trials and tribulation. The more difficult things become, the more our faith is put to the test. The more our tested faith proves to be legitimate and living faith, the more hope we have for the future. It is the testing of tribulation and trials, which shows that our faith is much more than a “fair weather faith,” thus giving us even greater confidence in the future.

### **3. Israel’s Protests at the Waters of Marah (15:22-27)**

The “Song of the Sea” was not written to be sung but once. Perhaps the Israelites continued to sing this song as they traveled on their way from the shores of the Red Sea, entering into the Desert of Shur. For three days they found no water. This does not mean they had no water to drink, but their supplies would have been limited, and they would have had to ration them carefully. The people were no doubt anxious about their water supply as they came to Marah.

Sighting the waters at Marah must have brought great rejoicing to the Israelites. Their thirst, they thought, would be quenched, their cattle could be watered, and their reserves replenished. What a disappointment it must have been to discover that the waters were bitter, and thus unfit for consumption. Their joy at discovering water turned quickly to anger at Moses for leading them to such a place. How could Moses have bungled this matter so badly? They did not hesitate to place the responsibility for this blunder squarely on the shoulders of their leader—Moses. They demanded that he come up with a solution.

Moses cried out to the Lord, who showed him a piece of wood, which he cast into the water, causing it to become sweet. No one knows of any wood, which could produce the result, which is here described. The transformation of the waters of Marah (which means “bitter,”) was a miracle. The casting of the wood into the water must have been a symbolic act, like Moses raising his staff over the waters of the Red Sea.

The incident at Marah was divinely designed as a test of Israel’s faith (v. 25), and as a teaching tool (v. 26). By Israel’s protest against Moses, the people had revealed their lack of faith and hardness of heart. They were deserving of the same plagues, which God had brought upon the Egyptians. If the Israelites would obey Him God would keep the plagues of Egypt from falling upon them. If they persisted in protesting against Moses’ leadership, the inference is that God would plague His people as He had done to the Egyptians. God does not tolerate disobedience and unbelief, either in the Egyptians or in His people. Just as the Lord “healed” the bitter waters of Marah, making them sweet, so He would be Israel’s healer, if they would but obey. Having brought this message home to the Israelites, God led them on to Elim, where there was an ample supply of water. Here they camped, and gained needed refreshment from the water of the springs and the shade of the trees (v. 27).

## **Boot Camp and “C” Rations (Exodus 16)**

### **1. Growling Stomachs and Grumbling Saints**

A month passed between the times Israel departed from Egypt to the time when the nation reached the Wilderness of Sinai. Water had already been a problem (15:22-26), and now they had run out of food. Their growling stomachs soon produced grumbling lips. The whole assembly grumbled against Moses and Aaron (16:2). They said they would rather have died in Egypt than to have been brought out into the desert to starve to death (16:3).

## **2. Characteristics of Israel's Grumbling**

Before we consider God's response to the grumbling of His people, it may be worthwhile to point out some of the characteristics of Israel's grumbling in this incident. Very likely, we will find that grumbling was not only a problem then, but that it is also a problem in our lives as well.

**(1) Grumbling is a problem with pain or problems.** Grumbling almost never occurs when we are experiencing pleasure, but nearly always when we are in pain. In our passage, there is a definite relationship between the Israelites' growling stomachs and their grumbling lips. We grumble because we do not like the pain or the discomfort of the situation we are in. We grumble because we think that we should experience pleasure rather than pain, affluence and ease rather than adversity and deprivation.

**(2) Grumbling is a problem of perception.** Grumbling results from a difference between the way we perceive things to be and the way we think they should be. The problem is that when we grumble our perception of how things are is distorted. Grumbling invariably distorts the facts. In our text, Israel greatly exaggerated the benefits of Egypt. They said they "sat" (v. 3) by their fleshpots, and that they ate "all they wanted" of a great variety of foods and meat. This is, quite frankly, hard to believe. If the Egyptians made them gather their own straw and were attempting to kill boy babies, why would they be concerned to feed the Israelites so well? Also, their perception of their own imminent danger of starvation was greatly exaggerated. They believed that their hunger was starvation. No one had yet starved; at best, a few had begun to feel hunger. Worst of all, perhaps, they accused Moses of leading them into the wilderness in order to kill them. Their perception of Moses' motivation was entirely distorted. Finally, Israel's perception of God's care and compassion is minimized to grotesque proportions. They failed to perceive the loving hand of a sovereign God in their sufferings.

**(3) Grumbling is a problem of submission.** The Israelites grumbled against their leaders, Moses and Aaron. The people had forgotten that it was God who was leading them, not only by Moses, but also by the cloud, which was before them (Exod. 13:21-22; 16:10). Ultimately, then, Israel's grumbling was a protest against God's leadership, as Moses pointed out (16:7-8).

**(4) Grumbling is a sin of the tongue, which is closely related to disobedience.** Grumbling occurs when we can't control our situation. Disobedience occurs when we have an option and we choose to do other than that which God has commanded.

**(5) Grumbling is a communicable disease.** As mentioned, "the whole community grumbled ..." I would suggest that the grumbling of a handful of people spread into the epidemic plague of the grumbling of the whole congregation. Grumbling is not only a malady of the mouth, it is a malady which is spread by the mouth.

**(6) Grumbling is the result of a failure in our faith.** Grumbling is a sin, but it is a symptomatic sin. It reveals a lack of faith, for the grumbler does not see that good hand of God, refuses to accept the adversity, and sees disaster rather than blessing as the outcome of their circumstances. In fact we can go farther and say that grumbling is allowing our present circumstances to nullify our confidence in God's purposes and promises.

## **3. God's Response to Israel's Grumbling**

Consequently, God responded gently and graciously to the grumbling of the Israelites. Rather than to rebuke them for their complaining, He did two things, both of which were intended to demonstrate His presence with His people in their affliction and adversity. **First, He revealed His glory to the Israelites by some**

**special manifestation of Himself in the cloud by which He had been leading them (16:10). Second, God provided His people with quail and with manna (16:11-14).**

#### **4. The Nature of God's Provision of Manna**

As usual, there are many who attempt to demonstrate that the manna, which was provided for the Israelites, was not miraculous at all. This is very difficult to believe in the light of what the text tells us about the manna which God provided for His people.

**(1) The manna, which God provided, appears to be very nutritious, as would be required for desert rations.** Israel was given nourishment and energy for the rigorous task of desert travel. It may not have had the most exciting flavor, or at least the Israelites eventually tired of it, asking for something more spicy (Numbers 11:4-9).

**(2) The manna, which God provided, could be prepared in different ways.** It could be baked or boiled (v. 23).

**(3) The manna was provided in abundance, so much so that limits had to be placed on how much was gathered (vss. 13-21).**

**(4) The manna was miraculously provided.** It was "rained down from heaven" (v. 4). It was like nothing the Israelites had ever seen before (v. 15). It appeared every morning, except on the Sabbath. At the end of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness it ceased falling (Joshua 5:12).

**(5) The manna appeared in the morning and disappeared in the heat of the day.**

**(6) The manna would not keep, except over the Sabbath.**

**(7) Some of the manna was miraculously preserved, as a memorial of God's provision for future generations (vss. 31-36).**

#### **5. God's Regulations Regarding Manna**

When God provided the Israelites with this "bread from heaven" (16:4), He also gave instructions as to how this bread was to be gathered and used. These instructions were intended to test the Israelites as well as to teach them obedience and increase their faith. We will therefore review these instructions briefly and then consider their role in promoting Israel's faith.

**(1) Israel was to gather only what was required for that day (v. 16).**

**(2) It would appear that every Israelite was required to gather manna for his own needs (v. 16).**

**(3) Manna was to be gathered daily, and only enough for that day was to be gathered.** Any excess from that day was to be disposed of at the end of the day (v. 19). In other words, manna could not be stored up or hoarded.

**(4) Israel was to gather twice as much on the sixth day, and to gather none on the Sabbath (vss. 23-26).**

#### **6. The Meaning of the Manna**

The purpose of God's provision of manna and for His exacting rules regarding its collection and use, can be best understood in the light of the rest of the Bible, beginning with the Book of Deuteronomy and ending in



the Book of Revelation. I will briefly survey the major references to manna in these texts, and then summarize their relevance to our lives today.

**The temptation of our Lord** (Matt. 4:1-4; cf. Deut. 8:1-3). Israel was led into the wilderness to be tested by God for forty years (Deut. 8:2). Our Lord was led of God into the wilderness to be tested (including hunger also) for forty days (Matt. 4:1-2). At the end of the forty-day period, Satan approached our Lord to tempt Him. The first attempted temptation centered on food. Since our Lord was hungry after His forty day fast, it seemed only logical that He should eat. Satan challenged Him to prove His deity by satisfying His human need for food, doing so by the exercise of His divine power.

Our Lord's answer was to refer Satan to Deuteronomy chapter 8, which was a theological reflection of incidents such as that recorded in Exodus chapter 16. The lesson drawn from Deuteronomy 8 was that one's physical needs are secondary to one's spiritual responsibilities—namely to be obedient to the will of God. Our Lord's hunger, like Israel's, was the will of God. To satisfy the physical need for food and, at the same time, to disobey God's will, was wrong. In point of fact, Jesus was saying that obedience to the will of God is more life-saving for a hungry man than is the eating of bread. Obedience to the will of God is the basis for survival, and is of higher priority than the act of eating. The pertinent principle is this: **Submission to the will of God is more important than the satisfaction of our physical, bodily, needs.**

**The words of our Lord's prayer in the Sermon on the Mount** (Matt. 6:11). Our Lord taught His followers to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Given the backdrop of God's daily provision of manna in the wilderness for forty years, it is almost impossible to conceive of this prayer being unrelated to the purpose of the giving of the manna in Exodus 16. The divine daily provision of manna in the wilderness taught the Israelites to look daily to God for their daily sustenance. The Israelites had to trust God very literally for their "daily bread." Those of us who are not living "hand-to-mouth" need to look to God as the source of our life, whether or not we have a supply of food adequate for the week. Dependence is a daily matter, and our prayers should demonstrate this kind of dependence. Whether or not we have a surplus of goods is not the issue, so much as on whom or what we have our sense of dependence. As St. Paul instructed Timothy, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17).

**The feeding of the five thousand and the resulting discussion and discourse** (John 6). The crowds had followed our Lord to a desolate place (Mark 6:35), where there was no food available. Our Lord gave them bread and fish to eat, just as God had given the Israelites bread and meat (quail) in the wilderness in Exodus 16. The response of the crowd was to look to the Lord Jesus to become a "meal ticket" for them for the rest of their days: "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread" (John 6:34). In response, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe" (John 6:35-36).

Jesus not only fed the 5,000 to meet their physical needs, He sought to show them their spiritual needs, which He had come to supply. Like the manna in the wilderness, which saved the lives of the Israelites from physical death, He is the "bread of heaven" (Exod. 16:4). Unlike the "bread from heaven" which God gave the Israelites (the manna), the new "Bread from heaven" would give men eternal life. Jesus was not only claiming to be bread, but to be better bread. The New Testament therefore shows us that the "bread of heaven" is the instrument of God's salvation. The former "bread of heaven" preserved men's physical lives. The final "bread of heaven" is Him who saves men's souls from eternal death. This He has done by giving His

life as a sacrifice. It is no wonder that one of the two symbols present at the Lord's Communion, which we partake of each Liturgy, is bread.

**The teaching of the apostle St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 and 2 Corinthians 8:14-15.** The Corinthian church was a self-indulgent church. There were those living in sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6). The church even condoned a man living with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5). Not only was the church self-indulgent in matters of their sexual appetites, they were also self-indulging in the area of food. Rather than to abstain from certain foods for the benefit of a weaker brother, some of the Corinthians indulged in the sumptuous meals, which were related to pagan worship and sacrifice (1 Cor. 10:14-33). Even at the Lord's Table, some did not have sufficient self-control to wait for those who had to come later (1 Cor. 11:17-34). In taking a public role in the worship meeting of the church, many indulged themselves to the exclusion of others, depriving the church of edification (1 Cor. 14).

St. Paul speaks to the Corinthian self-indulgence by turning their attention back to the exodus of the Israelites: "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer (1 Cor. 10:1-10)".

There is much more referred to here than just the events of Exodus chapter 16, there is a common theme, a common element—that of self-indulgence in matters of the physical appetites. That is why the verses immediately preceding this section pertain to the self-discipline required of the Christian (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The manna which God provided in abundance in the wilderness provided the Israelites with the opportunity of over-indulging, but God's commands pertaining to the harvesting and use of it prohibited such excesses. The manna was thus given to give God's people a lesson in self-restraint. When Paul refers to the "spiritual food" of the Israelites, he does so in the context of self-control, and no wonder. That is what manna was all about—self-control.

**The warnings and promises to the church at Pergamum** (Revelation 2:12-17). The church at Pergamum had fallen into an error, which our Lord referred to as "the teaching of Balaam" (v. 14). We know from the context that this involved "things sacrificed to idols," and "acts of immorality," the very same evils as were present in the Corinthian church (see above). To those who were faithful and would be overcomers, our Lord gave this promise, "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17). Our Lord is promising His "hidden manna," that is His provision of the inner needs (not just physical needs) of those who were faithful, and who exercised the self-control necessary to deny the fleshly lusts which were being peddled by the false teachers referred to as the "teaching of Balaam."

Let me attempt to draw these matters of self-indulgence and self-control to a conclusion by summarizing several principles, which relate to them:

**(1) The Christian frequently must choose between immediate pleasure and eternal blessings.** Self-indulgence inclines one to pursue the former, while self-discipline is required to gain the latter. Hebrews

chapter 11 is filled with the names of those who chose to deny themselves of immediate pleasure for the certainty of God's eternal blessings.

**(2) The Christian who would rid himself of self-indulgence must learn to be content with the condition and the circumstances in which God has placed him** (Phil. 4:10-13; 1 Tim. 6:6-10).

**(3) The Christian who would overcome the tendency toward self-indulgence must develop a sense of daily dependence upon God to meet his every need** (Matt. 6:11). For those of us who have enough food for today and tomorrow and the next several weeks, we must recognize that it is God who is our provider. We must seek to avoid a false sense of confidence based upon our material wealth (1 Tim. 6:17), and we must be free to share out of our surplus (2 Cor. 8; 1 Tim. 6:18). We must recognize that we are dependent upon God daily for our life, for health, and for the grace to deal with all that comes our way. These are things which money cannot buy.

## **The Grumbling of Men and the Grace of God (Exodus 17:1-7)**

### **1. Massah and Meribah: Water From the Rock (17:1-7)**

Leaving the Desert of Sin where God's miraculous provision of manna had commenced (chapter 16), the Israelites went from place to place, as the Lord directed them. It is significant to note that God was in no hurry to bring the Israelites into the land of Canaan. While Israel's later "wilderness wanderings" were the result of their sin at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 13-14), the wanderings here are designed to serve as Israel's "boot camp" experiences. The events of chapter 17 occur while Israel is camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the Israelites or their cattle.

Israel's response to the lack of water is no mere repetition of their previous actions, however. The Israelites should have learned to trust God to supply their needs, based upon His previous provision of water at Marah (15:22-26) and quail and manna in the wilderness of Sin (chapter 16). Furthermore, the Israelites did far more than just grumble, as they had previously done. Before this, the Israelites had grumbled against Moses and Aaron (15:24; 16:2, 7-8), but now they are quarreling with Moses and about to stone him (17:4). Before, the Israelites asked Moses what they were to drink (15:24), but now they are demanding that Moses give them water to drink. It is bad enough that the Israelites argued with Moses and demanded that Moses provide them with water, but the text informs us that they were also challenging God here as well. Moses accused the people of "putting God to the test" in their quarreling with him (17:2). Since Moses' authority is due to his divine appointment (chapters 3 and 4), to quarrel with Moses is ultimately to dispute with God. The issue, however, is not only whether Moses had the right to continue to lead this people, but also whether God was among His people. The challenge of the Israelites was, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Moses' rebuke (that the people were putting God to the test) fell on deaf ears. They began to rehearse their memories of the "good old days" in Egypt, contrasted with their miseries and near-certain death in the desert (17:3). Unable to dissuade the people, Moses could only cry out to the Lord for help (17:4).

God's answer was that Moses should walk on ahead of the people. Some of the elders were taken along by Moses to witness this new miracle. As commanded, Moses took along his staff—the same one with which he had struck the Nile (17:5). The Lord promised Moses that He would be standing before Him at the rock at Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock, causing water to flow from it. When Moses did this, water came

forth in abundance, providing for the needs of the Israelites. He named the place Massah (test) and Meribah (quarrel), an epitaph which the Israelites would gladly have stricken from their history.

## **2. The Meaning of Massah and Meribah**

First, Massah and Meribah become an epitaph of the hardness of the Israelites' hearts (and not just that first generation) as well as for the Gentiles. Second, Massah and Meribah is an evidence of the grace of God and of His presence and provision for His people. We shall explore both of these themes and their relationship to each other.

### ***A. Massah and Meribah: The Hardness of Man's Heart***

This incident is far more than a mere occurrence of corporate "temporary insanity," as the contemporary excuse for sin is so often labeled. The Israelites were not just momentarily "out of sorts." Unfortunately, this incident is typical of Israel's stubbornness. Moses informed them that it was typical of their stubbornness and rebellion against God: "Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord. At Horeb you aroused the Lord's wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you (Deut. 9:6-8, cf. v. 24; Heb. 3:10)". The problem of grumbling is one that is common to every generation, in every age. Thus, we find the events of Massah and Meribah frequently referred to in the Old Testament. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did" (Ps. 95:7b-9). The New Testament picks up "Massah and Meribah," making this incident a lesson for contemporary Christians as well (Heb. 3 and 4; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). We must therefore conclude that the problems, which underlie Massah and Meribah, are universal. Let us seek then to explore the nature of the Israelites' sin.

- (1) Israel's actions at Massah and Meribah constituted testing God
- (2) Israel's demand that God prove His presence among them betrayed their lack of faith in Him.
- (3) Israel's actions at Massah and Meribah reveal their lack of patience.
- (4) Israel's response at Massah and Meribah were acts of disobedience.
- (5) At Massah and Meribah, Israel doubted God's presence among them.

### ***B. Massah and Meribah: A Picture of God's Presence and Power***

The amazing thing about the incident at Massah and Meribah is that God graciously provided His grumbling people with water in abundance, through the rock at Horeb. In spite of the great sin of the people in disputing with Moses and in putting God to the test, they were abundantly provided for. Because of this, the rock at Massah and Meribah quickly became a symbol of God's presence and power among His people. It is little wonder that the Lord is worshipped as Israel's "rock" in the "song of Moses": "I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just" (Deut. 32:3-4; also vv. 13,15,18). Psalm 95 begins, "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation" (Ps. 95:1).

While the Old Testament saint came to view God as their "rock," there was yet unfathomed meaning to this symbol which is revealed by the apostle Paul after the coming of Christ. Paul's words are both profound

and perplexing when he writes, “They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:3-4).

How can we be assured of God’s presence with us? Let me briefly outline some of the assurances Christians have of the presence of God in their midst, especially in times of adversity:

**(1) Our Lord’s name assures us of His presence among us.** “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means ‘*God with us*’” (Matthew 1:22-23).

**(2) Our Lord came to the earth, not to be with those who were at ease, but to minister to those who were afflicted.** When our Lord was questioned about His contact with “sinners” He replied, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). And when the Lord Jesus presented Himself at the outset of His ministry, He revealed Himself as the fulfillment of this prophetic passage: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, citing Isaiah 61:1, 2).

**(3) God sovereignly controls every detail of our lives. Thus, we are where God wants us to be, even when we are in danger or distress.** We read in Exodus 17:1 that Israel was “traveling from place to place *as the Lord commanded*”. In the place to which He leads us, God will be with us.

**(4) God uses situations of adversity to draw us closer to Him.** We are informed that God designed Israel’s adversity for their good: “He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you” (Deut. 8:15-16). Thus, the difficulties, which come into our lives, are under God’s sovereign control, designed to produce (in the final analysis) that which is good for us. Adversity is therefore not an argument for God’s absence but for His presence with His people (cf. Hebrews 12:1-13).

**(5) God promises His children that He is always with them and that He will never forsake them.** “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you: never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

## **The Tyranny of the Urgent (Exodus 18)**

### **1. Jethro’s Arrival (18:1-12)**

The first section (verses 1-12) breaks evenly into two divisions. Verses 1-6 might be titled “focus on the family.” They reveal the occasion for the arrival of Jethro. Verse 1 informs us of the basis for Jethro’s decision to visit Moses, while verses 2-6 tell us the purpose of that visit to Moses—to reunite Zipporah (his daughter, Moses’ wife), Gershom and Eliezer (his grandsons, Moses’ sons). The second division, verses 7-12, focuses on the faith of Jethro. They depict the outcome of Jethro’s arrival: (1) Moses’ reports of God’s good hand on the Israelites; and, (2) Jethro’s response to God’s goodness to Israel—rejoicing, proclaiming God’s greatness, and worshipping Him with Moses and the elders of Israel.

## **2. Jethro's Advice (18:13-27)**

The people who sought to know God's will from Moses began to line up at the designated place, perhaps just outside Moses' tent. With a nation composed of nearly 2,000,000 people (600,000 men, cf. 12:37), one can imagine that the line was long, and that it began to queue up very early in the morning. Moses, we are told, seated himself, sitting as Israel's sole judge (vss. 13, 14). The people came to him with all those matters, which needed a decision, instruction, or counsel. The people looked to Moses alone for a word from God for guidance in their lives. At the end of the day, the long line of waiting Israelites was still there. The people were weary from standing all day, and so was Moses (vss. 14, 18). Jethro was able to quickly identify the problem to which, it seems, Moses was oblivious. Jethro began to inquire about Moses' rationale for administering justice (judging) as he was doing. So Jethro advised Moses: "You should choose some capable men and appoint them as leaders of people: leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They must be God-fearing men who can be trusted and who cannot be bribed. Let them serve as judges for the people on a permanent basis. They can bring all the difficult cases to you, but they themselves can decide all the smaller disputes. That will make it easier for you as they share your burden. If you do this, as God commands, you will not wear yourself out, and all these people can go home with their disputes settled (Exodo18: 21-23)".

## **3. Jethro's Advice and Contemporary Christianity**

Moses pointed out that Jethro's advice was directly related to the writing of the Pentateuch by Moses. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch. This is a great literary work, not to mention its status as divine revelation. The writing of the Pentateuch was Moses' implementation of Jethro's counsel: "Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform" (Exodus 18:20).

The way Moses was consumed by his duties as judge, he would never have had the time to write every chapter which we have studied, and from which we can learn so much. How directly we have benefited from Jethro's counsel to Moses. Millions have been blessed because of the change which Jethro's visit brought about in the life of Moses.

Let us explore the reasons why Jethro's advice is as relevant to every Christian today as it was to Moses centuries ago. I will seek to show the relevance of Jethro's advice by establishing three principles below.

**(1) The principles and practice advocated by Jethro are those, which we can find, applied by the church in the New Testament.** The parallels between Exodus chapter 18 (including its implementation in Deuteronomy 1:9-18) and Acts 6 are uncanny. Both the Old and New Testament incidents stemmed from problems, which were the result of rapid growth, large numbers of people, and too few leaders. Both events required the leadership to expand, and for those on the highest level of leadership to devote themselves to their primary calling, and to delegate the other ministries to highly qualified men. Jethro's advice was that Moses appoint others to deal with the problems, which arose, and for him to devote himself to intercession for the people (v. 19) and instruction (v. 20). The same practice can be seen in the New Testament. The apostles were made aware of the discrimination that was taking place in the feeding of the widows, but they quickly delegated the solution of this problem to others, rather than to become distracted from their primary responsibilities of prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-6).<sup>iii</sup>

**(2) The principles, which Jethro recommended to Moses, are those, which we find individual leaders in the New Testament applying to their ministries.** Our Lord exercised His leadership in a way that illustrates many of the principles Moses was taught by his father-in-law. Our Lord did not purpose to minister alone. Instead, He called 12 disciples to follow Him, and these He trained to carry on without Him. In

turn, they would also make other disciples. While our Lord was constantly busy, He never forgot His priorities. Even though He was constantly needed as a healer, He restricted His healing so that His principle task of proclaiming the gospel could be fulfilled (Mark 1:32-39). While our Lord ministered to the masses, He frequently withdrew for times of privacy with His Father. His public ministry was interspersed with times of private fellowship with God (Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13; 15:21; Luke 9:10; 22:41; John 6:16).

**(3) The principles, which Moses learned from Jethro, are applicable to every Christian, whether he is a leader or not.** The principles, which we have learned from Jethro, are leadership principles. Whether or not we are leaders in the church, most of us have some leadership responsibilities. Men have leadership responsibilities in marriage. Mothers have leadership responsibilities in the home. Older Christian women have a leadership role with the younger women. Many have leadership roles on the job or in the community. In whatever task we have a leadership role; the principles we find in Exodus 18 are applicable.

## **The Preamble to Israel's Constitution (Exodus 19)**

### **1. God's Purpose for the Decalogue (19:1-6)**

Verses 4-6 are the heart of the section, and some would go so far as to say they are the heart of the Old Testament revelation of God pertaining to His covenant with Israel. Apparently it was not necessary for God to summon Moses. Verse three implies that Moses went up the mountain without any overt prompting from God. This may very well be due to the fact that it was here, on Mt. Horeb (which seems to be synonymous with Mt. Sinai) that Moses first encountered God (Exodus 3 and 4). At the burning bush, God promised Moses that the nation would come to worship Him "at this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). Thus, Moses seemed to know that he was to ascend the mountain to speak with God. From the mountain, God spoke some of the most significant words found in the Old Testament, words which Moses was to proclaim to the Israelites (vss. 3, 6b): "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6a).

#### **These words convey several important truths:**

- (1) Israel's history is proof of God's faithfulness to His covenant, for He distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, delivering them and making them the special object of His care.
- (2) Israel's deliverance was for the purpose of being brought to God, so that the nation could be His prized possession and to serve Him as a priestly nation.
- (3) In order to maintain this privileged status, Israel must keep God's covenant (as defined by the Law).

### **2. Preparations for the Appearance of God (19:7-15)**

Moses conveyed the words, which God had spoken to him on the mountain to the people (v. 7). Unanimously, the people responded, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (v. 8) It is noteworthy that the Israelites agreed to do all that God commanded **in principle**, rather than **in particular**. Moses returned to the top of the mountain to convey the words of the people to God. Before he was able to speak, however, God revealed to Moses that He would appear to Moses in a thick cloud. The purpose for this appearance is not what we would have expected: "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever" (v. 9). God was going to speak with Moses

as Israel watched and listened, so that his leadership would be evident to the people. In light of later (not to mention earlier) events, when Moses' authority would be challenged, God purposes to clearly establish Moses' position and authority publicly. His appearance to Moses will accomplish this purpose.

Verses 10-15 outline the steps, which the Israelites must take in order to purify and prepare themselves for the appearance of God on the third day. During the two-day interval, a number of things were to be done:

- (1) **Boundaries were to be set, barring both man and beast from coming in contact with the mountain** (vss. 12-14). Any man or beast, which touched the mountain, was to die.
- (2) **The people were to consecrate themselves by washing their garments** (vss. 10, 14).
- (3) **The people were to abstain from sexual intimacy** prior to God's visitation on Mt. Sinai (v. 15).

### **3. The Manifestation of God on the Mountain (19:16-25)**

At the command of Moses, you gather with the whole congregation of the Israelites at the base of the mountain (v. 17). As you look on, the Lord descends upon the mountain in fire, with smoke billowing from the mountain (v. 18). Suddenly, the whole mountain quakes violently. The trumpet begins to sound again, each time getting louder and louder (v. 19). Moses speaks and God responds with thunder. It would seem that all of the forces of nature have been summoned to salute their Creator, as He manifests Himself to His people on Mt. Sinai. If the sight of the burning bush was awesome to Moses, what impact must this scene have had on the Israelites? Moses alone was summoned to the top of the mountain to meet God (v. 20). He was told to go back down to the people and to warn them not to draw too near to the mountain to gaze at the spectacular scene, which was taking place (v. 21). The priests, too, were to consecrate themselves, lest they be smitten of God (v. 22). When Moses descended this time, he was to return with Aaron (v. 24). Their leadership was thereby confirmed.

We can say with conviction that the giving of the Law as described in the Book of Exodus was a glorious occasion. The Law was a gracious provision of God for the nation Israel, albeit a temporary one. The new covenant would be far better, but the old covenant was a necessary prerequisite and preparation. The old covenant was introduced in a blaze of glory. All Israel beheld the manifestation of the glory and power of God as He descended upon the mountain. There was an immediate sense of the holiness of God, which gripped the entire congregation of Israel. It was not so difficult for the Israelites to appreciate the distance, which God kept between Himself and the people. Indeed, the people urged Moses to intercede and to mediate between them and God, fearing to be near Him (Exodus 20:18-20; Deuteronomy 5:22-27). Whether due to the boundaries established at God's orders, or to the fear of the Israelites of God, the people kept their distance.

The new covenant was introduced quite differently. The new covenant was introduced by the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to Israel. His coming was quite the opposite. He came as the child of poor parents, who could not even find suitable housing, so that the child was born in a cattle trough. His glory was manifested to a very few. At His birth and in His early life, a few humble people were given a glimpse of His majesty and power. Later, at His baptism and transfiguration, only a select few were privileged to witness His glory. Rather than the barriers, which kept men away from God, on threat of death, the multitudes pressed upon on the Lord and touched Him. The message of the gospel is evident in what we see here. The barriers which were, of necessity, constructed to keep men from God at the giving of the old covenant have all been taken away by the institution of the new covenant. The veil, which kept men from the presence of God, has been severed. The barrier of our sins has been torn down. This is because the holiness, which the Law requires, has been fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the penalty of death, which the Law pronounces on



every sinner, has been born by the same Savior, on the cross of Calvary. “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! (Zechariah 14:4-5)”.

## **An Overview of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)**

### **1. The Characteristics of the Commandments**

As we consider the Ten Commandments as a whole, the content of the commandments is not really new. All Ten Commandments had been part of the Law of God previously written on hearts instead of stone, for all ten appear, in one way or another, in Genesis. They are:

The first, Genesis 35:2: ‘Get rid of the foreign gods.’

The second, Genesis 31:39: Laban to Jacob: ‘But why did you steal my gods?’

The third, Genesis 24:3: ‘I want you to swear by the Lord.’

The fourth, Genesis 2:3: ‘God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.’

The fifth, Genesis 27:41: ‘The days of mourning my father are near.’

The sixth, Genesis 4:9: ‘Where is your brother Abel?’

The seventh, Genesis 39:9: ‘How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?’

The eighth, Genesis 44:4-7: ‘Why have you stolen my silver cup?’

The ninth, Genesis 39:17: ‘[Joseph] came to me to make sport of me ... but ... he ran. ...’

The tenth, Genesis 12:18; 20:3: ‘You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.’

### **2. Preface to the Ten Commandments (20:1-2)**

Verses 1 and 2 serve as a preface or introduction to all of the ten commandments, but they have a special relationship to the first three. Verse 1 informs us that God not only engraved the commandments on stone, but that He spoke these words in Israel’s hearing. These commands, God wants us to know, came directly from God. Verse 2 distinguishes the God of the Israelites from all of the gods, which are about to be forbidden. The words of this verse remind the Israelites that God has singled them out, distinguishing them from all other peoples on the face of the earth. They will thus be called upon in the following commandments to respond to God’s exclusive relationship with them by worshipping Him exclusively, without any other gods. It is no wonder that the marriage relationship is used metaphorically of the relationship between God and His chosen people, Israel. In both, there is a relationship, which excludes others.

### **3. The First Commandment (Exodus 20:3)**

“You shall have no other gods before Me.” With these words God is commanding an exclusive relationship between Himself and His people. The command instructs Israel that God will not allow His people to have any gods in addition to Himself. There are three principle reasons why the Israelites were given this first commandment:

**First, Israel’s history demonstrates their tendency toward false worship.** The Israelites frequently sought to serve other gods in addition to Yahweh, who is speaking in our text. Rachel stole her father’s household gods when they fled from his house (Genesis 31:19). Israel lived 400 years in Egypt, a nation that

had many gods, and the Israelites continued to attempt to worship them (Joshua 24:14; 1 Samuel 8:8). It was for their rejection of God that Israel was sent into captivity (Ezekiel 20).

**Second, to have other gods is always to forsake God** (Joshua 24:15-16, 20; 1 Samuel 8:8). To my knowledge Israel never meant to reject God altogether by having other gods, but simply to add other gods to those which they would worship. The Old Testament consistently indicates that having any other god or gods always constitutes the forsaking of God. The relationship of the Israelites to the God is like that of a man's relationship to his wife—it is an exclusive relationship, which allows for no others. Thus, turning to other gods is called harlotry and adultery in the Bible.

**Third, having other gods is evidence of one's lack of faith in God.** Here is the reason why having other gods constitutes forsaking God. This commandment assumes that multiple gods will be worshipped, not just one. The reason goes back to the pagan theology, which viewed each god as having power over a particular (but restricted) area. To “cover all the bases” one would have to serve many gods. Thus, once one came to doubt God's sovereignty, the addition of other gods would be necessary to assure the worshipper of being provided for and protected by his gods. God is thus forsaken when other gods are served, for we have failed to find Him sufficient and trustworthy if other gods are required to make us feel secure. This commandment therefore suggests that once we cease to trust God for every area of our life, we have ceased trusting Him altogether, and have turned to other “gods.”

#### **4. The Second Commandment (20:4-6)**

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

The first and second commandments are similar in that both deal with the matter of Israel's worship. They are distinct in that the first commandment has restrictions pertaining to the object of worship (God alone), while the second has restrictions regarding the means of worship. The second commandment prohibits worship by means of “visual aids,” more commonly known as idols. There are several important reasons for this prohibition of idolatry.

**First, an idol is contrary to the nature of God.** God is invisible. He revealed Himself to the Israelites without any form (Deuteronomy 4:12-19). Therefore, physical forms are inconsistent with the nature of God, and cannot be used to represent Him.

**Second, idols are demeaning to God, since there is no created thing, which can do justice to the perfections of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.**

**Third, idols are contrary to the nature of faith.** In the Bible, faith is belief in that which is not seen: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Our Lord gently rebuked Thomas for not believing the testimony of His resurrection apart from visual proof, and pronounced blessing on those who would believe on Him without seeing Him (John 20:29).

**Fourth, idols are contrary to God's goal for worship, which is to worship Him in the person of His Son.** In His conversation with the “woman at the well” Jesus gently focused her attention away from special places of worship, to the person whom all must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:20-24, esp. v. 24). The consequences for violating the second commandment are severe: “... visiting the iniquity of the father on the

children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exodus 20:5). We may wonder why this is so. Consider the following facts:

**(1) The nature of the penalty is proportional to the seriousness of the offense.** If the consequences of idolatry are serious, then we must also conclude that the offense is a serious sin.

**(2) The punishment described is an outworking of the principle of imputation.** The principle of imputation means that children share in the acts of their fathers. As applied to idolatry, this sin is passed on from father to son. The consequences of the sin of idolatry flow through the principle of imputation.

**(3) This warning spells out the dire consequences, which the sin of idolatry can bring on future generations.**

**(4) The specific reference in this warning is to Israel’s captivity, as the result of their idolatry.** There are many passages which link Israel’s captivity to her idolatry and false worship. “Then the Lord said to me, “A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to **the iniquities of their ancestors** who refused to hear My words, and they have **gone after other gods** to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.” Therefore thus says the Lord, “Behold I am bringing disaster on them which they will not be able to escape; though they will cry to Me, yet I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they surely will not save them in the time of their disaster” (Jeremiah 11:9-12, emphasis mine; also Deuteronomy 28:32, 41)”. We know that Judah’s captivity in Babylon was 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). Assuming that a generation is approximately 20 years, the consequences of Israel’s idolatry would last for 3 to 4 generations. The evidence seems, then, to favor the conclusion that the specific penalty in mind in verse 5 of Exodus chapter 20 is that of the Babylonian captivity.

**(5) The good news is that God overturns the curse of the second commandment of the Mosaic Covenant by the promise of the new covenant.** The prophet Jeremiah foretells of the coming of the new covenant, at which time the principle of imputation (with regard to the sins of the fathers) will be set aside: “And it will come about that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the Lord. “In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But every one will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:28-34).

The principle of imputation is not just set aside (with regard to the consequences of sin), it is applied positively so that as the sins of the fathers constituted the children sinners, now the righteousness of Jesus Christ will constitute all who are in Him, by faith, righteous. No wonder Jeremiah’s prophecy can promise that God will remember Israel’s sins no more!

### **5. The Third Commandment (20:7)**

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

If the first commandment dealt with the object of our worship, and the second the means of our worship, the third commandment deals with our verbal worship of God. In order to determine the meaning of this commandment we must first understand the meaning of two things: first, the concept of the “name of the Lord,” and second, the meaning of the term “vain.” “What then is involved in the ‘name’ of God? His name includes: (1) his nature, being, and very person (Ps. 20:1; Luke 24:47; John 1:12; cf. Rev. 3:4), (2) his teaching and doctrines (Ps. 22:22; John 17:6, 26), and (3) his ethical directions and morals (Mic. 4:5).” The ‘vain’ or ‘empty purposes’ to which God’s name may be put are: (1) to confirm something that is false and untrue, (2) to fill in the gaps in our speeches or prayers, (3) to express mild surprise, and (4) to use that name when no clear goal, purpose, or reason for its use is in mind, whether it be in prayer, in a religious context, or absent-mindedly invoked as table grace when no real heart, thankfulness, or purpose is involved. When God’s name is used lightly, what will we do in times of great distress? Proverbs 18:10 says “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”

### **6. The Meaning of the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11)**

There are two crucial passages which we must first consider, for they not only precede the Fourth Commandment, they actually lay the foundation for it, on which foundation the commandment is based. We shall first consider the “Sabbath rest” of God in Genesis 2:1-3 and then the “Sabbath rest” of Israel related to the gathering of the manna in Exodus 16:22-30.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work, which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work, which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work, which God had created and made (Gen. 2:1-3). This text draws together three separate, but related, events:

- God finished His work of creating the universe.
- God rested on the seventh day because His creation work was finished.
- God blessed and sanctified the seventh day because on it He rested.

The important thing to notice is this: no commandment is made in this text. The seventh day is not even called the Sabbath. But the seventh day is differentiated and set apart (sanctified) from the other six creation days. It is assigned a special significance (blessing) by God, based on the fact that it was the day on which God rested. All subsequent commands to keep the Sabbath assume that this sanctity of the seventh day has already been established (here, at creation) by God. Thus, the Israelites are not commanded to sanctify the Sabbath, but to conduct themselves in such a way as not to profane it (Exodus 31:14; Isaiah 56:2), because it has already been declared holy.

In Exodus 16:22-30: “Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, “This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a Sabbath observance, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it. And Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days

you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.” And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? See, the LORD has given you the Sabbath, therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” So they rested on the seventh day (Exod. 16:22-30)”. This text makes several significant contributions to the developing doctrine of the Sabbath. First, it is the first occurrence of the term “Sabbath” in the Bible. Second, it is the first time in the Bible that Israel is commanded to observe a Sabbath practice of any kind. Here, the practice is specifically related to resting from the work of gathering manna. Third, manna was not to be gathered on the seventh day because it was a “Sabbath to the Lord” (vss. 23, 26). God caused manna not to fall on the Sabbath (v. 27). God kept the double portion of manna gathered on the sixth day from rotting, as it did on all other days (vss. 20, 24).

In the light of the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20, the “Sabbath instructions” of Exodus 16 are preparatory for what will soon follow. God told the Israelites to keep a form of Sabbath observance several weeks before it was laid down as one of the Ten Commandments (and one with a death penalty attached). Once again, God’s dealings here are preparing His people for the future. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11). There are six important features of this passage:

**(1) This commandment looks back for its basis.** The first word of this commandment is “remember.” “Remember” points back, first to the rest of our Lord on the seventh day, the day, which He sanctified and blessed in Genesis chapter 2. Second, we are reminded of the “Sabbath commandment” given Israel in Exodus chapter 16, which forbade the gathering of manna on the Sabbath.

**(2) The Fourth Commandment is not just a requirement to “keep the Sabbath,” but more than this is the instruction to “keep the Sabbath holy”** (Exodus 16:23; 20:8). The Sabbath day is commemorated as a holy day, one designated such by the Lord (Genesis 2:1-3) and declared to be such in Exodus 16:23. Keeping the Sabbath involves much more than abstinence from labor, it requires the acknowledgment of the sacredness, the sanctity, of this day because of God’s deeds and declaration.

**(3) The Fourth Commandment instructs each Israelite to plan and to finish his week’s work by the Sabbath.**

**(4) The commandment here is broadened from the command given in Exodus chapter 16.** In that passage, God specifically prohibited the Israelites from gathering manna on the seventh day of the week. Now, all labor is prohibited.

**(5) This commandment is not given in isolation, but it is given in relationship, in concert with the other nine.**

**(6) This commandment in verse 11 we are reminded that the Lord “made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them.”**

**(7) In Exodus 31:12-18:** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the

Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.” And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:12-18).

**Several new dimensions to the Sabbath commandment are given in this text:**

- (1) This passage refers to the Sabbaths as “MY” Sabbaths (v. 13).**
- (2) The observance of the Sabbath is extended in time, so that it becomes a permanent one (throughout your generations, v. 13) for Israel.**
- (3) The observance of the Sabbath is declared to be the sign of the Mosaic Covenant between God and His chosen people Israel.**
  - (1) The importance of obeying this commandment is emphatically stressed.**
  - (2) The Sabbath is said to be profaned by any who work on this sacred day.**
  - (3) The purpose of Israel’s Sabbath observance was to teach them about sanctification—namely their sanctification.**

Let me briefly review the meaning of the Sabbath from the Old Testament, to show how carefully Sabbath instruction has been given:

Genesis 2:1-3	Sabbath established by deeds and decree of God.
Exodus 16:22-30	Sabbath first commanded. Applied by God to the Israelites in the wilderness, related to the gathering of manna.
Exodus 20:8-11	Sabbath first given as the Fourth Commandment. Application broadened to all work, and to all in Israel, including servants and animals.
Exodus 31:12-18	Sabbath specifically identified as Israel’s sign of the Mosaic Covenant, with death penalty prescribed for violators.
Leviticus (23:3, 25 and 26) and Numbers (28:9-10)	Sabbath rest to include the land. Religious celebrations and sacrifice given more detail.
Deuteronomy (5:12-15)	The Fourth Commandment reiterated, but now with emphasis on God’s redemption and Israel’s responsibility toward slaves.
Psalms 92	Description of the kinds of worship appropriate on the Sabbath.
Prophets (Jeremiah 17:21-27)	Israel’s errors in understanding and carrying out the Sabbath exposed (pursuit of own pleasure; ritual without mercy, justice, and Ezekiel righteousness). Blessings

and Ezekiel 20:12-26; 22:8, 16, 26)	promised those who keep Sabbath in spirit and in truth; judgment (captivity) if Sabbath is continually profaned.
Post-exilic books (Nehemiah 10:28-31; 13:15-22):	Emphasis on care given to keep the Sabbath.

### **7. Between Child and Parent—Honoring Father and Mother (Exodus 20:12)**

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you (Exodus 20:12; also Deuteronomy 5:16). Since this is really the first occurrence of the command to honor parents it would be well to make several observations about the commandment, which is given:

**(1) The commandment is given to children, specifying their obligation toward their parents.** The terms “father” and “mother” are synonymous with “parents,” thus we have spelled out here the obligation of children to honor their parents.

**(2) There are no indications here as to the age of the children who are to honor their parents.** We would tend to think that this commandment is given to young children regarding their obligation to their parents, but this is not so. Other passages will apply this general command to specific age groups, but this command is deliberately broad in scope.

**(3) There is no particular action required here.** Children are not told here to do anything in particular to honor their parents. We should assume, and rightly so, that different actions will be required at different times, of different people. We must therefore look elsewhere in Scripture to determine how we are to honor our parents at any given point in time.

The Old Testament Scriptures fill in many of the details as to what constitutes honor and dishonor, with respect to parents. When parents are dishonored, they are cursed (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9; Proverbs 20:20), or, according to Proverbs, not blessed (30:11). This disregard for parents can result in physically striking them (Exodus 21:15; Proverbs 19:26), and even of robbing them (Proverbs 28:24). The child can dishonor his parents by living a lifestyle which is contradictory to that of his parents and of society, including disobedience, stubbornness, rebelliousness, drunkenness, and gluttony (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

**(4) The Fifth Commandment is the first of the commandments, which deal with our obligations to men.** The first four commandments have dealt with the Israelite’s obligation to God. This commandment introduces those, which specify his duty with respect to men. This commandment pertains only to the obligation between child and parents. It is also a positive command, followed by prohibitions.

**(5) The Fifth Commandment is the first commandment, which is accompanied with a promise.** The promise, as I understand it, is two-fold. First, it is a promise of long life. Second, it is the promise of a long life, lived out in the land of Canaan. As it stands, the Fifth Commandment is given specifically to the Israelites, with a promise, which pertains to them. The New Testament will adapt and modify this commandment to apply to the Gentile Christians and the church, leaving the commandment in nearly the same form as found here in the Old Testament.

The promise of long life in the land of Canaan is given elsewhere, but it is the reward for keeping all of God’s commandments, not just the Fifth Commandment: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways

and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it” (Deuteronomy 30:15-16).

Why is obedience to the Fifth Commandment linked with the blessings attached to the keeping of all the commandments? In addition to the fact that one must keep every commandment to keep all commandments, the Fifth Commandment plays a special role with respect to the rest of the commandments. The laws of God are to be conveyed to subsequent generations of Israelites primarily from the parents to their children. Thus, the emphasis of Deuteronomy on the teaching the Law to children. If children are going to listen to their parents and learn to love the Law, they must first respect and honor their teachers—their fathers and mothers. **The honoring of parents is thus a prerequisite to the teaching of the Law from one generation to the next.**

If children honor their parents they will heed their instruction. If they heed their instruction, they will keep the whole Law of God. If they keep the Law of God they will not do harm to their fellow-Israelites. Viewed negatively, honoring parents causes the child to be inclined to avoid the evils of murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and coveting. Viewed more positively, honoring parents has a high correlation with honoring others and caring for them. This is emphasized in two passages of Proverbs:

There is a kind of man who curses his father, and does not bless his mother. There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness. There is a kind—oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised in arrogance. There is a kind of man whose teeth are like swords, and his jaw teeth like knives, to devour the afflicted from the earth, and the needy from among men (Proverbs 30:11-14).

The words of King Lemuel, the oracle that his mother taught him. What, O my son? And what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, Or your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink. Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted. ... Open your mouth for the dumb, For the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy (Prov. 31:1-5, 8-9).

**There is also a relationship between honoring parents and honoring God.** Not only does the Fifth Commandment relate to and facilitate the keeping of the last commandments, it also is very much related to the keeping of those commandments pertaining to the worship of God. This is especially apparent in Malachi 1:6: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Thy name?’”

Those who would honor God must also honor their parents. Those who honor parents have already begun to honor God. Our earthly fathers are, on the one hand, God’s representatives, instructing and disciplining their children in His place. On the other hand, parents serve to illustrate the way in which God is at work in the lives of His children, as a Father. This is seen, for example, in Proverbs chapters 2 and 3, where the father’s care for his child is likened to God’s fatherly care for His children.

Honoring parents was a vitally important obligation, signaled by its inclusion in the Ten Commandments, by the death penalty attached to its flagrant violation, and by the detail, which we are given about the evidences of honoring parents or its neglect. Honoring parents was fundamental for the passing on of Israel’s faith from one generation to another. It was also important because it enhanced and facilitated the honoring of God (commandments 1-4) and others (commandments 6-10).



**8. The Sanctity of Life (Exodus 20:13)**

We must begin our study at the creation of the world, and especially of mankind, for God gave man life in a way which sets him apart from all the rest of God's living creatures: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). God was more intimately involved in the process of giving life to man. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. This is distinct from the way He gave life to every other living creature.

**The first taking of life (murder) is described shortly after the fall of man:**

And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, Thou has driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Thy face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me." So the Lord said to him, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should slay him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden (Genesis 4:8-16).

At this point, I wish to make only a few observations, which I think are important to our study of murder:

**(1) Cain killed Abel because Abel was righteous and he was not.** Cain's sin manifested itself by his persecution of righteous Abel, whose sacrifice was pleasing to God (1 John 3:12).

**(2) Cain killed Abel in rebellion against God.** God had rejected Cain's offering, but accepted Abel's. When He saw that Cain was angry, God sought him out, urging him to do what was right, and to master the sin, which was threatening to overpower him. When Cain killed Abel, it was a deliberate, willful act of rebellion against God's encouragement to resist evil and to do what was right.

**(3) Cain was punished for murdering his brother, but not by the death penalty, which would only later be instituted.** Cain was forced to live in some way, which did not require farming, since the ground was cursed so as not to produce for him. To keep any man from killing Cain, a sign was given to him and a sevenfold vengeance was promised to any who would slay him. Capital punishment, which was commanded later on, is specifically prohibited here. Neither God nor man took Cain's life.

**(4) It would seem that the shedding of the blood of Abel on the ground was related to the cursing of the soil, which made farming impossible for Cain.** Later on, the shedding of blood will be clearly identified as profaning the land. Here, it would seem, this is implied.

**(5) It was not long until one of Cain's descendants became a murderer, and seems almost to boast of it:** And Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man for wounding me; And a boy for striking me; If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:23-24).

**(6) It is not until after the flood that capital punishment is prescribed as the punishment for the sin of murder.** Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed" (Genesis 9:6).

Leaving Genesis, let us move on to the Book of Exodus, where the Sixth Commandment is first given. Before turning to the prohibition of murder in the Ten Commandments, however, **let us refresh our memory as to the man, Moses, through whom these Scriptures have come to us**: Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (Exodus 2:11-12). It is ironic that the one through whom the commandment prohibiting murder has come to us is, himself, a murderer. It is likewise ironic that when Cain killed Abel, he rejected any responsibility for being his brother's keeper; when Moses killed the Egyptian, he did so thinking that he was acting as his brother's keeper (Acts 7:23-25). Also, there is David (Uriah, Bathsheba's husband) and King Ahab (who was great, but not godly), who killed Naboth to obtain his field (1 Kings 21:19).

In Exodus chapter 20 we find the prohibition of murder given as the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). Here, there is neither a precise definition of "murder" given, nor is any specific punishment prescribed. This is due to the very precise, summary form of the Ten Commandments. Very shortly, however, the particulars pertaining to this commandment will begin to appear. We shall briefly survey the kinds of murder, the penalties prescribed for murder, and the provisions made for some murderers, as prescribed in the Old Testament Law.

**Premeditated murder** is punishable by death, while murder which was **not premeditated** (second degree?) was viewed as a lesser offense: "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die" (Exodus 21:12-14).

**Negligent homicide** can also be as serious a matter as premeditated murder when one knows of a real danger, but willfully avoids doing what is necessary to prevent the death of another: "And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring, and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. If ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him" (Exodus 21:28-30).

In this case, while the death penalty is prescribed for the owner of the ox, it would seem that a ransom is possible, if such is the desire of the surviving relatives. The owner of the ox, however, is not in any position to negotiate about the price of the ransom that is demanded.

The Law goes so far as to distinguish between homicide which is justifiable and that which is not: "If a thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no blood-guiltiness on his account. But if the sun has risen on him, there will be blood-guiltiness on his account. He shall surely make restitution; if he owns nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft" (Exodus 22:2-3).

By far, the most definitive treatment of murder and of its consequences is found in Numbers 35. Here, as elsewhere, there is a distinction drawn between first and second-degree murder (first degree, vss. 16-21; second degree, vss. 22-28). The important truth which is emphasized here is **the provision of cities of refuge** for those who are not guilty of first-degree murder. Several things should be underscored regarding the cities of refuge:

- These are cities set apart for the Levites (v. 6).

- These cities are a place of refuge not only for Israelites, but also for the alien and the sojourner (v. 15).
- There is refuge only for the one who has “stood trial” before the congregation, and who has been found to have unintentionally taken the life of another (vss. 11-12, 24-25).
- There is refuge only if one remains in a city of refuge (vss. 26-28).
- There is refuge until the death of the high priest, at which time the one who shed the blood of another may return to his home, without fear of reprisal (vss. 25, 28, 32).
- The reason why murder must be dealt with in such meticulous terms is that if it is not rectified in some way, the blood which is shed pollutes the land (vss. 29-34).

This pollution of the land, along with others, is the reason why God will thrust the nation Israel from the land, into captivity. Thus, the Old Testament prophets will condemn the Israelites for violating the Sixth Commandment, along with the rest of God’s commands: How the faithful city [Jerusalem] has become a harlot, She who was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, But now murderers (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 7:9).

### **9. The Sanctity of Marriage (Exodus 20:14)**

#### **Adultery in the Old Testament**

The foundation for the sanctity of marriage is laid early in the Book of Genesis, where we read of the first marriage. “Then the LORD GOD said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” ..... And the LORD GOD fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. .... For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:18-24). God not only created man and woman, He also created the institution of marriage. He joined the first man and the first woman together in marriage. God has here joined a man and a woman so that they have become a unity. When the first sin was committed by partaking of the “forbidden fruit” God promised salvation through the seed of the woman in the midst of the curse pronounced on Satan: “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you will bruise him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15).

In **Genesis chapter 12** Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you” (Gen. 12:10-13). Abram’s request was for Sarai to lie, representing herself as an eligible bride, and thus potentially putting her in another man’s bed in order to save his life. In effect, Abram was not only endangering the promises of God and the purity of his wife, but he was paving the way for men to unknowingly commit adultery with his wife. This is not one of the high points in Abram’s life.

Joseph was a young man, with all of the sexual desires of any other healthy male. Away from his family, perhaps never again to return to his own people, how easy it would have been for him to succumb to the advances of his master’s wife: And it came about after these events that his master’s wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, “Lie with me.” But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Behold, with me around, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge.

There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, or be with her (Gen. 39:7-10). This incident reveals several important truths:

- (1) **Joseph knew he could not lie with this woman because she was the wife of another man.**
- (2) **We can see by Joseph's words that adultery was not only wrong, but that he understood it to be sin.**
- (3) **Joseph understood that, more than anything else, adultery was a sin against God.**
- (4) **The immediate results of Joseph's actions were painful, but the ultimate outcome was the blessing of God.**

**Exodus 22:16-17**—A man who seduces a virgin must marry her or pay the price of a virgin's dowry.

**Leviticus 18**—Israel is to distinguish herself from practices of Egypt and Canaan by maintaining sexual purity (vss. 3, 24-30). Uncovering the nakedness of a relative is prohibited (vss. 6-18), as well as illicit intercourse (vss. 19-23). Sexual sin defiles the people (vss. 24, 30) and the land (vss. 25, 27, 28), thus resulting in expulsion from the land.

**Leviticus 20**—Israel is not to "play the harlot" by consulting mediums or spiritists, but they are to consecrate themselves to the God of Israel, who sanctifies them (vss. 6-8). Sexual sins and their penalties are spelled out in detail (vss. 10-21). Sanctification is then stressed, so that Israel must not practice the immorality of the Canaanites before them, lest they too be thrust from the land (vss. 22-27).

**Numbers 5**—A test is given to determine whether or not a wife has been unfaithful to her husband. The consequences of either guilt or innocence are spelled out (vss. 11-31).

**Deuteronomy 22**—When a man accuses his wife of not being a virgin at the time they were married, the parents can show her (blood-stained) garment as proof of her purity. The consequences of guilt or innocence are spelled out (vss. 13-21).

Taken as a whole, the above passages convey several vitally important truths:

- (1) **Adultery is a more serious sexual sin because it is a violation of a marriage.**
- (2) **Sexual impurity defiles both the persons involved and the land.** (Lev. 18:24-30; 20:22-26).
- (3) **Terms referring to adultery and sexual immorality are employed non-literally, referring to Israel's infidelity to God.**

The Scriptures frankly tell us that sexual sin can be the source of other sins. It can dull the mind, like wine, making one insensitive to reality (Hos. 4:11-12). David's immorality led to the additional sin of murder. Sexual sin is also related to religious apostasy (Num. 25:1-9).

**The Old Testament prophets take up the themes already developed in the Pentateuch.** The sexual immorality of Israel has defiled the people and the land, and necessitates their expulsion from the land. Spiritual adultery has also become rampant, and is condemned. Judgment awaits this nation, which is likened to a harlot. Israel's restoration is described as a marriage between God and His bride. "Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken Me And sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, They committed adultery And trooped to the harlot's house. They were well-fed lusty horses, Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish these people," declares the LORD, "And on a nation

such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?” (Jer. 5:7-9). Thus, because Israel practiced the same sins as the Canaanites, who lived in the land before them, they were thrust forth from the land, just as their predecessors, and just as God had warned.

### **Adultery in the New Testament**

In the gospels we see how our Lord pressed beyond the actual act of adultery to the attitudinal sins of adultery:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. And it was said, ‘WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DISMISSAL’; but I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:27-32).

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matt. 15:19). “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

These three texts provide us with the essence of our Lord’s teaching on adultery and sexual immorality. Let us briefly consider the important truths our Lord taught on sex and marriage.

- (1) Jesus teaches here that it is not enough to keep the Law in its letter, but must also keep it in spirit.**
- (2) Jesus thus teaches here that attitudinal sins precede sins of action (cf. James 1:13-15).**
- (3) The way to fully keep the Seventh Commandment is to view sexual sin as so serious (damning) that we are willing to take any measure required to prevent it.**
- (4) Adultery is a violation of the union of marriage.**
- (5) Divorce causes adultery.**

The apostle Paul has the most to say of the apostles on the subject of sexual purity. In the Book of 1 Corinthians he focuses on illicit sexual union and its relationship to the believer’s union with Christ: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, “THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH.” But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:15-20)”.

In Ephesians chapter 5 Paul focuses on the relationship between the Christian husband and wife, and the way it portrays an important spiritual truth to the world: “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS CAUSE

A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:28-32)”.

**Finally, sexual purity is vitally important to the Christian life because it is directly related to one’s sanctification: ”** For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3-8)”.

### **10. The Sanctity of Truth (Exodus 20:16)**

The Ninth Commandment: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). Technically, this is not a prohibition of lying in general, but of that “false testimony” which is given in a court of Law, by which another is either convicted or found innocent. The implications of this commandment go much farther, as we shall soon see.

#### **False Witness in the Old Testament**

When God created Adam and Eve He gave them the gift of speech, which was one of the ways He distinguished them from the rest of His creatures. The gift of speech was distorted and corrupted at the fall. It was not long after the fall that falsehood raised its ugly head in the Scriptures. It is appropriate that the first falsehood in the Bible should be spoken by Satan, the “father of lies” (8:44). He assured Eve that partaking of the forbidden fruit would not result in death, as God had said (Gen. 3:4). Cain lied to God, insisting that he did not know where his brother was (Gen. 4:9). Abraham lied about his wife, passing her off as his sister (Gen. 12:11-13). Jacob was a master of deceit (e.g. Gen. 27). Joseph’s brothers deceived Jacob, their father; into thinking he had been killed by a wild animal (Gen. 37:20, 32-33). The midwives were not completely truthful with Pharaoh, when he asked why the Hebrew boy babies were not put to death (Exod. 1:18-19). Moses was not forthright with his father-in-law about his reasons for returning to Egypt (Exod. 4:18).

The falsehood which is forbidden by the Ninth Commandment, however, is much more specific: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Exod. 20:16; Deut. 5:20). There are several reasons why perjury should be viewed as a serious offense, not only in Old Testament times, but also in our own as well.

**(1) Truthful testimony is essential for a just trial.** “A rascally witness makes a mockery of justice, And the mouth of the wicked spreads iniquity” (Prov. 19:28). In Exodus God was giving Israel the Law, to serve as His perfect standard for men’s conduct.

**(2) Just trials are essential for righteousness to prevail in any nation.** There is a very close relationship between justice and righteousness, so close that you cannot have one without the other. If a nation is to be righteous, as the nation Israel was called to be, then there must be justice rendered in its judicial decisions.

**(3) False testimony is a barrier between man and God, which hinders his worship.** O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear

the Lord; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken (Psalm 15).

**(4) False testimony is a violation of the rights of the falsely accused, which can do great harm.** “With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered” (Prov. 11:9). “Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow Is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor” (Prov. 25:18).

### **False Witness in the New Testament**

Let us briefly look at the way the false witness is taken up and developed in the New Testament.

**(1) Our Lord was the faithful and true witness.** In the Book of Revelation, our Lord is called, “the faithful and true witness” (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). The Book of Hebrews begins with the statement that God has finally and fully given testimony to men in the person of Christ: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus was like the prophets of old in that He came to bear witness to the truth, but He was unlike them in that He was the truth (John 14:6). He spoke for the Father: “I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world. ... I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father” (John 8:26, 38).

**(2) Jesus taught that truthfulness should be habitual, and that oaths ought not be necessary for those who give testimony.** “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, FOR IT IS THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil” (Matt. 5:33-37). In the Old Testament, a witness was sometimes put under oath, swearing to tell the truth. Our Lord taught that truthfulness should be a way of life, so that no oath taking is ever necessary. We should, as it were, always speak as though under oath.

**(3) The Lord Jesus directly applied the Old Testament teachings on giving testimony to the maintenance of purity in the church.** “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED” (Matt. 18:16).

**(4) Those who rejected the witness of our Lord, sought to do away with Him by their own false testimony.** The witness of our Lord, like that of the Old Testament prophets, was rejected by sinful men: “The Pharisees therefore said to Him, ‘You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true’” (John 8:13). Consequently, it was not too long before the scribes and Pharisees determined that they must be rid of Jesus and that they must put Him to death. After some time, they found the opportunity to use Judas to help arrest Jesus. Ironically, it was through false testimony that they were able to find Him worthy of death, so that they could crucify Him: “Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put Him to death; and they did not find it, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward and said, “This man stated, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.’” And the high priest stood up and said to Him, “Do You make no answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” (Matt. 26:59-62). Here, we see Israel’s

judicial system at its very worst, using it to condemn the One who authored it. The judges were corrupt and personally prejudiced; the witnesses were false; and the Law was ignored.

**(5) The Lord's final command to His disciples was to be His witnesses.** “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:14). “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

**(6) The apostles taught that those who would give witness to their faith would suffer persecution for doing so.** Our Lord had indicated that those who gave witness to their faith would be persecuted, just as the Old Testament prophets were: “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12).

**(7) The apostle Paul warned that to proclaim as the gospel something which is not true is to be a false witness.** “Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised” (1 Cor. 15:15). To bear witness to the resurrection of Christ, if this did not happen in history, would make one a false witness. To extend Paul's point, to proclaim a doctrinally or factually inaccurate gospel is to become a false witness. Let us be sure that our message is biblical.

## **11. The Sin of Stealing (Exodus 20:15)**

### **Stealing—Its Categories**

Broadly speaking, stealing falls into two categories: active stealing and passive stealing. Active stealing aggressively, willfully, maliciously takes what belongs to someone else, through a variety of means. In Leviticus chapter 6 we find several forms of active theft identified: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD; and he shall be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt” (Lev. 6:1-7)”.

**(1) Embezzlement.** Embezzlement is the misuse or misappropriation of something that has been entrusted to us (Lev. 6:2).

**(2) Robbery.** Robbery is the act of taking what belongs to another (Lev. 6:2).

**(3) Extortion.** Extortion gains possession of another person's property by the illicit use of authority or of force. Thus, John the Baptist told the tax gatherers and soldiers of his day: “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And what about us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:13-14).



**(4) Kidnapping.** In the ancient Near East, kidnapping was considered a form of theft (Deut. 24:7), probably because the individual would be kept as a slave, rather than because he or she would be ransomed.

In addition to these “active” forms of stealing, there are a variety of “passive” forms of stealing. The following forms of passive stealing are forbidden in the Bible:

**(1) A man’s negligence which results in a loss to his neighbor.** Exodus chapter 22 (verses 1-15) describes several acts of negligence which deprive a neighbor of his property, and which thus require restitution. For example, if a man’s pasture land has been grazed bare, and he therefore lets his animal loose, so that it grazes on his neighbor’s pasture, consuming it, the negligent man is guilty of passive stealing (Exod. 22:5).

**(2) A man’s failure to return something lost to its owner is stealing.** Clear instructions regarding the returning of lost items is given in the Book of Deuteronomy: “You shall not see your countryman’s ox or his sheep straying away, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly bring them back to your countryman. And if your countryman is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall remain with you until your countryman looks for it; then you shall restore it to him. And thus you shall do with his donkey, and you shall do the same with his garment, and you shall do likewise with anything lost by your countryman, which he has lost and you have found. You are not allowed to neglect them. You shall not see your countryman’s donkey or his ox fallen down on the way, and pay no attention to them; you shall certainly help him to raise them up (Deut. 22:1-4).

**(3) Failure to give what belongs to another is stealing.** A day laborer is to be paid at the end of the day (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15).

Theft, whether actively or passively perpetrated, has certain characteristics:

**(1) Stealing involves an unauthorized change of possession.** “The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it” (Ps. 24:1). God not only owns all things, He also possesses all people. When a person steals, he disregards both divine and private ownership of that property.

**(2) Stealing does harm to one’s neighbor by taking what rightfully belonged to him.** The man who was robbed in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) was also beaten. Stealing therefore is a violation of one’s obligation to love his neighbor, and to do good to him (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19).

**(3) Stealing takes unfair advantage of one’s neighbor.** Stealing is always accomplished by gaining some advantage over the neighbor who is the victim. The advantage may be that of strength (including the use of a weapon), subtlety (deception or stealth), or power.

**(4) Stealing sins against God by wrongly possessing the property of another.** Stealing is a sin against God (Lev. 6:1-2, 6-7), profaning His name: Two things I asked of Thee, Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion; Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or lest I be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God (Prov. 30:7-9).

**(5) One who steals sins against himself, thereby bringing calamity upon himself.** The folly of stealing is that while the victim of the theft is harmed, the thief is not benefited. Both the thief and his victim will suffer due to the theft. The thief will suffer because he will not gain from stolen goods and God will bring divine judgment upon him. In fact, the thief destroys himself by his crime. ” Then he said to me, “This is the curse that is going forth over the face of the whole land; surely everyone who steals will be purged away according to the writing on one side, and everyone who swears will be purged away according to the writing on the other side. I will make it go forth,” declares the LORD of hosts, “and it will enter the house of the thief and

the house of the one who swears falsely by My name; and it will spend the night within that house and consume it with timber and stones” (Zech. 5:1-4).

**(6) Robbery corrupts the nation and the land:** Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, And every one who lives in it languishes Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky; And also the fish of the sea disappear (Hosea 4:1-3).

**(7) Stealing seeks to set aside the covenant of God with His people.** The commandments, of which the prohibition of stealing is one, are a part of the covenant God made with His people. So that stealing would thwart the intent of the covenant.

### Stealing—Its Contemporary Forms

Some of the popular forms stealing takes in contemporary society:

**(1) We must beware not to steal on the job.** We may ask others (our secretaries, for example) to do personal work for us. We can also use the copy machine for personal copying, without permission. Then there is the stealing of time.

**(2) Stealing from others by depriving them of the fruit of their labor.** The stealing of software (“bootlegged” copies) deprives the author and the dealer of the fruit of their labor, and is nothing less than stealing. The same is true of duped copies of audio and video recordings. Withholding our giving to those who minister to us is also a failure to let the Lord’s servants benefit from their labor (1 Cor. 9:1-14).

**(3) Stealing may also involve the abuse of legal rights.**

**(4) Stealing by negligence or neglect.** Our negligence can be costly to others. For example, littering and polluting is an act of negligence which makes life easy for us, while others pay the price. We avoid the inconvenience of disposing of our trash or pollutants, but someone else has to pay for cleaning up our mess.

**(5) Stealing in the name of getting a “good deal.”** For example, suppose that you went to a garage sale and found a widow selling some of her husband’s tools, at far below their real value. We could buy them all up and walk away feeling that we really got a great deal. But is this really honest? Is this not stealing, gaining at the expense of this woman, having the advantage over her, due to her ignorance of the value of what she possessed?

**(6) Corporate or collective stealing.** For example, some large business can steal, either by fixing prices, or manipulating the market, or by using their power to pay inadequate wages. They can also provide unsafe working environments, which can certainly produce profits at the expense of their employees. The child labor abuses of the last century are an example of corporate theft.

**(7) Religious robbery.** Religious robbery is one of the most serious forms of stealing, in my opinion. The reason is that we are either robbing God, robbing in the name of God, or robbing in a way that suggests God is our partner in crime. We rob God whenever we withhold from Him what is due Him, or what belongs to Him. We rob God when we withhold our offerings from Him. Thus, Haggai, the Old Testament prophet, accused the Israelites of robbing God when they lived in paneled houses, while the house of God was in shambles and incomplete (Hag. 1:2-4). There is another way that we rob God, in our negligence to his brothers, poor people. The most frequent and flagrant way in which men rob God is when we fail to give Him the praise which He deserves. Then, there is what I call “sanctified stealing.” Sanctified stealing is that which is done in

the name of God, in the name of religion, or by the misuse of religious position or power. The scribes and Pharisees were sanctified stealers. Jesus accused them of “devouring widows houses,” while at the same time they prayed long pretentious prayers (Matt. 23:14). In addition, they used their religious position and power to make money in the Temple, buying and selling sacrificial animals and exchanging money. For this these religious merchandisers were forcibly cast out of the Temple with the rebuke, “It is written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER’; but you are making it a robbers’ den” (Matt. 21:13). Another forms of robbing God and His people by mismanagement and specifically by excessively high operating and administrative costs in ministry.

### **Stealing—Its Corrective and Its Cure**

For those who had stolen from another, the Old Testament prescribed restitution. The most detailed prescription of the restitution required is found in the Book of Exodus 22:1-9. Restitution is a corrective, but not a cure for the crime of stealing. The Bible clearly prescribes the cure, especially in the New Testament. Crime would have the thief get ahead at the expense of one’s neighbor. Justice would have one person gain while, at the same time, the other party gained equally. Jesus Christ teaches that we should be willing to sacrifice our own interests if that benefit our neighbor: “Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42). Christ calls for nothing less than what He Himself exemplified, nothing less than a complete reversal of the attitudes and actions of the thief. Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need (Eph. 4:28).

### **12. Do not desire another man’s house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattles, his donkeys, or anything else that he has owns(Exodus 20:17)**

#### **The Characteristics of Coveting**

The coveting which is forbidden in the Tenth Commandment has certain characteristics, which make it possible to identify this evil in its various forms:

**(1) Coveting is a desire.** It is a matter of the heart, an attitude, a matter of strong emotion. As such, coveting is somewhat unique among the evils condemned by the commandments. The evils prohibited by the other commandments were such that one could be tried and found guilty of committing a certain act. This act was based upon attitudes, of course, but a society cannot convict people for what they are thinking and feeling. The final commandment is a forbidden feeling, as it were, not a forbidden act.

**(2) Coveting is a strong desire.** Coveting is a desire, a motivation so strong that the one who covets something will have it if there is any way possible to do so, even if it involves evil. Coveting is a consuming desire, which is highly competitive. It is an evil attitude, which will likely lead to an evil act.

**(3) The coveting which the Tenth Commandment condemns is the desire to have something which one does not have, or which one does not think he or she has enough of. In brief, coveting wants more.** It is not content with what it already has, no matter how much that might be. As Habakkuk put it, “He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied” (Hab. 2:5).

**(4) Coveting wants not only what one does not have, but also what one cannot have.** Coveting wants what is forbidden, that which belongs to another and which cannot be obtained. It is possible, of course to buy a neighbor’s animal, but not his wife. The assumption here, I believe, is that what we covet is what we

cannot have, that is, what our neighbor either cannot give up (like his wife, or his land), or what he will not give up.

**(5) Coveting is a deliberate desire, of which one is conscious, and for which one is responsible.** The coveting which this commandment forbids is one for which the individual is responsible.

**(6) Coveting is a selfish desire, which is willing to gain at the expense of others.** The covetousness which is condemned is that which wants what one's neighbor has. This kind of covetousness is clearly self-centered.

**(7) Covetousness is a detrimental, destructive, desire.** One of the reasons why covetousness is condemned is because of its consistently detrimental effects. There are several dimensions of this destructive impact of covetousness. First, covetousness hinders the generosity which God requires of His people. Second, covetousness is destructive and dangerous because it is often the motive for offenses against one's neighbor. Third, the covetousness of a person is also self-destructive.

**(8) Covetousness is a deified desire—idolatry.** The Ten Commandments began with a prohibition of idolatry, and they end with a prohibition of covetousness, which is called idolatry: But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:3-6).

God has provided us the means by which can we overcome the evil coveting and for rekindling the flame of our desire for Him.

**(1) First, pray that God will renew your heart, and that He will give you a passion for fellowship with Him.** David, whose sin with Bathsheba began with covetousness, prayed this prayer, which can just as easily apply to us: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Thy presence, And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit" (Ps. 51:10-12).

**(2) Second, saturate your heart and mind with the word of God,** which will expose impurity and which will give you an appetite for the things of God: Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy Law, And keep it with all my heart. Make me walk in the path of Thy commandments, For I delight in it. Incline my heart to Thy testimonies, And not to dishonest gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, And revive me in Thy ways. Establish Thy word to Thy servant, As that which produces reverence for Thee (Ps. 119:33-38).

**(3) Third, work at your worship of Him,** for it is in our worship that we are reminded again of His worth, of His purity and perfection, and thus of Him as our ultimate goal, both to know and to serve.

**(4) We must begin to "take up our cross" of self-denial, while at the same time putting off our self-indulgence.**

**(5) Finally, we should practice sacrificial giving.** By thus "laying up our treasures in heaven" we will begin to experience that our hearts will follow our treasure, and begin to focus on heaven and not earth, on Christ and not things.

## **The Magnificent Meal on Mountain of Sinai (Exodus 24:1-18)**

### **1. Review of Covenant-Making in the Bible**

The making of covenants in the Old Testament should not come as a surprise to us. Moses has already provided us with a considerable amount of precedent in the Book of Genesis. The first covenant is that which God made with Noah, promising never again to wipe out the whole earth by a flood (Gen. 8:20-22; 9:9ff.). The sign of this covenant was the rainbow (Gen. 9:12-17). The next covenant is that which God made with Abraham (Gen. 15:8-21). The promises (a land, a seed, a blessing) of chapter 12 (vss. 1-3) are formalized in the covenant of chapter 15. The sign of this covenant, circumcision, was later indicated in chapter 17, where the covenant was confirmed to Abraham. Isaac made a covenant with Abimelech in Genesis 26:26-31, agreeing to live in peace. Finally in Genesis, Jacob made a covenant with Laban (31:43-45), agreeing not to do harm to one another. Covenants, as illustrated in the Book of Genesis, as well as from secular sources, had several common elements. There were usually promises or commitments which were made, to which the parties bound themselves. There was often a sacrifice made, followed by a meal, which partook of some of the sacrifice. There was also a memorial, some kind of physical token of the oath, which served to remind the parties of their commitments. There was also a curse attached to the one who broke the covenant which he had made. There was always a sense of solemnity in the making of a covenant, for it was a serious step of commitment. Most of these elements are found in the ratification of the covenant on Mt. Sinai, as described in Exodus chapter 24.

This chapter falls into two divisions: (1) A Divine Call and the Ratification of the Covenant (verses 1-11) and (2) A Divine Call and the Recording of the Covenant (verses 12-18). The first and second divisions of this chapter are similar in that they both begin with the call of God (“come up,” vss. 1, 12). The first call includes Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. The second call is for Moses alone. Both divisions end similarly, as well. The first division ends with a description of the revelation of God as seen by the elders. The last division ends with a description of the revelation of God as seen by the Israelites in the camp.

### **2. The Call to Worship and the Confirmation of the Covenant (24:1-11)**

God’s call for the elders to “come up to Him,” along with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, in verses 1 and 2 makes two very important distinctions. First, it clearly distinguishes God from the Israelites, with whom He is making this covenant. Some covenants were made between equals, such as those between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26) and between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31). Others, known as suzerainty-vassal (king and subject) treaties were not between equals. The Mosaic Covenant is of this latter kind. God clearly distinguished between Himself and His subjects in three ways:

- (1) **He initiated the covenant. He brought Israel out of Egypt, and He declared the covenant, and He invited the seventy elders to come up to Him.**
- (2) **God invited the seventy elders to come up to worship Him (24:1). Worship is not practiced among equals. The inferior always worships the superior being.**
- (3) **God invited the elders to worship Him “from a distance” (v. 1), allowing only Moses to come near to Him.**

There is not only a distinction drawn between the Israelites and God, but also a distinction made between Israelites. Furthest removed is the nation as a whole, back at the base camp. Barriers had to be constructed to keep the people back, lest they be put to death (cf. 19:12-13). The seventy plus leaders of Israel were granted to draw nearer to God (24:1), but only Moses could approach God as he did (24:2). The response to this divine invitation is recorded in verses 3-8. It also seems apparent that the 75 leaders (70 elders, Nadab and Abihu, Aaron, Moses, and his servant Joshua) were representatives who acted on behalf of the entire nation. These were also the leaders of the nation who would teach, interpret and apply the Law which God was giving Israel. Twice in these verses (vss. 3, 7), the Israelites have verbally committed themselves to keep this covenant. God spoke verbally, in the hearing of the Israelites (19:9; 20:18-19), and several times through Moses (19:3-7, 10-15, 20-25). Moses conveyed the contents of the “book of the covenant” to the Israelites, which the people committed to keep (24:3). Then, Moses put the “book of the covenant” into writing (24:4), which he later read to the Israelites, and they again committed themselves to keep the covenant (24:7). Finally, God will Himself write the covenant in stone, and have it placed in the ark of the covenant, so that Israel will not forget it. Since the Israelites have verbally ratified this covenant, Moses now carries out the ratification process, symbolically; Moses offered covenant sacrifices, making an altar with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. The blood of the sacrifices is sprinkled upon the altar and upon the people, thus linking the people with the covenant sacrifices. Israel has truly ratified the covenant which God gave through Moses. The covenant meal, eaten by the 75 leaders of Israel in the presence of God, is the final act of ratification. The leaders saw God. The God they saw had feet (v. 10). All that is described, to our dismay, is the feet of God and the sapphire-like clear blue pavement under them. Why does our text describe only the feet of God and the pavement under them? One might think that this is all one would have seen stretched out on one’s face before God, since most of those who had such visions of God fell before Him in terror or in humility (Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 1:17). There may be another explanation, however.

There are two other texts which describe God enthroned in heaven, which are parallel to the description of God in Exodus 24, and which therefore serve as a commentary on our passage:

And as I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a **great cloud with fire flashing forth continually** and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire ... Now over the heads of the living beings there was **something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads**. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward the other; each one also had two wings covering their bodies on the one side and on the other. I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. Now above the expanse that **was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man**. Then I noticed from the appearance of his loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking (Ezek. 1:4, 22-28, emphasis mine).

After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “**Come up here**, and I will show you what must

take place after these things.” Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, **a throne** was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. And from the throne proceed **flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder**. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was, as it were, **a sea of glass like crystal**; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind (Rev. 4:1-6).

The cloud and the lightening of Ezekiel 1:4 (Rev. 4:5) take us back to the description of the revelation of God on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16. In both Ezekiel (1:22, 25-26) and Revelation (4:6) there is a crystal-like floor, on which the throne of God stands, very much like the crystal-clear sapphire pavement of Exodus 24:10. In Ezekiel’s description, this crystal floor is above the heads of the four living creatures (1:22, 25). In both Ezekiel (1:26) and Revelation (5:1), as well as in Exodus (24:10), the One who is enthroned appears with human characteristics. The revelation of God in each of these three passages is similar, but that God is progressively more closely and more intimately revealed, and from a slightly different perspective. The elders of Israel (Exodus 24) saw God enthroned high above them, from under the crystal floor, looking through it. They would thus have seen only the feet of the God who was enthroned, since the throne would have obscured the rest of Him. Since the floor was crystal clear, they could see God above them through the floor, with the throne sitting on the floor, and God on the throne. Ezekiel’s vision describes God as enthroned on the crystal expanse, above the heads of the four living creatures, but more of Him is seen. Thus, Ezekiel must have been closer, and perhaps elevated and looking at the throne of God from a different angle. John, on the other hand, sees God enthroned “from heaven,” so that his view of God is not restricted. Appropriately, those who behold God at later times see more of Him.

### **3. The Upward Call of Moses and the Tablets of Stone (24:12-18)**

The second “upward call” is given in verse 12, calling Moses alone to the top of Mt. Sinai. This is for the purpose of giving to him the commandments written on stone by the finger of God (24:12). It is also for the purpose of revealing to Moses the “heavenly pattern” and the blueprints for the tabernacle and its furnishings: “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it” (Exod. 25:9).

From chapter 25 to the end of the Book of Exodus, it is the tabernacle which is the principle subject. The tabernacle was designed of God to institutionalize, as it were, the manifestation of His presence among His people on an on-going basis, as the mountain had served on a one-time basis. Moses made the necessary preparations for his trek up the mountain, which indicates that he may have planned to be gone for some time (which indeed was the case). In particular, Moses appointed Aaron and Hur to judge any legal matters which might arise in his absence, so that Aaron and Hur are to take Moses’ place. Thus, everyone except Moses and Joshua (who ascended at least part way with Moses, 24:13) was back in the camp with the Israelites. For six days Moses waited, and on the seventh God called Moses to Himself in the cloud. The forty days of Moses’ absence provide a test, one which Israel failed (chapter 32).

But why Moses didn’t report what he saw on the mountain, I think that there are a couple of reasons: First, we must remember that Moses was a very humble man (Num. 12:3), a man who was not intent upon glamorizing his own experiences. In this regard, Moses is a rare individual. How many books have been written by men and women, dwelling on their own descriptions of some unusual experience. Unfortunately, many

Christians get caught up in the commercialization of their experiences as well. St. Paul's words to the Colossians may relate to this problem: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, **taking his stand on visions he has seen**, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18). Second, I doubt very much that Moses could have described what he saw, even if he wanted to. There is another interesting verse, which relates to this matter: "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another" (1 Cor. 15:40). The glories of heaven are such that men simply cannot comprehend them: "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM" (1 Cor. 2:9; Isa. 64:4; 65:17). Paul therefore calls such heavenly things indescribable: "And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak" (2 Cor. 12:3-4). When the Scriptures, Old and New Testament, speak of the glorious things of heaven, they use expressions like "appeared as ..." (Ezek. 1; Rev. 4, above), because such things can only be described in comparison to the precious and beautiful things we know, which fall far short of the treasures of heaven. Both Moses and Paul thus refrain from trying to describe for men the glories of heaven which they have seen, for it is an impossible task. They also resist focusing men's attention on themselves, when their vision and experience are but the product of the grace of God.

## **The Rejection of God and the Revelation of Man (Exodus 32:1-14)**

### **1. Israel's Idolatry (32:1-6)**

**(1) The sin of the Israelites happened very soon after the Mosaic Covenant was ratified in Exodus chapter 24—sooner, in fact than 40 days.**

**(2) The absence of leadership is a contributing factor to Israel's idolatry.**

**(3) The hostility of the people plays a significant role in explaining the role which Aaron played in Israel's sin.** The crowd which had "assembled about" Aaron was not a friendly group, gathering for small talk and making casual suggestions. The expression used here suggests that this was an angry, aggressive mob, whose presence Aaron perceived to be a threat to his safety, perhaps even his life. Given the actions of the Israelites before and after, Aaron was probably right to see this situation as one that was "dangerous to his health."

**(4) There is a military motivation behind Israel's demand to have a graven image.** What was it that the Israelites thought the graven "god" could do for them? I have concluded that there is a rather strong military factor here. Twice in our text, the expression, "who brought us up from the land of Egypt," has occurred, the first time with regard to Moses (32:1), the second, with respect to the idol which was made (32:4). Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. This victory was viewed as a military victory over the army of Pharaoh (Exod. 15). The idol which the Israelites demanded was to serve as the nation's military leader, which would lead them to victory over her enemies.

**(5) Idolatry is not something new to the Israelites; it is something which has characterized this people from the very outset of their history.**



## **2. Israel's Demands**

Moses has been on the mountain, away from the camp, long enough for this nameless group of Israelites to conspire to create an idol to represent God, in direct, deliberate disobedience to the commandment of God prohibiting the making of idols. These people came to Aaron demanding that he make them an idol (literally “gods”).

## **3. Aaron's Acquiescence**

Aaron responded to “the people” by telling them to “tear off” the gold rings. This gold jewelry was undoubtedly Israel's “wages” from the Egyptians (3:21-22; 12:35-36). This gold should also have been what was contributed for the construction of the tabernacle, rather than the golden idol (Exod. 25:3). Seemingly it was Aaron who decided on a calf, or, better, a young bull, as the symbolic representation of God. He melted the gold, cast the idol and fashioned it. When “the people” saw this idol they responded, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (v. 4). Seeing that the Israelites regarded the image as their “god,” Aaron began to play the priest, solemnizing this idolatrous occasion with “worship”. Aaron built an altar (32:5), just as Moses had (24:4). Aaron proclaimed a feast (a covenant meal?), a “feast to the Lord” (v. 5), just as there was a meal on Mt. Sinai (24:11). Israel's early rising (v. 6) indicates the zeal with which this “worship” was pursued. Burnt offerings and peace offerings were sacrificed, too, (32:6), just as these had been sacrificed in chapter 24 (v. 5). All the people sat down to eat and to drink. There was a very great difference between the “worship” of the people before the golden calf and that of the elders on the mountain. The people not only ate and drank, they “rose up to play” (32:6). This term “play” refers to illicit and immoral sex play. Thus, this “worship” had turned into an orgy. And so another of the commandments, the prohibition of adultery, is most likely violated. What tragic irony!

## **4. Divine Indignation and Human Intervention (32:7-14)**

The plans for the tabernacle have been given to Moses, along with the two tablets of stone, on which the commandments have been written by the finger of God (31:18). Knowing all that has been going on in Moses' absence, God told Moses to go down to the people. Before Moses departed from God's presence, God first diagnosed Israel's condition, and then threatened judgment which Israel richly deserved.

God gave Moses a three-fold description of the sin of the Israelites. The first two characterize the sin which the nation has just committed. These are expressed in the past tense “have corrupted themselves” (v. 7); “have quickly turned aside” (v. 8). The third term focuses on the root problem, the spiritual condition of the nation which has produced these symptomatic sins seen in chapter 32. By worshipping this idol, Israel has violated the covenant they just made with God, and have thus “corrupted” themselves. Furthermore, they have “quickly turned aside” from the way which God had shown they should walk and live, the “way” declared by the commandments. The nation had not only corrupted themselves by their disobedience, they had done so quickly. The cause of Israel's quick corruption is declared by God in verse 9: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people.’” In one word, the people of Israel are obstinate. That is, they are stubborn, willful, and rebellious. Literally, the Israelites were “stiff-necked,” a term which was frequently employed to identify Israel's sinfulness (Exdo 33:3, 5; 34:5, 9; Dt. 9:6, 13; 10:16; 31:27; 2 Chron. 30:8; 36:13; Ps. 75:5; Jer. 17:23; Acts 7:51). God's words in verse 7-10 reflect the consequences of sin—a separation from God and the judgment. God spoke no longer of Israel as “His” people, but rather as the people of Moses: “Go down at once, for **your** people, whom **you** brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves” (Exod. 32:7). Both in what God says and in the way He says it, Israel's sin has put the nation in great danger. God then threatened to annihilate the entire nation, to wipe

them out, and to start over, making a new nation of Moses: “Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation” (32:10). Moses knew that God’s threatened action (of destroying Israel) and His offer to Moses (of making a new nation through him) would have been inconsistent with His character and His covenant with Israel. The Egyptians would have taken pleasure in the fact that the Israelites were destroyed, which was precisely what they had attempted to do (Exod. 1:8-22). The character of God would have been demeaned, for God would not have kept His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Messiah could not come through Moses, for he was of the tribe of Levi, while Messiah must come through Judah (compare Exodus 2:1-2 with Genesis 49:10). Thus, the words which God spoke were intended to stimulate Moses to intercede for his people, and thus to bring about forgiveness.

### **5. Israel and Aaron at the Hand of Moses (Exodus 32:15-35)**

During Moses’ absence, the people have decided to worship another god, whose presence will be visible and assuring, in the form of a golden image. Israel actually rejected both God and His appointed leader, Moses, and chose to serve a different god altogether. God then terminated Moses’ stay on the mountain with a command to return to the camp, informing Moses of the evil which the people had committed, of the roots of their sin, and of the severity of the judgment which their actions called for (vss. 7-10). Moses’ intercession resulted in at least a momentary stay of execution for the Israelites (vss. 11-14). Moses’ response to the sins of the people involved two major actions: the demolishing of the tablets of stone, on which God had written the commandments; and, the demolition of the golden calf, which included making the Israelites drink water which contained the ground gold of the idol. In verses 21-24 Moses confronts Aaron for his role in this apostasy. Verses 25-29 describe the severe action which is required to bring the Israelites back under control. Finally, in verses 30-35, Moses intercedes for the Israelites, petitioning God to forgive them. Nevertheless, God says that they will be accountable for their sin, and brings a plague upon them.

The unruliness of the Israelites may have been manifested in nakedness and in frenzied worship, which seems to have included wild dancing and unrestrained passions. They were “out of control. The unruly behavior of the Israelites was wrong not only because it was being practiced without self-control and restraints, but because it was being observed by Israel’s enemies and was a “derision among her enemies” (v. 25). The frenzied worship of Israel was noted by their enemies, and would eventually serve to haunt them, as we shall see later. Moses stood at the gate of the camp and called for every Israelite to make a choice: “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!” (v. 26). We are told that the entire tribe of Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron (Exod. 2:1), gathered to Moses. This does not necessarily mean that no one else joined Moses, only that all of the Levites did pledge their allegiance to the God of Israel. Many did not join Moses, however, revealing their rebellion against Yahweh. They really had turned to another “god” and rejected God. The Levites are then instructed to strap on swords and go about the camp in a systematic fashion (from gate to gate, v. 27), killing anyone they met, including they be friend or relative. This action seems exceedingly harsh at first glance, but this is not the case, as can be seen from the following factors:

**(1) The order for the Levites to kill their fellow Israelites was a command of God, not just of Moses.** The command to kill was preceded by, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel” (v. 27).

**(2) What God commanded the Levites to do to the apostate Israelites is precisely what He commanded the Israelites to do to the Canaanites. The idolatrous worship of the Israelites was Canaanite-like and thus requiring the same remedy:** “When the LORD your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the

Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them” (Deut. 7:1-2; cf. Num. 31:17).

**(3) The same severity was called for in dealing with those Israelites who followed foreign gods and attempted to draw others after them in their apostasy:** “If your brother, your mother’s son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people” (Deut. 13:6-9).

**(4) The slaying of 3,000 Israelites was necessary to bring them under control, thus sparing the entire nation of greater judgment.** Had this not happened, a great disaster may have been required. The killing of the few may have spared the lives of the remainder. Thus, the killing of the Israelites was necessary, and, in the long run, for the benefit of the nation.

## **6. Moses and God (32:30-35)**

Having put an end to the false worship and immorality of the Israelites, Moses must once more beseech God to forgive the people for their sin. Moses did not minimize the seriousness of Israel’s sin, nor did he promise them that his efforts would bring about forgiveness. Before he left to return to the top of the mountain, Moses told the people, “You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin” (v. 30). Their only hope was in the grace of God and in the mediatorial role of Moses.

In verses 31 and 32, Moses mediated on behalf of his people. He acknowledged the great sin of the Israelites (v. 31), and he asked God to forgive their sin (v. 32). Many have thought that Moses, like St. Paul (Rom. 9:1-3) was petitioning God to save the Israelites at the sacrifice of his own soul, when he prayed, “But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!” (v. 32). The “book” of which Moses spoke here is the “book of the living,” not the “book of life” of the New Testament. Moses is not trying to exchange his soul for the salvation of his people, but is petitioning God to forgive, not on the basis of anything he or Israel can do, but only on the basis of God’s goodness and mercy. If God will not forgive Israel, then Moses wishes to die as well. This very effectively declines the offer of God to make a new nation of him.

God’s response is recorded in verses 33-35. Every man is accountable for his own sin, and the penalty is death. This is simply another statement of the Old Testament warning, “The soul who sins will die” (Ezek. 18:4), an Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament statement that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The death will not come immediately, however, so that God’s covenant promises may be fulfilled to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Thus, Moses is instructed, “But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin” (v. 34).

Moses is commanded to lead the Israelites on toward Canaan. God’s angel will go before them, but not God Himself. There will still be a day of reckoning, however, when the penalty for Israel’s sin must be paid. I believe that the penalty God is referring to here is the death of this entire generation in the desert, because of

this sin and others which will follow, including Israel's rebellion against God at Kadesh (Num. 13, 14). I believe that the writer to the Hebrews confirms this: "For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?" (Heb. 3:16-17).

The sins of the Israelites were many, of which this was the first great act of rebellion. In the later account in Deuteronomy Moses included a number of other sins, to show that this was but one of many serious acts of rebellion against God (Deut. 9:22-24). The 40 years delay in God's judgment thus gave Israel further opportunity to prove they were worthy of God's sentence of death, as well as providing sufficient time for the second generation of Israelites to grow up, so that God's purposes might be realized through them, and not their fathers.

The final verse of the chapter (v. 35) speaks of a plague which God brought upon the people. This plague is something different from the slaying of the 3,000. No deaths are reported as a result of this plague. Thus, it could have been a non-lethal plague, which brought discomfort on the Israelites, but not death. Thus, God made His displeasure known to the entire nation.

## **“Outside the Camp” (Exodus 33:1-17)**

### **1. God's Remoteness and Israel's Repentance (33:1-6)**

Sin always creates barriers between men and God. Some barriers are the result of man's withdrawal. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God, even when He came to fellowship with them (Gen. 3:8-9). At other times, God may appear to withdraw from men. Exodus 32-34 is one such occasion. God has relented from destroying the nation outright, and has allowed this rebellious people to live, at least until a later time, but He has also appeared to withdraw from the people. In our text God continues to speak of the Israelites as Moses' people ("the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt," 33:1; 2:7). He promised to have His angel lead them into the promised land (32:34; 33:1-2), but He threatened to not go up with them in their very midst (33:3): "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, lest I destroy you on the way" (Exod. 33:3). The grace of God is seen even in God's threat to remove Himself from their midst. God's stated purpose for keeping a distance between Himself and the Israelites as they travel on toward the promised land was that their sinfulness would require Him to destroy them. Thus, to be in their midst was to greatly endanger the Israelites, while to be distant from them was to assure their safety, unless there was some means provided to deal with Israel's sins, and thus to appease God's righteous anger.

In Exodus chapter 33, God said, "... I will not go up **in your midst**" (v. 3). God was thus threatening to not dwell in the Tabernacle, in the midst of the camp. He was not threatening His complete absence, only that His presence would be manifested to Israel at a distance. God was present in the angel, who would go before the Israelites, leading them to Canaan (32:34). The presence of God was also manifested in "the tent" which Moses pitched "a good distance from the camp" (v. 7). The threatened consequence for Israel's idolatry was that of losing the more intimate presence of God which the Tabernacle was designed to provide. Keeping God at a distance was Israel's first inclination and request, as we saw in Exodus 20:18-21. Now, when God indicates that He will lead Israel into the blessings of Canaan, but from a distance, the Israelites mourn. I believe that they were mourning over their sinful actions in the incident with the golden calf. I believe that they mourned as well over the remoteness of God's presence. The Israelites are no longer content with just a land of milk and honey, with a God who is far removed. They mourn the threatened loss of intimacy with God

which they might have had. **The mourning of the Israelites was not only commendable; it was accompanied with the fruits appropriate to repentance.** The appropriate act of repentance here was that which God Himself had prescribed: “Now therefore put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I will do with you” (v. 5). The gold ornaments had a direct association with the false worship of the Egyptians. These ornaments were similar to those which had been contributed to make the golden calf (Exod. 32:2-4). Thus, to put off these ornaments was to show Israel’s repentance over the golden calf incident. The Israelites, we seem to be told, never again put on these ornaments: “So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward” (Exod. 33:6). It seems that it is these ornaments, which the Israelites put off here, were later offered to God to be used for the furnishings of the Tabernacle (Exod. 35:21-22).

## **2. Moses and the Mysterious “Tent of Meeting” (33:7-11)**

The “tent of meeting” of Exodus 33:7-11 is not the Tabernacle, which will appear later. That the “tent of meeting” and the Tabernacle are distinct entities can be seen from these lines of evidence:

- (1) The “tent of meeting” was outside the camp, while the Tabernacle was within the camp.**
- (2) The “tent of meeting” was served by Moses and Joshua, while the Tabernacle was served by the Levites.**
- (3) The cloud of God’s presence came down to the “tent of meeting” only when Moses was there, while the cloud hovered over the Tabernacle at all times, except when Israel was to break camp and march.**

The period of time which this “tent of meeting” was used is not made clear. It had to be used for some period of time because the construction of verse 7 indicates that Moses repeatedly took the tent outside the camp and pitched it. I would suppose that it was until the time that the Tabernacle was completed. It may also be that God graciously provided this tent for Moses to meet with Him and to mediate for the people, rather than having to scale Mt. Sinai every time he wished to worship God. The “tent of meeting” was not that Moses could go there to seek God, but that the Israelites could seek Him as well: “And it came about, that everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp” (Exod. 33:7). The God who had appeared at the top of Mt. Sinai, which the Israelites were not allowed to approach (Exod. 19:12-13), not even the priests (19:23-25), was now willing for people to seek Him in this tent, outside the camp.

The “tent of meeting” was located “outside the camp,” “a good distance from the camp” (v. 7). I believe that the principle reason for this was to fulfill God’s words to Moses, that He would not go up with Israel to Canaan “in the midst of them” (v. 3). When God’s presence was manifested at the tent of meeting, it was always outside the camp. When an Israelite would seek God, he or she would do so “outside the camp.” This tent symbolized the remoteness of God, due to Israel’s idolatry, yet also provided a nearness to God that was more intimate than anything the people had yet experienced. When any Israelite wanted to seek God, he would have to remove himself from the midst of his people, separate himself from their sinfulness, to seek God on His own holy ground.

In our text we see Moses enjoying an intimacy with God which is virtually unparalleled in the Old Testament. When Miriam and Aaron later on spoke against Moses, God Himself said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD” (Num. 12:6-8a). No

other prophet spoke “face to face” with God as Moses did here. And when Moses entered the “tent of meeting” the cloud, representing the presence and the glory of God, descended to the door of the tent (Exod. 33:9).

### **3. The Presence of God With His People (Exodus 33:12-17)**

#### ***Moses' First Petition (33:12-14)***

Moses has not yet asked for anything specific. This he will do in verse 13. But first he will lay a more substantial foundation for his request. He reminds God that He has said to him, “**I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight**” (v. 12), Moses felt free to make this petition: “**Now, therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee, so that I may find favor in Thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is Thy people**” (v. 13). **Moses' petition is based on God's word.** Moses argues from the known to the unknown, from, “Bring this people up ...” to “Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me.” From what God has said to a request, based on what God has said. Thus, Moses reminds God that He has said, “I have known you by name,” and “you have also found favor,” and then asks God to let him know God's ways. **Moses' petition had, both as its basis and as its goal, God's favor.** Moses petitioned God to know His ways because he was chosen to be favored of God, and because he desired to continue in His favor. **Moses' petition was two-fold: First, that God would make known His ways to Moses, and second, that God would view Israel as His people.** The first request was more personal, the second, more public or collective in nature. God's response to Moses' petition is recorded in verse 14: “And He said, ‘My presence shall go **with you**, and I will give you rest’” (Exod. 33:14). Almost always in the Bible, “rest” conveys the concept of putting an end to an evil, an enemy, hostility, or adversity. When God promised Moses “rest” He assured him that those things which Moses must have feared most would be overcome, and that the task which God has given him to do will be completed.

#### ***Moses Second Petition (33:15-17)***

The assurance of God's presence and of “rest” is only guaranteed Moses, not the nation Israel as a whole. In Moses' petition in verses 15 and 16, he sought for this assurance for the nation. Moses began by asking God not to lead the nation up from Sinai if His presence did not accompany them (v. 15). Moses then argues the necessity of God's presence with Israel. He reasons that the one thing which distinguishes God's people from all other peoples of the earth is His presence in their midst: “For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Thy sight, I and Thy people? Is it not by Thy going with us so that we, I and Thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?” (v. 16). Notice how Moses twice links himself with Israel. He is not willing to enjoy God's favor alone, while Israel's destiny hangs in the balance. God's presence, he petitions, must not only be with him, but with them also. God's answer this time assures Moses that He will be present with Israel, as well as with him: “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name” (v. 17). While God grants Moses' request, it is only due to his standing in favor with Him, not due to any good on the part of Israel. Israel's future is totally dependent upon Moses, and his standing with God.

## The “Backside” of God (Exodus 33:18–34:9)

The structure of this text provides us with two main incidents: first, the request of Moses to see God’s glory, followed by God’s response (33:18-23); secondly, the revelation of God’s glory, followed by Moses’ response (34:1-9).

### 1. Moses’ Petition and God’s Provision (33:18-23)

The petition of Moses in verse 18 is the third and final request in chapter 33. Moses has already asked that God make His ways known to him, so that he may continue to find favor in His sight (33:12). God promised His presence to Moses personally, but He has not said that He would be present among His people. Thus, in his second petition Moses asked that God show His favor to Israel, as well as to Himself, and that God not send the nation toward Canaan without a promise that His presence will accompany His people (33:13, 15-16). God’s response in verse 17 would lead one to believe that this second request will be granted: “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name.’” The first request “let me know Thy ways” and the petition in verse 18, “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!” are essentially the same. To know God’s ways is to see the glory of God. God’s response in verse 19 is to grant Moses all that He possibly can, which would be to Moses’ best interest: “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” The granting of Moses’ petition would include God’s causing of all His goodness to pass before Moses. As the term goodness is employed in the Old Testament, this meant that God’s benevolence; God’s graciousness and generosity would be seen by His servant Moses. In addition to having all His goodness pass before Moses, God also promised to **proclaim His name, the “name of the LORD,” before Moses**. The specific name which God will proclaim is the name YAHWEH. This is the name by which God identified Himself to Moses at the burning bush, and by which God was to be known to Israel. YAHWEH was the name which spoke of God as Israel’s Savior and Deliverer. YAHWEH is the name of the God who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God’s response to Moses’ petition included a third element, a declaration of His Sovereignty: “... I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” I believe that there are two reasons why God included this statement here: First, it is a reminder to Moses that God is under no obligation to show mercy to anyone. Second, one of the “glories” of God is His absolute sovereignty. God’s sovereignty means that He is free to do anything He chooses which is consistent with His character.

God has granted Moses’ petition to “see His glory,” but not without restrictions. These restrictions are for Moses’ own good. Verses 20-23 describe the restrictions which God must place on Moses’ request, along with His provision for Moses’ protection in the process of seeing His glory. Moses has asked to see the glory of God in visible form. God speaks of the “form” in which He will manifest Himself to Moses in what theologians call an anthropomorphism, which is a sophisticated way of saying that God speaks of His self-revelation to Moses in man-like terms. Thus, God speaks of Moses as being able to see His back, but not His face. In the context of the passage this means that Moses will be able to see all of God’s goodness, but not some of His other attributes. The Bible consistently teaches us that no man is able to see God face-to-face and live. Had God granted Moses all he had asked for, Moses would have been struck dead by the presence of the living God. It is only in heaven, when we are rid of all sin, that we shall behold God face to face (Revelation 22:4). Thus, God will grant Moses the privilege of seeing more of Him than he (or any other man to this point,

I believe) has ever seen before. He will see part of God's glory, but not all of it. He will see, in human terms, God's back, but not His face. Verses 21-23 describe the provision for Moses' protection which God promises. There on Mt. Sinai, there was a rock on which Moses could stand (v. 21). While he stands upon this rock, God will pass by Him in all of His goodness. God's hand will shield Moses from the full radiance of God's splendor (v. 22), much as a welding helmet filters out most of the brilliant light of the welding arc, or as asbestos clothing shields a man from intense heat. When God has passed by, He will take His hand away so that Moses can look upon a portion of His glory—His back side (v. 23).

## **2. The Revelation of God and the Request of Moses (34:1-9)**

While Moses met with God at the "tent of meeting," which was "outside the camp" (Exod. 33:7), the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant would take place at the top of Mt. Sinai. The revelation of the glory of God to Moses would, it seems, take the place of the manifestation of God to the 70 elders of Israel, as described in chapter 24. There are both similarities and differences between this renewal of the covenant in chapter 34 and the first ratification of the covenant in the previous chapters (especially chapter 24). The similarities include the fact that the requirements of God are virtually identical. It is the same Ten Commandments which will be written on the two stone tablets. It is the same code of the covenant which God will lay down as His standard of conduct for the Israelites (compare Exodus 21-23 with chapter 34). Both times the covenant is given to Moses by God from atop Mt. Sinai. As before (Exod. 19:12-13, 21-25; 24:2), the people are told to keep their distance from the holy mountain (Exod. 34:3). As the ratification of the covenant involved a vision of God (24:9-11), so it does in the renewal of the covenant (34:5-7). The differences, however, are perhaps even more enlightening. The Israelites are represented only by Moses, and not by the seventy elders as before (Exod. 24:1, 9). This time, there are no promises made by the people. Before, the people repeatedly affirmed, "All that the Lord has said, we will do" (19:8; 24:3, 7), but this time there are no promises made. And little wonder! Israel could not be counted on to keep her word, no matter how sincere her intentions at the time. Finally, Moses is noticeably more prominent in the renewal of the covenant than he was in the first ratification of the covenant. His level of involvement is considerably higher. In the first ratification of the covenant, God carved out the stones and wrote the commandments on them (31:18). In the renewal of this same covenant Moses cut out the stones and wrote the commandments on them (34:1, 27-28). Moses was given an even greater participation in the renewal of the covenant, so that now God can say that this is a covenant made between Him and Moses and Israel (34:27), a statement which was not previously made. Moses' role of mediator is thus enhanced.

Verses 5-7 describe the fulfillment of God's promise to Moses in 33:19-23. God descended in the cloud and His goodness passed in front of Moses (vss. 5-6a). God also proclaimed His name before Moses: "Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin'" (Exod. 34:6-7b). There are many blessings to be derived from a careful study of each of these expressions proclaimed by God here, but the essence of all of them can be summed up in a single word: **goodness**. The final words of verse 7 must have puzzled the Israelites throughout the entire Old Testament period: "Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" (Exod. 34:7c). While God said that He was forgiving, He also said that the guilty would not go unpunished. This means, first and foremost, that God does not forgive sin by ignoring or overlooking it. Sin is a much more serious malady than this. A righteous God cannot minimize sin, and thus He cannot simply forgive men by ignoring what they have done. There must be punishment. The punishment, we learn from Isaiah chapter 53, is to be borne by the



Messiah. Men's sins are forgiven because someone was going to bear the penalty prescribed by the Law (death) for sin.

God, in order to be just, must punish sin. God, in being gracious, can forgive sin. God, in order to keep His covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants, must fulfill His Abrahamic Covenant through the nation Israel. If God punished this generation of Israelites for the sins of idolatry and immorality completely and instantaneously (as He threatened to do, Exod. 32:10), then there would not be a second generation of Israelites, nor a third, and so on. In other words, there would not be an on-going line of Israelites through whom Messiah would come. By spreading out the consequences of the sin of this first generation of Israelites, God was able to preserve the nation, and assure the messianic line, until the time when Messiah would be born of a virgin of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David. Once this took place, the consequences of the sins of a given generation would not pass on to later generations (Jer. 31:29.). Moses' response to this revelation of God was instantaneous: "And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship. And he said, 'If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O LORD, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate; and do Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Thine own possession'" (Exod. 34:8-9). The revelation of God's goodness to Moses was a revelation of those aspects of God's character which were the basis for Israel's future, and thus Moses petitioned God to forgive this sinful people, and to dwell in their midst, not because they were righteous, but because He was gracious and forgiving. The grace of God is the basis for repentance and for restoration, and thus Moses requested that God forgive His people and make them His possession, as He had previously done.

### **A New Beginning (Exodus 34:10-35)**

The structure of our text is straightforward. The entire section describes the re-making of the Mosaic Covenant. Verses 10 and 11 introduce the covenant, while verses 27 and 28 serve as the conclusion. The codes of the covenant or its conditions are contained in summary form in verses 12-26. Verses 12-17 are the negative prohibitions, while verses 18-26 are the positive practices which Israel is to faithfully pursue. The final section, verses 29-35, describes the radiance of the face of Moses as he returns from the presence of God.

#### **1. The Characteristics of the "New" Old Covenant**

In verse 10 we read the words of God, spoken to Israel through Moses: "Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth, nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the LORD, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you" (Exod. 34:10). Verses 11-26 contain the stipulations or the "code of the covenant" which God is making here. They are considerably more abbreviated than the "code of the covenant" given in chapters 20-23. This "new" old covenant will be best understood as we compare this covenant with that previously made and broken.

First, there is a "sameness," a distinct similarity between this covenant and the first. The Ten Commandments, written on the two stone tablets are the same. Moses went to the top of the same mountain, and stayed there for the same time period—forty days and nights. The same standards are laid down in the second covenant as were contained in the first. Israel's sin did not bring about a reduction in God's standards for His people. The covenant which is made here is thus virtually a renewal of the former covenant. There are some differences however. Second, there is a "newness" to the covenant which God made with Israel in our text. The term "renewal" or its equivalent is not found in our text, nor is there any reference to the former (first)

covenant. The first covenant was based upon the “miracles” which God had done in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, while this covenant looks forward to the miracles which are instrumental in Israel’s possession of the land of Canaan (Exod. 34:10-11). (Ironically, the miracles which God formerly accomplished in Egypt resulted in the Egyptians driving the Israelites out of their land; now, the miracles which God is promising to accomplish will drive the Canaanites out of Israel’s land.)

There are a number of differences between the way this “new” covenant is given and the way in which the former was given. Previously, Moses, along with 74 of Israel’s leaders went to the mountain, to ratify the covenant. Now, Moses alone goes to the mountain, apparently not even accompanied by Joshua. Formerly, the people repeatedly emphasized that they would obey all of God’s commandments, but no promises were made this (second) time. While the blessings of this covenant are still conditional, there are no “if’s” stated here, as there were at first (Exod. 19:5). Finally, the “code of the covenant” which is given in chapter 34 is significantly shorter than that found in chapters 20-23. The first code of the covenant placed a great deal of emphasis on social matters, such as the treatment of slaves and just compensation for losses caused by negligence or theft. In this abbreviated “code of the covenant” the emphasis falls on Israel’s walk with God, which had so quickly been interrupted by Israel’s idolatry and apostasy. The prohibitions of verses 12-17 forbid those contacts with the Canaanites which might lead Israel to turn from God. The way Israel is to deal with pagan idols is even more severe in the second statement of the “code of the covenant.” The practices referred to in verses 18-26 are those which would enhance Israel’s worship and walk with God. Thus, without referring to Israel’s fall, this abbreviated statement of the previously given “code of the covenant” focuses on those commands which will keep Israel from falling again, if they are obeyed.

## **2. The Splendor of the Covenant—The Transfiguration of Moses (34:29-35)**

The Israelites were waiting once again, for another forty days and nights, until Moses returned with the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandments. The mood was very different this time from the last. The first time Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, Moses found the people worshipping a golden calf, which they had convinced Aaron to fashion for them. There was a heathen quality to this pseudo-worship and Moses was furious, just as God was. The stone tablets were smashed and pulverized by Moses, as was the golden calf. Three thousand were slain before the situation was back under control. There was much intercession before God finally promised Moses that He would forgive Israel and be present with them as they went on to possess the land of Canaan. After Israel’s apostasy, there may have been some doubt as to whether or not Moses would return with the stone tablets, and with the assurance that God had once again entered into a covenant with His people. Every Israelite’s eye was fixed on Mt. Sinai, waiting for the first sign of Moses’ return. On that first descent, the people were unaware of Moses’ descent, but Moses and Joshua became increasingly aware of the revelry and apostasy of the people. Moses’ anger must have intensified with every downward step. Now the circumstances were different. Moses’ face was radiant, literally aglow with the glory of God. Moses began to employ a veil. He would remove the veil when he went to speak with God and would leave it off until he had conveyed God’s words to the people. Then, the veil would be put on until the next time he spoke with God. Now that Moses’ face radiated with the glory of God, the people were reluctant to get too close to him (34:30). What function did the “beaming,” radiant face of Moses play here? First, I believe that it further elevated Moses, showing him to be the one who God had chosen to be the mediator of His people. It also gave great force to the words which he spoke. When Moses came from the tent of meeting after having spoken with God everybody knew that what Moses was about to convey to them was a word directly from God. When Moses’ face was aglow, the words which Moses spoke were the very words

of God. The radiant face of Moses gave testimony to the divinely inspired utterances which he spoke to the people.

### **Concerning Contributions (Exodus 35:1–36:7)**

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. And this is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams’ skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones and setting stones, for the ephod and for the breast-piece. And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:1-8).

Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.” And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, ‘Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD’S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, and blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goats’ hair, and rams’ skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breast piece. And let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the LORD has commanded’” (Exodus 35:1-10).

#### **1. Israel’s Offerings**

The events of chapters 35-40 can only be understood in the light of God’s instructions concerning the construction of the tabernacle, given to Moses as recorded in chapters 25-31. There is a great deal of similarity between these two accounts, as has been observed. The first nine verses of chapter 25 serve as the introduction to God’s instructions concerning the tabernacle, including the divinely appointed means of providing the needed materials from which the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priestly garments will be made. In comparing chapters 25-31 with chapters 35-40 it is interesting to note that just as the first portion ended with instructions regarding keeping the Sabbath (31:12-17), so the first verses of the latter portion begin with Sabbath instructions (35:1-3). The Sabbath was, of course, the sign of the covenant, and thus a very significant observance. It is also possible, that this command is given here to insure against Israel’s violation of the Sabbath in the construction of the tabernacle. The undertaking of such a project might have seemed so holy that a Sabbath rest could be set aside to work on the construction of the tabernacle.

#### **2. Characteristics of Israel’s Contributions**

There are many details concerning the contributions of the people in this account, but for our purposes we shall attempt to focus our attention on some of the more general characteristics of the contributions to the tabernacle. Consider the following characteristics:

**(1) Israel’s contributions were voluntarily given** There is an interesting comment given to us in verse 20 of chapter 35 which reinforces the voluntary aspect of Israel’s gifts. After Moses had given God’s instructions to the people, explaining the opportunity that each had to make a contribution, he dismissed them: “Then

all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence" (Exod. 35:20). It is not until later, after the people had been dismissed, that the people began to bring their offerings to the Lord.

**(2) Israel's gifts were willingly, joyfully given.** God instructed Moses to collect an offering from "whoever is of a willing heart" (Exod. 35:5), and the text frequently informs us that this was the case (35:21, 22, 26, 29). Every indication of our text is that the people gladly gave their gifts so that the tabernacle could be built.

**(3) The gifts of the Israelites were abundantly given.** The excitement and enthusiasm of the Israelites is evident by the abundance of their gifts. In fact, the text informs us that the gifts exceeded the need, so that Moses was requested by the workers to command the people to stop giving (Exod. 36:2-7). This is the first time in the history of mankind that I know of that people were told to stop giving because all that was needed was given.

**(4) The giving of the Israelites was unanimous.** While all were free to give or not to give, the text strongly suggests that there were few, if any, who refused to have a part in contributing toward the construction of the tabernacle (35:23-28).

**(5) The giving of the Israelites was proportionate.** While virtually everyone gave something for the tabernacle, each one gave in accordance with what he or she had to give. "Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD'S contribution; and every man, who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service, brought it. And all **the skilled women** spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen. And all **the women whose heart stirred with a skill** spun the goats' hair. And **the rulers** brought the onyx stones and stones for setting for the ephod and for the breast piece; and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD" (Exod. 35:24-29). Those who were wealthy gave what only the wealthy would possess—the finest stones and gems, the most precious oils and fragrances. Those who had lesser means gave what they had.

**(6) The giving of the Israelites included both material goods and technical services.** The building of the tabernacle required two essential elements: goods and services. That is, there must be the raw materials from which the tabernacle and its furnishings were to be constructed. This included gold, silver, precious stones, animal skins, spices and ointments, and fine cloth. Then there must be skilled workers, both men and women, who would fashion these raw materials into objects of beauty. Some of those who gave to the tabernacle gave of their goods, while many others gave of their skilled abilities, to create a place of great beauty and worth.

**(7) The contributions of the Israelites were of the highest quality.** The tabernacle was to be of such quality and craftsmanship that it would befit the God who was to dwell within it (Exod. 25:8). Thus, the materials used in building it were the finest that were available (cf. 35:6-9). So, too, with the craftsmen who were to create the intricate and beautiful works of art within the tabernacle (35:30-35). God was given the finest men had to offer, and all of these fine things, whether goods or skills, were God-given in the first place.

### **3. A Comparison of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9**

As we compare the characteristics of the contributions of the Israelites in our text with the contributions of the Corinthians (as described in Paul's Corinthian epistles) we find that there are some remarkable parallels.

Consider some of the similarities of the principles and practices which Paul teaches in his epistles with what we have just observed of the Israelites' giving in Exodus.

**(1) Neither were compelled to give, but encouraged to do so voluntarily** (2 Cor. 8:3). The Corinthians were given time to think about what they would give, and were not put under any pressure. They were given time to raise their contributions (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:2-5).

**(2) Both were giving willingly, cheerfully, and bountifully** (2 Cor. 8:1-3; 9:7).

**(3) The Corinthians, like the Israelites, gave out of those things which they had, out of what God Himself had provided** (2 Cor. 9:8-11). The Corinthians were encouraged to give only as they themselves had prospered (2 Cor. 8:12-15).

Comparing the giving of the Israelites in Exodus 35 and 36 with that of the Corinthians, we can safely conclude that with regard to voluntary giving, the principles and practices of both testaments are nearly identical. But what about the many Old Testament texts which command the people to give in a very different way? The majority of Old Testament instances where giving is taught involve mandatory contributions, not voluntary gifts. For example, in Exodus chapter 30 the same term for giving found in Exodus 35 and 36 is found, but in a distinctly mandatory context: "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty grams), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD. The rich shall not pay more, and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves" (Exod. 30:13-15).

Notice that there are at least two ways in which this contribution differs from that of chapters 35 and 36, in spite of the fact that the same term for giving is used in both passages. First, the contribution is not a voluntary matter, but is compulsory. Second, the contribution is not one that is proportionate to one's financial status, but all, rich or poor, are to give the same amount.

In the New Testament our Lord affirmed the legitimacy in principle of this compulsory "temple tax": And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" And upon his saying, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for you and Me" (Matt. 17:24-27). While our Lord, as the "king's son," was not obliged to pay the temple tax of Exodus 30, His payment of the tax underscored the legitimacy of such a tax for Israelites in general.

I believe that in the New Testament, as in the Old, two types of giving are described: the first is voluntary giving, and the second is mandatory. Consider the following texts, and see if there is a not a kind of giving taught in the New Testament which is obligatory and binding: "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you" (Matt. 5:42). "In every thing I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). Contributing to the needs of the saints ... (Rom. 12:13).

Beyond the meeting of the needs of the poor and the afflicted, there is the obligation to support those who minister the Word of God: And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches (Gal. 6:6). Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Tim. 5:17-18; also 1 Cor. 9:1-14; 2 Tim. 2:4-7). Thus, while there are some areas where giving is optional, a matter of individual leading, there are also obligations which no Christian should dare to neglect because they are mandatory, not optional.

## **The Tabernacle, the Dwelling Place of God (Exodus 36:8–39:43)**

### **1. Introduction**

The importance of the chapters in Exodus which deal with the tabernacle is very significant. God created the whole world in six days, but he used forty to instruct Moses about the tabernacle. Little over one chapter was needed to describe the structure of the world, but six were used for the tabernacle.

Through the centuries many have sought to find the meaning of the tabernacle in terms of its symbolism. Already in the Hellenistic period ... the attempt had been made to understand the function of the Old Testament tabernacle as basically a symbolic one. It is immediately apparent from the biblical language why this interpretation seemed a natural one. First, the dimension of the tabernacle and all its parts reflect a carefully contrived design and a harmonious whole. The numbers 3, 4, 10 predominate with proportionate cubes and rectangles. The various parts—the separate dwelling place, the tent, and the court—are all in exact numerical relation. The use of metals—gold, silver, and copper—is carefully graded in terms of their proximity to the Holy of Holies. In the same way, the particular colors appear to bear some inner relation to their function, whether the white, blue, or crimson. There is likewise a gradation in the quality of the cloth used. Finally, much stress is placed on the proper position and orientation, with the easterly direction receiving the place of honor.

The earliest interpreters had no doubt that the importance of the tabernacle lay in its hidden symbolism, and the issue at stake was properly to decipher its meaning. ... For Philo the tabernacle was a representation of the universe, the tent signifying the spiritual world, the court the material. Moreover, the four colors signified the four world elements, the lamp with its seven lights the seven planets and the twelve loaves of bread the twelve signs of the Zodiac and the twelve months of the year.

Origen in his ninth *Homily on Exodus* makes reference to Philo's approach, but then moves in another direction. He saw the tabernacle as pointing to the mysteries of Christ and his church. His moral analogies in terms of the virtues of Christian life—faith compared to gold, the preached word to silver, patience to bronze (9.3)—were picked up and elaborated on at great length throughout the Middle Ages.

### **2. Characteristics of the Tabernacle**

**(1) The tabernacle was a very functional facility.** The tabernacle served as a meeting place between God and men, and was thus known as the “tent of meeting” (35:21) This was no small task, for having God in close proximity was a very dangerous thing. When Moses plead with God to dwell in the midst of His people (Exod. 34:9), God warned him that this could prove fatal to such a sinful people: “For the Lord had said to Moses, ‘Say to the sons of Israel, “You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you”’” (Exod. 33:5). The tabernacle solved the problem of having a holy God dwell in the midst of a sinful people. The solution includes two provisions: **The tabernacle solved one problem with its portability.** God had revealed Himself to His people from atop Mt. Sinai. When the people left Sinai for

the promised land of Canaan, they would need some portable place for God's presence to be manifested. Since the tabernacle was a tent, the problem of portability was solved. **The tabernacle also solved the problem of a holy God dwelling in the midst of a sinful people.** The tent curtains, and especially the thick veil, served as a separator, a dividing barrier, between God and the people. Beyond this, the tabernacle was sanctified and set apart as a holy place. Also, the tabernacle was a place of sacrifice, so that the sins of the Israelites could be atoned for. While the solution was not permanent, it did facilitate communion between God and His people.

**(2) The tabernacle was a facility which displayed fabulous wealth and beauty.** It was a very costly project involving about 1,900 lbs. of gold, 6,437 lbs. of silver, and 4,522 lbs. of bronze. The project involved not only very expensive materials, but these materials were fashioned in such a way as to create great works of art. The tabernacle and its furnishings were provided for the Israelites for both "glory" and "beauty," (28:2, 40).

**(3) The building of the tabernacle involved all of the people.** All of the people would benefit from the tabernacle, and thus all were permitted to participate in its construction, either by their donations of materials, or of skilled labor, or both.

**(4) The tabernacle testified to the character of God.** The excellence of the tabernacle, both in its materials and its workmanship, was a reflection of the excellencies of God. The tabernacle was also a holy place, because abiding in it was a holy God (30:37, 38). Aaron bears the engraving on the diadem, 'Holy to Yahweh' (28:36). The priests are warned in the proper administration of their office 'lest they die' (30:21), and the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10.1) made clear the seriousness of an offense which was deemed unholy to God.

**(5) The tabernacle was composed of various elements, but the unity of all, in design, function, and purpose, was emphasized.** "And he made fifty clasps of gold, and joined the curtains to one another with the clasps, so the tabernacle was a unit" (Exod. 36:13). "And he made fifty clasps of bronze to join the tent together, that it might be a unit" (Exod. 36:18). Not only was there unity in architecture and structure, but there was also a unity in the function of the tabernacle. The purpose of the tabernacle was to provide a place where God may dwell in the midst of men. All of the furnishings facilitate ministries and ceremonies which contribute to this one place of providing a "tent of meeting."

**(6) The tabernacle was God's idea, God's initiative, and God's design.** The tabernacle was made after the divine pattern shown to Moses (25.9). The ... instructions emphasized that every detail of the design was made by explicit command of God (35.1, 4, 10, etc.). Bezalel and Oholiab were equipped with the spirit of God and with knowledge in craftsmanship (31.2ff.) to execute the task. Moreover, the tabernacle is not conceived of as a temporary measure for a limited time, but one in which the permanent priesthood of Aaron serves throughout all their generation.

### **3. The Temple as the Dwelling Place of God**

Once Israel possessed the land of Canaan, there was no need for a portable facility to house the ark of the covenant and the other furnishings of the tabernacle. The ark had been used by the Israelites when they fought against the Philistines, under the leadership of King Saul and his son Jonathan. The Israelites lost this battle and the ark was captured by the Philistines. After repeated difficulties directly related to the ark, the Philistines sent the ark back to Israel. The return of the ark and David's dwelling in a lavish house seems to have prompted him to propose the construction of a different place for the ark to be kept: "And it came

about, when David dwelt in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Behold, I am dwelling in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under curtains’” (1 Chron. 17:1).

Nathan quickly (and apparently without consulting God) encouraged David to build a temple (1 Chron. 17:2). God had different plans, however, for David had been a man of war and had shed much blood. God would indeed allow a temple to be built, but it would be built by Solomon, David’s son, a man of peace. While David wanted to build God a house, God promised to give David a house, and so it is in the context of David’s request to build a temple that God proclaims what has become known as the Davidic Covenant, the promise that David’s seed will rule forever, and so it became known that Israel’s Messiah would be the “Son of David” (1 Chron. 17:4-15).

Like God’s victory over the Egyptians, David’s military victories over the surrounding (hostile) nations provided many of the materials needed for the construction of the temple (1 Chron. 18-21). Although David is not permitted to build the temple, he does make extensive preparations for it. In chapter 22 of 1 Chronicles David began to gather the materials needed for the temple. Solomon was given instructions concerning the construction of the temple. The people were encouraged to assist in this project. Those who would minister in the temple were designated as well (chapters 24-26). The plans which David gave to Solomon were inspired by God (1 Chron. 28:11-12, 19), and were thus divinely provided, as were the plans for the tabernacle.

David generously gave materials needed for the construction of the temple, as did the people when they were invited to do so (1 Chron. 29:1-9). In celebration, sacrifices were offered and all the people ate and drank in the presence of God (1 Chron. 29:21-22), in a way reminiscent of the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 24:5-11). After David’s death (1 Chron. 29:28), Solomon reigned over Israel (2 Chron. 1), and constructed the temple (2 Chron. 2-4). It was elegant in materials and in workmanship, just as the tabernacle was (2 Chron. 2:7; 3:8-17). When it was completed, the nation was assembled and the ark was brought into the temple (2 Chron. 5:2-10). Like the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34.), the cloud descended on the temple and the glory of the Lord filled the place (2 Chron. 5:11-14). The temple was dedicated, and Israel was instructed about the purpose of the place, paramount among which was that it was to be a place of prayer (2 Chron. 6). After Solomon had finished speaking, God spoke to the people, promising both blessing and cursing, depending upon Israel’s faithfulness to the covenant which God had made with them (2 Chron. 7). If Israel was not faithful to their covenant, the temple would be destroyed, and the people would be scattered. Nevertheless, if Israel repented and prayed (in the direction of the temple), God would hear and would restore them.

Israel’s history bears out the truthfulness of God’s words. The people did not remain faithful to God and they were driven from the land and the temple was left in ruins. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the return of the faithful remnant from their captivity to the land of Canaan, where they rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem, guided and encouraged by the minor prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. When the temple was rebuilt, it did not have the splendor of the first temple, and thus some of the “old timers” wept at the sight of it (Ezra 3:12). The prophet Haggai, however, speaks a word of encouragement, assuring the people that the temple is glorious because God is with them, that His Spirit is dwelling in their midst (Hag. 2:4-5), and that in the future God will fill His house with even greater splendor and glory (2:7-9).

The temple is also spoken of in the future tense by the prophet Ezekiel (chapters 40). The promise of the future return of the nation Israel to the land of Canaan and their spiritual restoration are assured by the description of the millennial temple which is measured and described in great detail by Ezekiel.



#### **4. God's Dwelling Place in New Testament**

From the time of Christ's coming to earth to the present, the dwelling place of God among men is not conceived of in terms of buildings. As a momentary aside, the physical building (the temple) had become a kind of idol to many of the legalistic, unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day. The presence of the temple was proof to them that God was with them and that they were pleasing in His sight. Even the disciples were impressed by the beauty of the temple building, yet Jesus cautioned such enthusiasm, knowing that the temple would soon be destroyed (Matt. 24:1-2). You can well imagine how upset the scribes and Pharisees would have been when our Lord spoke of destroying God's temple (not knowing, of course, that it was He who was that temple). The destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. was a fulfillment of the Christ's prophecy; warnings of the Old Testament Scriptures, proof of Israel's disobedience and of God's chastening hand on the nation, once again. After our Lord's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, St. Stephen was put on trial by those who put our Lord on the cross. One of the charges against him was that he spoke against the temple (Acts 6:13). St. Stephen's response, given in his own defense, made it clear, as the Old Testament Scriptures had already done, that God did not dwell in man-made places (Acts 7:47-50; 2 Chron. 2:5-6; 6:18, 30).

The New Testament epistles go on to teach us that the dwelling place of God is now the church, not the church building, but the people who comprise the body of Christ: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22)". "And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you ARE A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 9)".

### **The Consecration of the Tabernacle and the Presence of God (Exodus 40)**

#### **1. Introduction**

There are many reasons why this final chapter of the Book of Exodus is worthy of our study. In the first place, this chapter is the conclusion, the climax, of the Book of Exodus. Second, the 40th chapter of Exodus is Moses' introduction to the Book of Leviticus. Third, the cloud which descends upon the tabernacle has a New Testament parallel, which should make the text an important subject for our own study. The more we can grasp the significance of the cloud to the people of God in the Book of Exodus, the better we can understand the significance of one of God's great provisions for His people, the church. In outline form, the structure of our chapter looks like this:

- A. Divine Instructions: Arranging and Anointing—Vss. 1-16.
- B. Moses' Implementation: The Erection of the Tabernacle—Vss. 17-33.
- C. God's Glory Fills the Tabernacle—Vss. 34-38.

#### **2. Divine Instructions (40:1-16)**

**(1) There is a distinct change in the personal pronoun employed in chapter 40 from that used in the immediately preceding verses.** The change is from "they" (e.g. 39:43) to "you" (e.g. 40:2). The shift is

from the construction of the tabernacle, in which all the people were involved, to the setting up of the tabernacle and the anointing of it, which was the responsibility of Moses (40:1, 16).

**(2) The first 16 verses of chapter 40 are divided into two sections, as indicated by the repetition of certain terms.** The first division consists of verses 1-8, where the terms “place,” “arrange,” and “set up” frequently occur. Thus, the first half of this section deals with the proper arrangement of the furnishings of the tabernacle. There is, as it were, “a place for everything,” and “everything was to be in its proper place.” The second division includes verses 9-16, where the predominant terms are “anoint” and “consecrate,” which results in the object becoming holy. I have summarized the two divisions of verses 1-16 as “arrangements” (vss. 1-8) and “anointing” (vss. 9-16).

**(3) There is a distinct order and sequence to be seen in the items which are named in these verses.** There is a descending order of “holiness” to those items referred to in the chapter. We move from the inside of the tabernacle to the outside courtyard. We begin in the holy of holies, the most holy place in the tabernacle, and we end in the courtyard, the least holy place. This order and sequence is found in each of the three listings of the furnishings of the tabernacle in chapter 40, as we can see below:

<b>Set Up (1-8)</b>	<b>Anoint (9-15)</b>	<b>Erected (17-33)</b>
<b>HOLY OF HOLIES</b>		
Tabernacle (2) Ark (3) Veil (3)	Tabernacle, all in it (9) Ark (vss. 20-21)	Tabernacle (17-21) Veil (21)
<b>TABERNACLE</b>		
Table and Shew Bread (4, 22-23) Lamp Stand (4) Altar of Incense (5, 26-27) Veil (5)		Table and Shew Bread Lamp Stand (24-25) Altar of Incense Veil (28)
<b>TABERNACLE COURT</b>		
Altar of Burnt Offering (6) Laver (7)	Altar of Burnt Offering (10) Laver (11)	Altar of Burnt Offering (29) Laver (30)
<b>OUTER PERIMETER OF THE COURT</b>		

Tabernacle Courtyard Boundaries Defined (8)		
<b>PRIESTS</b>		
	Aaron and sons (12-15)	Washing: Moses, Aaron and sons (30-31)

**(4) The anointing of Aaron and his sons, directed by God in verses 12-15 is not described until Leviticus chapter 8.** The details of this anointing fit better into the scheme of Leviticus than that of Exodus. From verse 16 we can assume that it was done at this time, but not described until later in the Pentateuch.

**3. The Tabernacle Is Assembled and Raised (40:17-33)**

Consider the following observations, which enable us to capture the thrust of these verses:

**(1) There is a mood of excitement and anticipation here.** A period of nearly 6 months must have been required for the Israelites to collect the materials and to fashion and construct them into the various components of the tabernacle. Now, after a long period of rising expectation, the tabernacle is about to be erected for the first time.

**(2) A precise timing is indicated.** Verse 2, along with verse 17 informs us that there was a particular day determined by God when the momentous occasion of erecting the tabernacle was to occur. This day was indicated by God as the first day of the first month of the second year. This means that the tabernacle was constructed on Israel’s first anniversary as a free nation (Exod. 12:2), and approximately 9 months from the time of arrival at Mt. Sinai. It would also appear that the tent was erected on this one day, since the materials were all made and ready before this time (39:32-43).

**(3) Moses seems to have a provisional role here, a priestly role, which continues until Aaron and his sons are anointed and installed as the official priesthood of Israel.** Moses offered incense (v. 27) and burnt and grain offerings (v. 29), and washed himself (v. 31), like Aaron and his sons.

**(4) The text emphatically reports exacting obedience with regard to the carrying out of God’s instructions.** Two things signal this emphasis. First, verse 16 informs us that Moses carried out God’s instructions, but then verses 17-33 go on to describe his obedience in detail. This detailed repetition of Moses’ meticulous obedience must have been done to underscore the importance of the precise compliance of Moses to the commandments of God. Second, seven times in verses 17-33 we are told that Moses did exactly as God commanded him (vss. 19, 21, 23, 25-26, 29, 32).

**4. The Glory of God Descends Upon the Tabernacle (40:34-38)**

In these five verses we come to the end of the Book of Exodus. There are several features of this paragraph of which we should take note:

**(1) These verses are the conclusion of the Book of Exodus.** The glory of God descending upon the tabernacle is the realization of Israel’s highest hopes, of Moses’ most noble and impassioned petition.

**(2) The account is very brief.** While this paragraph serves as the conclusion to the Book of Exodus, we should realize that it is a very brief account.

**(3) The descent of God’s glory upon the tabernacle is the fulfillment of God’s previous promises to Israel and to Moses:** So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite (Exod. 3:8). And I will meet there [at the altar] with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. And I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; and I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God (Exod. 29:43-46; 33:7-11).

**(4) The cloud was a visible manifestation of the glory of the Lord.** The cloud, in its various appearances, is identified with the presence and the glory of God (13:21; 14:19, 24; 16:7, 10).

**(5) The glory of God revealed in the tabernacle was greater than any glory previously revealed to Israel.** The glory of God in the tabernacle was so awesome that even Moses could not enter the tabernacle. It should be remembered that Moses apparently had seen more of God’s glory than any man alive. He had seen the glory of God in the burning bush (Exod. 3). He had seen God’s glory in the plagues and the exodus of Israel. He alone had seen the glory of God from inside the cloud atop Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19, 24). At his request, he had seen even more of God’s glory when he was privileged to view the “backside of God” (Exod. 33:17–34:9). But the glory of God in the tabernacle was greater than that which Moses (or any other Israelite for that matter) could behold. Thus, the glory of God which now abides in the presence of the Israelites is the greatest glory known to man to this point in time.

**(6) There is both a “sameness” and a “newness” to what happens here.** The cloud of God’s glory is not new. In verse 34 it is called **the** cloud, indicating that it is the same cloud mentioned previously. We find it first mentioned in chapter 13: Then they set off from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people (Exod. 13:20-22). In chapter 14, the cloud went from before Israel to behind them, to separate them from the Egyptians (v. 19). From the midst of the cloud God brought confusion to the Egyptians (v. 24), which led ultimately to their destruction. In chapter 16 (vss. 7, 10) it was associated with God’s provision of manna and meat for the grumbling Israelites. In chapter 19, the cloud was manifested atop Mt. Sinai (vss. 9, 16-18), as well as in chapter 24 (vss. 15-18).

Since the cloud was present with the Israelites from the time they left Egypt, and never departed from them, there is a sense in which nothing new occurs here in chapter 40. It is, so to speak, the same cloud as before. There is a “newness,” about this appearance of the cloud, which is indicated by three facts. The first difference lies in the fact that the cloud, and thus God’s glorious presence, is now nearer to the Israelites than ever before. What was once distant (either before or behind the nation, or far away, atop Mt. Sinai) is now in the very midst of the camp. The second fact is even more significant. The appearance of the glory of God in the tabernacle took place after Israel’s great sin (the golden calf), which is reported in chapter 32. Finally, the glory of God settled on the tabernacle to abide there, not just as a momentary manifestation of God.

**(7) The cloud had a very practical function—that of guiding the Israelites on their way to the promised land of Canaan.** Verses 34 and 35 describe the phenomenon of the descent of the cloud, while verses 36-38 describe the function of the cloud. By this cloud God led the Israelites, informing them as to when they should make or break camp, as well as leading them in the proper route. While the guiding function

of the cloud is not a new one, it is an assurance to the Israelites that they will get to the promised land of Canaan, for God Himself was going before them.

### **5. The Meaning of the Manifestation of God's Presence**

What, then, is the significance of this event for the Israelites and for us? I believe that the lesson which God had for the Israelites of old is similar to that for the people of God in our own day. Consider the following lessons which can be learned from the events of this concluding chapter of Exodus.

**First, this chapter reminds us of the importance of exacting obedience for the people of God.** God manifested His presence in the place which He prescribed, and among those people who precisely carried out His commands pertaining to the tabernacle. The exacting obedience of Moses (in this chapter) and the people (in the preceding chapter) are underscored in our text. God not only refused to associate Himself with the people's independently made golden calf, but He threatened to disassociate Himself from this people permanently. It was not until the tabernacle was made in complete compliance with God's instructions that He descended upon it. Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Let us seek to be meticulous in keeping God's commands, and not just in their letter, but in their spirit as well.

**Second, the manifestation of God's glory in the tabernacle was to be an assurance to Israel of God's presence among them.** This assurance of God's presence was even more precious after the great sin of the nation in making and worshiping the golden calf (Exod. 32). God's presence assured the Israelites that God would be among them, in their midst, in spite of their sin. This did not minimize their sin, but focused their attention on the primary function of the tabernacle, which was to provide a place and a means of atonement, where sin could be set aside (temporarily, Rom. 3:25) by the shedding of the blood of animals. God's visible presence in the tabernacle, as well as His daily guidance, facilitated by the cloud (Exod. 40:36-36), further assured Israel of the fact that God would be present with His people.

God has provided us with the same kind of assurance as that which the cloud provided for Israel. Through His Spirit, God indwells the believer, giving assurance of the forgiveness of sins, of the presence of God, and of continual access to Him, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him (Rom. 8:9). But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you (Rom. 8:11). For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:14-17).

The Holy Spirit ministers to the saints today as the cloud once ministered to Israel. The Spirit of God abides within the saints as the cloud used to abide within the tabernacle. If we have true personal faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells us and assures us that we are the children of God. The Spirit also gives us guidance, as the cloud guided the Israelites. Furthermore, the presence of God achieved by Christ and mediated by the Holy Spirit is far more intimate than that which Israel experienced. The presence of God was indeed dear to the Israelites, who had never had the presence of God closer to them. Nevertheless, God was still separated from the people. Even Moses could not enter into the presence

of God in the tabernacle and only the high priest could enter into the holy of holies, and but once a year. Christ has torn the veil asunder, and He dwells within each individual believer, not just in the midst of the nation. We have a far greater intimacy with God than did the Israelites.

Finally, the events of Exodus chapter 40 were but a prelude, an introduction to the Book of Leviticus. If the Book of Exodus contains the description of the “parts” of the tabernacle, as well as providing the assembly instructions for its erection, the Book of Leviticus is the “owner’s manual,” which tells the Israelite how they are to take advantage of the mediatory role of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the priesthood, which enable them to draw near to God.

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