



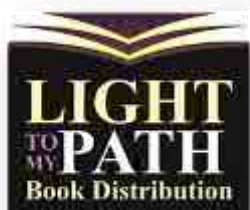
EXODUS

A Devotional
Look at Israel's
Exodus from Egypt
and Organization
at Mount Sinai

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Exodus

*A Devotional Look at Israel's Exodus from Egypt and
Organization at Mount Sinai*



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS

Author:

Traditionally, Moses is the author of the book of Exodus. There are a number of factors that support this. It is obvious from the details recorded in the book that the author had to be very familiar with Israel's escape from Egypt and time in the wilderness. The precise facts recorded in the accounts lead us to understand that the person who wrote the book was with Israel at the time and wrote from personal experience.

Beyond this, however, God commanded Moses to write down the events that took place at the time of Israel's escape. Listen to what God told Moses in Exodus 17:14 after the Amalekites attacked Israel:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

God also command Moses to write down the laws He was giving him:

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." (Exodus 34:27)

Deuteronomy 31:24-25 tells us that Moses obeyed the words of the Lord and wrote down the words of the law "from beginning to end."

After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD:

Jesus, quoting one of the commandments recorded in the book of Exodus, said in Mark 7:10:

For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'

Notice that while these were God's commandments, Jesus tells us that they came through Moses. All these verses point to Moses as the human author of the book.

Background:

Israel had been in Egypt for about 430 years. During the latter part of that time they were reduced to slavery and forced to serve Pharaoh and his cause. Exodus recounts how God raised up a man by the name of Moses to deliver His people from their bondage and organize them into a nation under God.

At the foot of Mount Sinai God's people were divided into family groups (or tribes) and given a central place for worship. Priests and Levites were ordained to serve as spiritual leaders. A governing law was written with the requirements of God for them as a new nation under His leadership.

Importance of the Books for Today:

Israel's rescue from Egypt is a central theme in much of Scripture. God calls His people often to remember their roots in Egypt and what He had done to set them free.

The book has much to teach us about God. We see how God is faithful to His promises. He had promised to Abraham that he would make him a great nation. While 430 years in Egypt put that promise to a test, God was true to His word. We learn about the power of God over entire nations. For the sake of His people, the most powerful nation on the earth was reduced to nothing. We see His infinite resources as He provided food and provisions for over two million Israelites in the desert. We come face to face with His holiness as we read of His fiery judgment lashing out against sin and those who rebelled against His purposes. We experience His majesty in the fire and cloud that descended on the mountain and made the earth shake. We marvel at His patience with a people who fall so quickly into rebellion and disobedience. Exodus introduces us to God.

There is great inspiration in watching what God does through Moses and Aaron in this book. He takes two ordinary brothers and uses them, despite their failures, to set His people free. Through these men, God overturned the power of nations and overcome the laws of nature. Through their prayers, His holy wrath is diverted and His

provision unleashed from heaven. The book encourages us to step boldly in the power of Moses' God.

Exodus gives us a deeper appreciation of what the Lord Jesus came to accomplish. We see the requirements of God and realize that not one of us could ever measure up to His standard. As the nation of Israel is born, its failure to keep God's requirements was obvious. What began at Mount Sinai would be completed at Calvary and expand to the entire world.

1

ISRAEL IS ENSLAVED

Read Exodus 1:1-22

As we begin our study of the book of Exodus, we need to remind ourselves of the context. The people of Israel have been living in Egypt. God's people enjoyed special favour in the land under the capable leadership of Joseph.

When Israel arrived in Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan, they numbered about seventy people. Verses 1-5 give the names of the sons of Israel who were heads of their families. Over time, Joseph and the whole generation that had gone down to Egypt died (verse 6). God's blessing remained on the nation, however, and they grew in numbers. Notice in verse 7 that they "were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them." This was clear evidence of God's blessing on their lives.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's commentary tells us that about sixty years after the death of Joseph there was a revolution in the land of Egypt:

About sixty years after the death of Joseph a revolution took place—by which the old dynasty was overthrown, and upper and lower Egypt were united into one kingdom. (*Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A.R.; Brown, David, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Laridian, 1871, Electronic edition*) *Comments on Exodus 1:8*)

This was a period of unrest in the nation of Egypt. The new king, who came into power because of this revolution, was not familiar with Joseph and the great work he had done in the land (verse 8). When he came to power, he took note of the Israelites. Because this was a tense time politically, the new king wanted to do everything in his power to assure his position and the stability of his government. He saw the Israelites as a threat to him and his government.

Fearing that the Israelites would revolt against him and join forces with their enemies, the king put slave masters over them. Notice also in verse 10 that he was afraid that they would leave the country. We need to remember that the promise of God to Israel was that they would have their own land. Satan knew this promise and would do his best to thwart the purpose of God.

The new king felt that the best option for him, in these times of unrest, was to make the Israelites his slaves. He put slave masters over them and forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses, which he used as store cities for the wealth of the nation (verse 11). This was a radical change for the people of God who had enjoyed blessing and wealth in the days of Joseph. Likely, many of them wondered why God had allowed this to happen to them.

Notice in verse 12 that God still blessed His people in these evil times. The more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied. This teaches us something very important. Sometimes our greatest growth takes place under oppression and difficulties. This has certainly been the case in my own life. God will allow problems and pain to enable us to grow closer to Him. He releases special blessings into our pain and suffering. We are refined and become stronger through the obstacles He sends our way.

Notice the response of the Egyptians to God's blessing on His people in verse 12. They came to dread the Israelites. The word "dread" could also be translated by the words "anxious" or "distressed." In other words, the blessing of the Lord on the lives of the Israelites distressed the Egyptians and made them anxious. They were not sure how to take what God was doing in the lives of His people. They began to realize that they were not dealing with an ordinary people. There was a power at work in the lives of the Israelites that caused the Egyptians to fear. Do people see this power at work in your life today? Is there evidence of the strength and blessing of God even in difficult times?

The only way the Egyptians knew to deal with the Israelites was to increase the persecution. They made their lives more difficult. They forced them to work even harder making bricks and working in the fields (verse 14).

These efforts to oppress the Israelites did not work. They continued to multiply. The king decided that he needed to do something more drastic to slow down the growth of the Israelite population. He commanded the midwives to kill any male child that was born to Israel (verse 16).

While the midwives heard the king's command, they feared God more than they feared the king and they let the boys live (verse 17). These midwives knew the power of God and made a choice. They chose to risk their lives, disobeying Pharaoh rather than risk the wrath of Israel's God. While God expects us to obey the powers He places over us, there are times when those powers ask us to do things that are contrary to the Word of God and His purposes. In that case, we need to follow the example of these midwives and choose God over our leaders.

When the king saw that male children were still being born to the Israelites, he questioned the midwives. They responded by telling him that the Hebrew (Israelite) women were stronger than the Egyptian women and give birth even before they could arrive to help them (verse 19).

Notice from verse 20 that the Lord was kind to the midwives because they feared Him and did not obey the command of the king. God blessed them with families of their own (verse 21). Despite the efforts of Pharaoh to kill them, the people of Israel continued to grow in number. God was showing Himself to be more powerful than the king of Egypt.

Pharaoh intensified his efforts to deal with the Israelites and the threat they posed to his people. In verse 25, he commanded his people to throw every male child into the Nile River. It is hard to imagine a time when a government would give permission to its people to rip a male child from a mother's arms and kill him in open view of everyone present. These were evil days in Egypt. We see the hand of Satan behind this as he lashed out at the people of God seeking to destroy and oppress them.

We often look at this passage from the perspective of persecution and oppression. This is not the central focus, however. This chapter is about the blessing of God. Despite the efforts of a cruel king to oppress God's people, God continued to bless and keep them. The more Pharaoh lashed out at God's people the more they multiplied. The more Pharaoh persecuted, the more God blessed. Yes, these were difficult times for the people of God but they were also times when God drew close and revealed His presence. The blessing of God was so evident on the lives of His people that the nation of Egypt feared them.

The chapter is very important because of what it teaches us about God and His desire to bless and draw near to His people. We often are so caught up in the problems of life that we fail to see God's hand of blessing. God was richly blessing Israel in these days. I believe that the enemy was more aware of this blessing than His people were. In fact, Egypt was afraid of what God was doing in the life of His people. Don't let the problems of life hide God's blessings from you. Take a moment to consider the evidence of His hand on your life. Thank Him that, despite the struggles you have had to face in life, He has always been there to bless and protect.

For Consideration:

- Are Christians free from persecution and oppression in a sinful world? Have you had to suffer for being a Christian? Explain.
- Have you ever lost sight of the blessings of God because of your suffering? Explain.

- The more Egypt oppressed the Israelites, the more they grew. How have the problems you faced in life caused you to grow spiritually?
- The Egyptians became anxious and distressed because of what God was doing in the lives of His people. Is there enough evidence of God's blessing in your life today that the enemies of God would take note?
- Are you facing trials today? Is God's blessing also present? What is God doing through your trials in your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have failed to see His hand of blessing in the midst of your trials and suffering. Ask Him to open your eyes to His blessings.
- Thank the Lord that He uses the trials of life to strengthen and draw us closer to Him.
- Thank the Lord that no matter what happens to us, God is greater than any effort of the enemy to oppress.

2

MOSES' EARLY LIFE

Read Exodus 2:1-25

We saw in the previous chapter that the new king of Egypt, fearing that the people of Israel would turn against him, set cruel task masters over them and forced them into slave labour. When they continued to prosper, he commanded the midwives to kill all male children when they were born. Because these midwives feared the Lord, they did not listen to the king's command. Finally, in frustration, Pharaoh commanded his people to throw young Israelite males into the Nile River.

In Exodus 2:1 we read about a young Levite woman who gave birth to a son. Fearing what might happen to him, she hid him for three months. The time came, however, when she could no longer hide him. If he was discovered, he would be taken from her and thrown into the Nile River. It is hard to imagine the type of cruelty that would rip a young infant from the arms of his loving mother and throw him into the river to drown. These were the days in which Moses was born.

When this young mother realized she could no longer hide him in her house, she coated a papyrus basket with tar and pitch to make it waterproof. Placing her young son inside the basket, she hid him among the reeds along the river bank. It is hard to say what she was thinking at this point. She knew it was just a matter of time before her son would be thrown into the river. By placing him in the river she recognized that this was his fate. By making a basket for him, she was showing how much she loved him and wanted him to live. Verse 4 tells us that Moses' sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

While Moses waited in the river, Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river to bathe (verse 5). As she bathed, she saw the basket among the reeds. She sent her servants to get it. When the servant opened the basket she found the young boy inside. He was crying and despite the fact that she knew him to be Hebrew, Pharaoh's daughter felt compassion for him.

Watching from a distance, Moses' sister saw what had happened. She ran to Pharaoh's daughter and asked her if she would like her to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby (verse 7). Pharaoh's daughter agreed and, giving Moses to his sister, told her to find a nurse for him. She even agreed to pay the nurse for her services. By this means, Moses was returned to his own mother, who cared for him on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter. We see here the wonderful hand of God protecting this young life.

There are a few details we need to see in this story. Notice first that God did what seemed impossible to Moses' mother. In her wildest dreams she could never have imagined that her young son would be protected in such a way. She could never have planned such deliver-

ance. Only God could do this. He is the God of the impossible.

Notice also from this story the role that Moses' sister played. While Moses' mother committed him to the Lord and walked away, his sister stood at a distance to see what would happen. She was ready when Pharaoh's daughter found the basket. She took the initiative to speak to her and ask her about a nurse. She was available to be used of God in this situation. It is true that God had a wonderful plan for Moses' mother in this but his sister's role was also a vital one. We are left to wonder what would have happened had she not been available at that precise moment. Who would have raised Moses? Would his life have taken a different turn? While we do not have answers to these questions, Moses' sister is an example to us. She waited at a distance to see what would happen. She was ready to be used of God. Are you available to God?

Moses' mother and his sister both had different roles to play. His sister could not have played her role had Moses' mother not first been willing to surrender her son and walk away. One was to surrender and walk away, the other was to stay and be available. One role was as important as the other and neither role could have been accomplished without the other. The important thing was for each person to do what God had put on their heart to do.

Pharaoh's daughter did not forget Moses. When he was older, she brought him up as her own son. It was Pharaoh's daughter who gave him the name Moses. The name Moses sounds like the Hebrew word for "draw out."

Moses would grow up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter with all the privileges of riches, education and comfort while his brothers and sisters lived under the cruel oppression of the people who were raising him.

Notice that God had a role for Pharaoh's daughter to play as well. Why would she be interested in a young Hebrew child left in the river? Why would she remember him and have such compassion for him that she would adopt him as her own child? All this happened because God was placing this burden on her heart. She did not realize that she would be raising a child who would eventually be God's instrument to set His people free.

When Moses had grown up he went out to see what was happening to his people. He took note of their afflictions. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave (verse 11). What he saw that day upset Moses greatly. He looked around to see if anyone was watching and attacked and killed the Egyptian for beating that slave. He buried his body in the sand (verse 12). Acts 7:23-25 tells us that Moses' intention here was to be a deliverer for his people.

(23) "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. (24) He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. (25) Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

From this we understand that God had also put a burden on Moses' heart for His people. While he was raised in the luxury of Egypt, his heart was still Hebrew. From a

very early point in his life Moses sensed the call of God to be the deliverer of His people.

Verse 13 tells us that Moses went back the next day and saw two Hebrews fighting. Going over to them he asked them what was wrong and why they were fighting among themselves. Moses did not expect the response he received. The man turned to Moses and said:

“Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?”
(Exodus 2:14)

The response of this Hebrew showed Moses that what he had done in killing the Egyptian was known throughout the Hebrew camp. It would not be long before Pharaoh would hear about what he had done. This meant that Moses would be in serious trouble. More than this, however, the response of the Hebrew indicated that he had no respect for Moses or his leadership. When the man asked, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” he was making a statement. He was telling Moses that he considered him to be his enemy. He was unwilling to submit to his leadership.

Moses had a burden on his heart for his people. He wanted to be their deliverer. He was in a position where he could humanly do something, but the door closed in his face. The Hebrew people (his own people) were not ready for his leadership.

When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he tried to kill him. Moses was forced to flee Egypt. He went to live in the land of Midian, hundreds of miles to the east across the wilderness.

We can only imagine what Moses was thinking as he crossed the wilderness to the land of Midian. He had a heart to deliver his people but God had closed the door. Have you ever experienced the death of a vision? Moses was likely very disappointed and confused. Moses trusted his own wisdom and strength at this point. He believed that he could deliver the people because of his influence and position. God's ways are very different from ours. He was not looking for human strength, wisdom and influence. His plan was far greater than anything Moses could have imagined or done in his own strength.

As Moses crossed the wilderness to Midian, little did he know that God was indeed preparing him for the deliverance of His people. The day would come when God would call him to lead His people through the very desert he was crossing now. God did not explain this to Moses, nor does He always explain to us the reason why we face our own difficulties. We can be sure, however, that in His wisdom, there is no situation God does not use to teach and prepare us for His greater purposes. We often complain about the things that come our way. Instead of complaining, we need to see that God is using each circumstance to accomplish His purpose.

Arriving in Midian, Moses sat down by a well. At that time, seven daughters of a priest in Midian came out to draw water from the well. As they filled their barrels with water, some shepherds came and drove them away. Seeing this, Moses came to their rescue and watered their flocks for them (verse 16-17). This is the second time we see Moses standing up against injustice. Moses seems to have a heart for justice. While this passion for justice needed to be tamed, it was something God would use in his life.

When the girls returned to their father Reuel and told him what had happened, he invited Moses to his home for a meal. Reuel would eventually give Moses his daughter Zipporah to be his wife (verse 21). Zipporah gave Moses a son. He called him Gershom because he was a foreigner in the land of Midian. Gershom sounds like the Hebrew for “an alien there.” Moses knew that this was not his land.

The king of Egypt died while Moses was living in Midian. Israel continued to suffer in their bondage. They cried out to God for help. God heard their cry and remembered His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Verse 25 tells us that God looked on the Israelites and was concerned. It would only be a matter of time now before God would move on their behalf. Moses would play a vital role in ministering to God’s people.

God’s timing is not our timing. Even as the children of Israel were crying out, God was preparing His servant to be their deliverer. In His time, He would call Moses and send him back to his people. While Moses could not presently see or understand this purpose, God was in complete control. He was working out His purposes in answer to the prayers of His people in Egypt.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in this passage of God’s protection on the life of Moses?
- What do we learn about God’s ways? How are God’s ways different from ours? Why do we feel

the need to trust our own wisdom rather than waiting on God?

- Moses' sister waited and watched to see what would happen to her brother and was ready to be used at any moment. Are you ready and watching for opportunities to be used of God?
- Moses mother surrendered her child and walked away, trusting the Lord to minister. Are there things you need to surrender to the Lord today?
- How did Moses trust in his own strength and position here? Do you find yourself trusting your strength and wisdom to do God's work?
- God gave Moses experience in living and travelling through the desert. Moses did not realize that God would use this later in his life. How has God used your past experiences to accomplish His purpose in you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not trusted Him in the circumstances of your life.
- Ask God to keep you from complaining when you face the wilderness in your life. Thank Him for what He is teaching you through these times.
- Are you facing a trial right now? Ask God to make you more ready to wait on Him and trust in His purpose. Thank Him that His purposes are greater than anything you could ever imagine.

- Ask God to give you more of Moses' heart for justice. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have watched things happen without doing anything about it.

3

MOSES IS CALLED

Read Exodus 3:1-22

Moses was living in the land of Midian with his father-in-law Jethro. Notice in Exodus 2:28 that Jethro is also called Reuel. It is uncertain why he is identified with these two names but they are the same person.

Moses tended his father-in-law's sheep. Egyptians despised shepherds. We have a clear example of this in the story of Joseph in Genesis 46.

(33) When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' (34) you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians." (Genesis 46:33-34)

Moses was trained in this mind-set. Now, however, instead of being a prince in Egypt he was a despised shepherd. This, too, was part of God's training in his life.

Moses would be called to shepherd a whole nation and lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. He also needed to be humbled if he was going to be used by God for the deliverance of His people.

One day Moses was tending the sheep of his father-in-law on the far side of desert. He came to the region of Horeb before the mountain of God. Many commentators believe that the reference to the mountain of God is to Mount Sinai where God would speak to Moses later in his life. It was here in the desert, tending sheep that Moses would meet the Lord God. By this time Moses had been greatly humbled. All confidence in himself had been stripped away. His vision for his people seemed in the distant past.

As he tended his father-in-law's sheep, Moses saw a bush that appeared to be on fire (verse 2). The bush, however, was not consumed, though it was filled with flames. This intrigued Moses and he decided to go over to see what was happening (verse 3).

When he approached, he heard a voice speaking from the bush. The voice called out his name, "Moses! Moses!" Moses, hearing the voice, replied, "Here I am" (verse 4).

The voice warned Moses not to come any closer. It told him that he was to take off his sandals because the place he was standing was holy ground. It was holy because the presence of God was there. The removal of the sandals was a cultural way of showing respect for the person he stood before.

God introduced himself in that voice to Moses as the God of his father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moses grew up in the home of Pharaoh's daughter. We do not have any reference to men in Moses' early life. The people of significance to Moses were all women. His mother, his sister and Pharaoh's daughter appear to have raised him. God introduced himself to Moses as the God of his father Abraham. This is significant because it identifies Moses with a family line. Although Moses grew up as an Egyptian, he is identified here with his true Hebrew roots. God saw him as an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It should be remembered that Moses had been rejected by his own people (the Hebrews) before he fled from Egypt (see Exodus 2:14). He had been rejected also by the Egyptians who raised him.

Moses was a stranger in Midian without an identity. When God spoke to him that day, he brought him back to his roots. He showed him that he was an Israelite and was to live as an Israelite. It is easy to underestimate the importance of this in the life of Moses. Without roots, Moses would wander from place to place without purpose. God gave him roots that day. From that point onward, Moses would live as an Israelite with a clear purpose in life. Though the path would be filled with obstacles, Moses would ultimately become one of Israel's most respected leaders.

When God introduced himself to Moses, Moses hid his face because he was afraid. This was an awesome encounter that Moses would not likely forget. God revealed himself to Moses as a voice out of a burning bush. We can only guess at why God would reveal Himself to Moses in this way. There are a couple of things we need to understand from this illustration.

First, God is often compared in Scripture to fire as a symbol of holiness and judgement. The fire in the bush represented God in His holiness and justice.

Second, there was nothing more common and ordinary than a bush. In many ways, Moses was like that bush. He was just an ordinary person with nothing special to offer. It is true that he had been a prince in Egypt but in Midian he was a simple shepherd. Could it be that God was showing Moses what He wanted to do in his life? Was He showing Moses that He wanted to be like this fire in him? God's power and enabling would come to an ordinary person but it would not consume him. He would be an instrument in the hands of God to accomplish His purpose. Back in Egypt, Moses trusted his own strength and wisdom. God was showing him a better way. God would be a fire in him.

Notice from verse 7 that God had seen the misery of His people in Egypt and heard their prayers for help. God was concerned about their suffering (verse 7). In response he called Moses back to Egypt to set His people free (verse 10). He told Moses in verse 8 that He was going to rescue His people and bring them to their own land. That land He would give them was a land of milk and honey. That is to say, it was a fruitful land with all they needed to prosper. Notice also that the land currently belonged to the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. God was going to take this land from these nations and give it to His people. As a sovereign God, everything belongs to Him and He has the right to do with it as He sees fit.

Listen to the response of Moses to what the Lord told him that day. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" he asked in verse 11.

Moses saw himself as a common bush. He did not see himself as anything special. All sense of pride in his own ability had been stripped away after years in the land of Midian. Moses did not feel that he had anything to offer. He failed to understand the fire of God's power and authority in him. He was still looking at himself. He still had much to learn. How easy it is for us to see things in the same way. We look at ourselves and see our weaknesses. We see our lack of power and experience. We need, however, to look beyond ourselves to the fire of God's Spirit burning in us. With that fire in us, nothing is impossible.

In verse 12, the Lord told Moses that, despite his weakness, He would be with him. In other words, God would be like the fire in the bush for him. God told Moses that the day was coming when he and his people would worship Him at the mountain where they were now speaking.

Moses was still not convinced that he was the person to deliver His people. When he left Egypt, the Israelites had rejected him as their leader. His past experience showed him that they were not ready to accept him and his authority. If he was going to do what God was asking him to do, he needed to go with a greater authority than his own. Moses asked God who he should say sent him (verse 13).

God told Moses that he was to tell the people that "I AM" had sent him. How can we describe God? We cannot compare Him to any human being or object. He is beyond description. Everything must be compared to Him. He is the one who always was and always will be. He is the source to which all things owe their existence. He is the ultimate authority to which all must submit and bow. This

is the one who was sending Moses. There could be no greater authority. To reject Moses was to reject the God who sent him. In the event that this was not clear enough for His people, God made things even clearer in verse 15. He told Moses that he was to tell the people that the Lord God of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sent him.

God told Moses that he was to go to the elders of Israel and tell them that the God of their fathers had appeared to him and told him that he had seen what Egypt had been doing to His people. Moses was also to tell them that God would bring them out of Egypt and give them their own land (verses 16-17).

God promised Moses that the elders of Israel would listen to him (verse 18). This may have been one of Moses' concerns as he had experienced rejection while he was in Egypt many years before. God told Moses that he and the elders were to go to the king of Egypt and ask him to let them take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord their God (verse 18). God also explained to Moses that the king would not listen to him unless a heavy hand compelled him (verse 19). God would stretch out His hand and strike Egypt with many miraculous signs. Only after this would the king let them go (verse 20).

There would be resistance to Moses. This resistance, however, would ultimately accomplish God's greater good. God would reveal His power both to His people and to the Egyptian population. Everyone would see that it was by the mighty hand of God that Israel was delivered.

God promised Moses that the day would come when Egypt would be “favourably disposed” toward His people (verse 21). Israel would not leave Egypt empty-handed. The Egyptians would provide them with all they needed for the journey (household articles, silver, gold and clothing).

The work God had called Moses to do would not be easy. In fact, it was impossible in human strength and wisdom. Unless he was empowered and enabled by God, Moses had no hope of being successful in this mission. He was a common bush standing before the most powerful king on the earth. That common bush, however, was going to be filled with the fire of God. In His authority and by His might, great things would happen. God’s people would be free.

Like Moses, we are ordinary and common vessels. We are, however, called, anointed and empowered by God. God does the impossible through ordinary people like you and me. Will you trust Him and step out in obedient faith? You will be surprised at what He will do through you.

For Consideration:

- How was Moses humbled in the desert? Has God ever brought you through circumstances that humbled you?
- God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush. What do you think this burning bush represented? How did this apply to Moses’ life? How does it apply to your life?

- God promised to go with Moses and to empower him in the work He had called him to do. Does God promise the same thing to us today? Have you been willing to step out in obedience?
- How have you experienced God's enabling in your life and ministry?
- While God enabled Moses, the task to which he had been called would not be easy. Why do you suppose God allows us to struggle in our empowerment?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to strip away pride and anything in your life that keeps you from being useful to Him.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to be an empowering fire in you. Ask Him to burn more brightly in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have tried to serve in your own strength and did not trust in His enabling presence.
- Thank the Lord that He is the God of the impossible.

4

MOSES AND AARON LEAVE FOR EGYPT

Read Exodus 4:1-31

In chapter 3 we saw how God called Moses to return to his people in Egypt. God promised to be a fire in him, enabling him to do the ministry to which he had been called. Moses was not convinced that he was the man for the job. His past experience had shown him that the people of Israel would not be quick to accept his authority. In verse 1 Moses questioned God. "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?" he asked.

God had just spoken to Moses through the burning bush. He had revealed Himself to him as the God of his fathers. Moses knew that this God was a powerful God who had done great things. Still he questioned whether God could really use him. How often have we fallen into the same trap? We know that God is powerful and has used many people in the past but we question whether He would ever use *us*. Our expectation of what God can do in others is high but our faith to believe that He will use us is often very small.

God does not become angry at Moses for his doubt. Moses' experience of God, to this point had been very limited. God is patient with him and meets him in his doubt. To help Moses, God gave him three signs.

In verses 2-5 God told Moses to throw his staff on the ground. Moses obeyed and, when he did, the staff turned into a snake. Moses was afraid of it and ran from it (verse 2). God then told Moses to reach out and take the snake by the tail. There are two things we need to see here. First, Moses was afraid of the snake but God was asking him to face his fear. By picking up the snake by the tail God was also asking Moses to trust Him. This was not only a sign for Israel but for Moses as well. Moses was afraid of facing the great snake of Egypt. God was showing him that he was to stand up to that fear and take it by the tail. God would do a miraculous thing through Moses if he would face that fear and trust Him.

How about you? Are you willing to face the things you fear today? Are you willing to trust the Lord to do His wonderful work in you? Will you take your fear by the tail, trusting the Lord to protect and keep?

When Moses picked up the snake it turned back into a staff. God told Moses that He gave him this sign so that when the people of Israel saw it they might believe that the Lord God had appeared to him (verse 5).

God gave Moses a second sign. In verse 6 he told him to put his hand inside his cloak. Moses obeyed. When he took his hand out of his cloak, however, it was leprous. God told him to put it back inside his cloak. When he did, it was healed (verse 7). By this means God was showing Moses and His people that He could take what was unclean and make it clean. Like the hand that was

confined to the cloak, God's people were held in the uncleanness of their slavery in Egypt. God was able to set them free and make them whole again. What God did with Moses hand He could certainly do for His people.

In verse 8 God told Moses that He had given these signs so that the people might believe. If they did not believe the first sign they might believe when he showed them the second. If, however, they did not believe either sign, God gave him yet a third sign. This sign, however, Moses had to take by faith. God told him that he was to take some water from the Nile and pour it on the ground. When he did this the water would become blood on the ground (verse 9). This third sign was a sign of judgement on the land of Egypt. By pouring blood on the ground Moses was declaring to His people that God was going to pour out His wrath on the nation for the blood of His people that they had spilt.

These were very powerful signs and revealed the power of God and His purposes through Moses. Despite these signs, Moses still wrestled with God's call on his life. He still looked at himself and not at God's power in him. In verse 10 he told God that he was slow of speech and tongue. It is difficult to discern whether Moses was saying that he had a natural inability to speak in public or whether he was referring to the language of Egypt. While Moses had grown up in Egypt, he had likely not used that language for forty years. It is quite possible that he had not used the Hebrew language in his forty years in Midian either. He would naturally feel quite awkward ministering in languages that he had not used for so long.

God reminded Moses in verse 11 that He was the God who created the mouth. He gave hearing, sight and enabled speech. He promised to open Moses mouth and

help him to speak. God would give him the words to speak. We have evidence that God did just that. In Acts 7:22 we read that Moses was powerful in speech.

Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

This shows us that God did a wonderful thing in Moses. He gave him the ability to communicate powerfully in the languages of Egypt and Israel. When God calls He will also equip us to do what He calls us to do. The only obstacle is our willingness to trust Him.

Despite the words of God, Moses was still not convinced that he was the man for the job. Not only had all confidence in himself been stripped away but Moses was struggling even to place his confidence in God. He had a hard time accepting the fact that God would use him in the way He was saying. He pleaded with God to send someone else. The vision he had for his people had died many years ago. Moses never thought he would ever return to his people. They had rejected him and his ministry. Egypt had also rejected him. He had become quite comfortable in the simple life of Midian. He pleaded with God now to send someone else (verse 13).

In verse 14 God became angry with Moses. He had given him three signs. He had promised to be with him and give him the words to speak but Moses still could not accept His calling. Despite His anger, the Lord listened to Moses' objection and decided to send his brother Aaron with him. It is interesting to note that God does not object to Moses wanting someone to stand with him in this ministry. His objection is to Moses refusal to accept His calling. God told Moses in verse 14 that Aaron was already on his way to meet him. This leads us to believe

that it was always God's intention that Aaron go with Moses. When Jesus sent out His disciples in Mark 6 He sent them out in pairs.

Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. (Mark 6:7)

This is what He is doing with Moses. He is giving him a partner to stand with him. We should not assume that Aaron only went because Moses refused to go alone. It appears that it was God's intention from the start that Moses have the support of his brother.

God was not only calling Moses but He was also moving in the life of his brother Aaron as well. Aaron was brought up in the hardship of Egypt. He suffered the injustice of slavery. This slavery had become oppressive. We know from Exodus 2:23 that the Israelites began to cry out to God in their agony. We see from Exodus 4:14 that Aaron had somehow escaped from Egypt and was now searching for Moses. Acts 7:30 tells us that Moses had been forty years in the desert of Midian. This means that Aaron and Moses had not likely seen each other for forty years.

Why was Aaron searching for Moses? Was it because he believed that God had a call on his life? Was it because he believed that God wanted to set His people free and Moses was the man to do it? Was he looking for Moses because he believed that he was the answer to the prayers of his people in bondage? In verse 14 God reminds Moses that Aaron could speak well. In other words, he had been living these past forty years in Egypt and spoke fluently both the Hebrew and Egyptian languages. Aaron would be Moses' mouthpiece. He would speak for him to the people and the Egyptian leaders.

God would speak to Moses and Aaron was to share His words with the people.

We should not underestimate the significance of this meeting between Moses and Aaron. It was a very personal sign for Moses that he was the man God had called for the task of delivering His people. Aaron's possible belief that Moses was the man of God for this time may have been a real confirmation to Moses. Certainly the fact that Aaron had come searching for him would have shown Moses that he believed in him. How important it is for us to have people who believe in our ministry and calling. There have been many times in my ministry when these people have encouraged me and enabled me to keep going.

With these words of God ringing in his ears, Moses realized that he had no choice but to obey. Taking his staff with him, he went back to his father-in-law and asked permission to return with his family to Egypt to see if his people were still alive (verse 18). He does not give his father-in-law the details of his mission. Jethro gave his son-in-law his blessing for the journey.

In verse 19 God assured Moses that all the men who had sought to kill him were dead. Again this must have been a reassurance to Moses. With this assurance from God, Moses took his wife and sons and put them on a donkey and started back for Egypt. Notice in verse 20 that he also took the staff of God. This staff was very important as it was a sign of God's authority and power. With it he would do miraculous signs.

After Moses gathered his family and started out on his journey two important things happened. First, the Lord revealed to Moses something of the difficulty that lay

ahead for him. He told Moses in verses 21-23 that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened to what he had to say. He would not let the people go. We can only imagine what Moses felt when he heard these words. Why was he going to Egypt if Pharaoh was not going to let his people go? God did not reveal all the details of His purpose to Moses at this time. He simply reminded him that the task would not be easy. He told Moses that he was going to kill the first born son of Pharaoh. Again, we can only imagine what Moses felt about these words. What would be the response of Pharaoh to the death of his firstborn? Would he respond with anger? Was his life and the life of his family in danger? There were likely many unanswered questions and fears in the heart of Moses as he returned to Egypt.

The second significant event that happened as Moses returned to Egypt is found in verse 24 where we read: "At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met [Moses] and was about to kill him." These words are troubling. What is happening here?

While we do not have all the details of what happened that day some commentators believe that Moses was struck with an illness that could have killed him. Possibly realizing the seriousness of Moses' illness, his wife took a sharp flint knife and circumcised her son. She threw her son's foreskin at Moses' feet calling him a bridegroom of blood.

We need to pause a moment to reflect on these verses. Moses could have died had it not been for his wife's action. The circumcision of his son seemed to save Moses' life. God was showing him through this that he needed to live a certain way now. He was to live as an Israelite and his children were to be brought up as

Israelites. Moses had not circumcised his son as required by the law of God through Abraham. If he was going to minister to his people, Moses needed to follow the law of God and be an example for them to follow. God was also showing Moses, however, that He fully accepted him as one of His people. By leaving the land of Midian he was turning his back on his former life and now identifying with God's people. He would never return to that former life again. He and all his family would become Israelites and follow the God of Israel.

As Moses travelled with his family toward Egypt, the Lord directed Aaron to him. They met at the mountain of God (likely Mount Sinai) where God had called Moses. We can only imagine how joyous that meeting would have been. They greeted each other with a kiss (verse 27) and Moses explained to Aaron what God had been saying to him and how He had given him the miraculous signs to perform before His people in Egypt. The passage does not tell us Aaron's response but we can imagine that he must have been overjoyed to hear that God had been calling Moses back to his own people.

Together, Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and called all the elders of Israel together. When Moses showed the people the signs that God had given him to perform, the people believed. They responded by bowing down to worship the Lord God because He had heard their cry and sent His servants to deliver them.

For Consideration:

- In this passage Moses seems to look at his weaknesses and does not see the power of God at his disposal. Have you ever been guilty of this? What power is available to you today for your ministry and walk with God?
- What is the significance of the sign of the snake? Are their fears in your life that you have to address?
- God gave Moses a partner in ministry? How important is it for us today that we work with others? Has God given you a partner in ministry?
- Why did God give Moses miraculous signs for His people? Are miraculous signs necessary today?
- How did God use Moses' sickness to teach him a lesson? Does God use illness and tragedy today to accomplish His purposes in our lives? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to accept His call on your life without question. Ask Him to help you to trust Him and His purposes.
- What fears do you need to address in your life? Ask God to help you to face those fears in His name.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that despite our failures, He does not give up on us. Thank Him that He wants to use you for His glory.

- Thank the Lord for the people He has put on your path to stand with you in your ministry.
- Ask God to enable you to trust in His power and not in your own strength. Thank Him that He wants to empower and use you for His glory.

5

THINGS HAVE ONLY GOTTEN WORSE

Read Exodus 5:1-6:1

God often works in ways that are strange to us. Sometimes what appears to be tragedy is used of God to accomplish His wonderful plan in our lives. The path to victory sometimes passes through the valley of difficulty and trial. Moses and Aaron would pass through that valley in this chapter.

The initial response of the Israelites was very favourable toward Moses and Aaron. They believed God had sent them and worshipped Him for the deliverance He promised. This must have been very encouraging for Moses and Aaron. We should remember, however, that God had told Moses what Pharaoh's response would be. Listen to what God told him in Exodus 3:18-20:

(18) "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the

LORD our God.’ (19) But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. (20) 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.

As Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh they knew that he would not listen to them. This obviously did not make the rejection any easier.

Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh and asked him permission to take the people of Israel into the desert to hold a festival. We can only imagine the boldness of this request. God’s people had been treated as slaves for years. Their only purpose in the eyes of Pharaoh was to serve his cause. The king feared the Israelites and slaughtered their male children, commanding his people to throw every young male baby into the Nile River. It was not likely that Pharaoh would agree to a “vacation” in the wilderness for his slaves. While God knew what the response of Pharaoh would be, He still sent Moses to speak to him.

Again we understand that God’s ways are different from ours. Not everyone we speak to will accept the message we bring. Pharaoh’s response was predictable, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go” (verse 2).

Moses told Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews had met with them and commanded them to take this journey. Again he asked for permission to take his people for a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord. This time, however, he warned the king of the consequences of not letting them go. Moses told Pharaoh

that if he did not let his people go on this three-day journey into the desert, the Lord would strike the land with plagues and the sword (verse 3).

This was a very bold statement from Moses. The warning, however, did not persuade the king to let the people go. In fact, he told Moses that he was only keeping them from their work (verses 4-5). Pharaoh had no concern for the people of Israel. His only concern was to advance his cause. The Israelites were slaves whose only purpose in Pharaoh's mind was to build his kingdom. Pharaoh refused again to let the people go.

When Moses and Aaron left the presence of Pharaoh that day, Pharaoh gave orders to his slave drivers and foremen. He told them that they were no longer to supply the straw necessary for making bricks. The people were to gather their own straw and produce the same quantity of bricks as before (verses 6-8). He accused them of being lazy and wanting to get out of work (verse 8).

Pharaoh's intention was to make the people even busier so they would not have time to listen to Moses and Aaron. Notice in verse 9 that Pharaoh believed Moses' words to be lies. He did not believe Moses to be a true prophet and rejected his God.

As a result of Pharaoh's command, the people spread out over all the countryside looking for stubble (verse 12). Stubble is usually the short stalks left after a harvest. The fact that the Israelites were gathering stubble is an indication of how desperate they were. They were looking for anything they could find to meet the quota. They were going over fields that had already been harvested in order to gather anything they could use as straw. Despite their efforts, they were not able to meet Phar-

Pharaoh's daily requirements. The Egyptians beat the Israelite foremen because the people were not meeting their quota of bricks (verse 14). Life for God's people became even more difficult.

We are left to wonder why God would allow His people to struggle. Instead of easing their load, God allowed it to become unbearable. Again we see that God's ways are very different from ours. God had a purpose in this suffering and pain. He would deliver His people but that deliverance would come through great hardship. There were lessons to learn. God's people needed to be prepared for what was ahead of them. The path to the Promised Land would be difficult. They needed to learn how to trust the Lord in new ways. They needed to understand how great and powerful their God was if they were going to embark on the journey to freedom.

God must stretch us before He uses us in greater ways. This is what is happening here. God is training His people for what was ahead. Are you facing trials in your life as a believer? Be assured that God is in control and that He is preparing you for His greater purpose.

The Israelite foremen did not understand why Pharaoh was making such impossible demands of their people. They went to the king to ask him why he was treating them in this way. They told him that they could not possibly meet his quota if they had to gather their own straw. Pharaoh was not sympathetic to their "excuses." He told them that he believed the only reason they were asking for time to go into the desert to offer sacrifices to their God was to get away from their work. He told the foremen that he believed them to be lazy people and commanded them to get back to work and meet his quota (verses 17-18).

Pharaoh's response to the foremen helped them understand why he had made such unreasonable requests of them. Moses and Aaron were responsible for this hardship. They also knew they were in serious trouble because they could not possibly meet the quota of bricks required by Pharaoh (verse 19).

Leaving the presence of Pharaoh, the foremen found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them (verse 20). We are not told why Moses and Aaron wanted to meet the foremen. When the foremen met Moses and Aaron they told them, "You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us" (verse 21).

We can only imagine how difficult this would have been to Moses and Aaron. Moses in particular had experienced this same rejection in the past. It was one thing to be rejected by Pharaoh and quite another to be accused of putting a sword in his hand to kill their own people. This would have been a tremendous discouragement for Moses and Aaron. Their own people had rejected them.

The pain of this rejection was particularly hard for Moses. In verses 22-23 he cried out to the Lord:

"O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? (23) Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

It is one thing to experience personal failure. When that failure, however, affects others it makes it even more difficult to bear. Moses realized that what the Israelites were saying was true. His presence had caused more

hardship for them. Things had indeed become worse since he arrived. He had no response for the people. He was left to wonder about God's plan. His cry to God was a cry for answers. Moses was asking difficult questions. Why have you done this Lord? Why have you sent me to this people if things are only getting worse? Why am I seeing no fruit for my efforts? Would it not have been better for me to stay in Midian?

Who among us has not asked similar questions? Have you ever questioned God's purpose for your life and ministry? Moses was living in obedience to the Lord here. He was doing exactly what God had told him to do. While he was not seeing fruit in the moment, God still had a plan in all that was happening.

I want to conclude this chapter with the first verse of chapter 6. God listened to Moses cry and responded in Exodus 6:1:

(6:1) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."

God told Moses that He was going to do a great thing. He was going to extend His hand and force Pharaoh to let His people go. These words from God must have been a tremendous blessing for Moses. God was going to work out His plan. He was going to use him to deliver His people. He was going to do this with mighty power. Moses was God's instrument despite this perceived setback.

Are you experiencing difficulty and struggle in your ministry today? Lift up your eyes and see the great God

of Moses. He is not finished yet. He is only beginning His work. Wait on Him and His time. You will see Him breakthrough in power.

For Consideration:

- Will people always respond favourably to our message? Why do you suppose God sends us to people who will not listen?
- Why do you suppose God allowed things to become more difficult for His people? What lessons did His people need to learn at this time? What lessons has God taught you in times of trouble and difficulty?
- What was the response of Moses to the Israelite foremen? Have you ever questioned God's plan for your life and ministry? Explain.
- Can we ever fully understand the ways of God? What role does faith play in these times?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful even when you are seeing no fruit for your labours.
- Thank the Lord that He teaches us many valuable lessons in the times of trial and difficulty. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to His call in these times.

- Thank the Lord that even when we do not understand His ways, He is still Lord. Thank Him that He is still in control.

6

THE CREDENTIALS OF MOSES AND AARON

Read Exodus 6:1-30

In the last chapter we saw what happened when Moses and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh. His reaction was to make the burden of God's people heavier. Pharaoh forced them to gather up their own straw to make bricks without reducing the quota that was to be produced each day. This was a tremendous hardship for the people of Israel. As a result, they turned against Moses and Aaron. When Moses spoke to God about this, God replied in Exodus 6:1 by telling him that He was going to move in power and reveal His mighty hand. God told Moses that Pharaoh would drive Israel out of his country.

In verse 3 God reminded Moses that He was the Lord (Jehovah). This name was so holy to the Jews that they refused even to pronounce it. Notice in verse 3 that God told Moses that He had appeared to his fathers as God Almighty but He never made Himself known to them as Lord (Jehovah). It is difficult to know exactly what God was telling Moses at this time but it is clear that He was about to reveal Himself in a new way. He had been a distant and Almighty God to his ancestors but now He

would be known personally by name. As Moses embarked on this great adventure, God promised to reveal Himself to him and His people in a new way. He would speak to Moses as a friend. Moses would come to see God and know Him in a way that even his ancestors had never known Him.

Who is God to you today? Do you need a fresh vision of Him for the task to which He has called you? God reveals Himself in different ways to us at different times in our lives. Sometimes in our discouragement we need to see Him as our great comforter. In times of great need, we gain a fresh vision of Him as our provider and security. When we don't understand what He is doing, we can see Him as our counsellor, guide and shepherd. We will never fully understand God and His ways but He will reveal Himself to us as the God of every situation we face. Sometimes He even allows us to face circumstances in life just to reveal Himself in a new and fresh way to us. What situation are you facing in life today? What does God want to teach you about Himself in your situation?

Not only did God tell Moses that He would reveal Himself to him in a deeper way but He also reminded him of the covenant promise He had made to his fathers. He had promised to give them the land of Canaan (verse 4). God always keeps His promises. As Moses embarked on this great journey, he had the assurance of God's promise that would never fail. Neither Pharaoh nor any other enemy could take away what God had promised.

Notice also what God told Moses in verse 5. God saw what the Egyptians were doing to His people, and He heard their groaning. His heart of compassion and justice was moved for them and He had determined to bring His people out of their bondage and reveal Himself to them

as a just and compassionate God (verses 6-7). Moses could rely on the character of God. God would bring justice and show love, mercy and compassion to His people. Moses knew this to be the character of God. The enemy would not prevail because God had seen the misery of His people and would have compassion on them. Evil would never triumph because God was a God of justice.

God gave Moses a three-fold assurance. First, He told him that He would reveal Himself in a fresh way as he stepped out in obedience. Second, he had the promises of God that could never fail. Finally, he had the knowledge of the compassionate and just character of God. He would never forget His people or leave them to be overcome by evil.

In verse 9 Moses told the Israelites what God had promised him, but they refused to listen because of their oppression. They did not have any confidence in Moses or his leadership. This lack of confidence hurt Moses. When God told him to go to Pharaoh a second time in verse 11, Moses hesitated. Notice his response in verse 12:

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

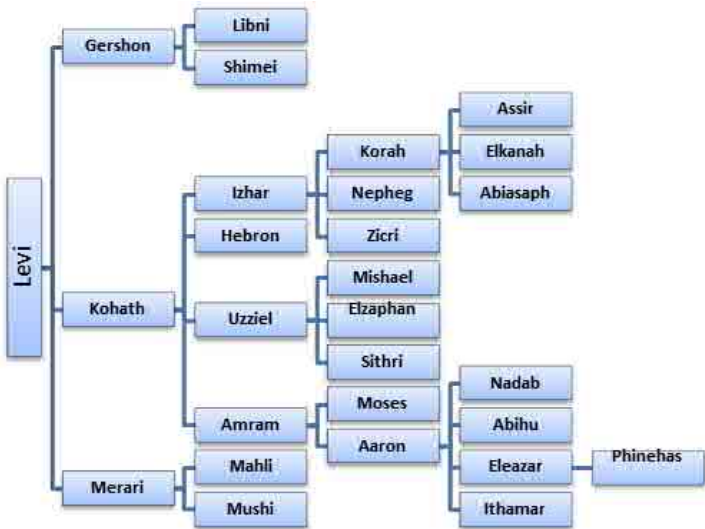
The response of the people had discouraged Moses. This passage does show us how our response can affect someone else. I have seen people discouraged or hindered in their service of God because of how fellow believers responded to them. While he had the promises of God to back him, Moses still hesitated because he did not have the support and encouragement of his own

people. We all need support, encouragement and people to believe in us and the ministry to which God has called us.

While his people did not support him, God still expected Moses to go to Pharaoh. Our friends and loved ones may not stand with us. We may not have the confidence of those to whom God has called us to minister but God's calling still remains. It is for us to be obedient and leave these matters to God.

Verses 14-30 show us the family line of Moses and Aaron. Mention is briefly made in verse 14 and 15 of the lines of Reuben and Simeon, possibly because they were older than Levi. The focus of these verses, however, is the line of the tribe of Levi of which Moses and Aaron were part.

The following chart describes the family line of Levi. Notice that the focus of this line is Levi's son Kohath. The names mentioned in the list are very selective.



Verses 26-27 seem to show us the significance of this genealogy. Mention is specifically made of Aaron and Moses. The phrase “it was this same Aaron and Moses” is repeated twice in these verses showing us that the purpose of this genealogy was to trace the line of Moses and Aaron as descendants of Levi.

Notice as we conclude that Moses was not qualified for the task of delivering his people because of anything in himself or because he came from such an important family. Verse 30 makes it clear that Moses questioned God saying: “Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?” Even though he came from such an important family line, Moses’ faith was weak and he knew that he did not have any natural ability that qualified him for the task. All of his qualifications were in God and His choice to use him.

How quick we are to judge people on the basis of their human abilities or family. God does not see people in this way. He will use even the weakest among us to accomplish great purpose.

For Consideration

- How is God revealing himself to you? What part of His nature is He showing you today in your situation?
- What promises of God bring you hope and encouragement in your life situation today?
- What do we know about the character of God? How does knowing God's character bring courage and strength in difficult times?
- How does the response of people toward us hinder or encourage us in ministry? Have you ever felt hindered in your ministry because of the response of people toward you?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your eyes to see Him in a new way? Ask Him to teach you more about Himself through the situations you are currently facing.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful promises that give us hope and comfort. Take a moment to thank Him for one of those promises in particular.

- Thank the Lord for who He is and how this reassures us in difficult times.
- Ask God to give you courage to obey even when people do not respond well to your ministry. Ask Him to help you to be a blessing and encouragement to someone else in their ministry.
- Thank the Lord that He does not need us to be strong or powerful for Him to use us. Thank Him that He uses us as we are and changes us into the people He wants us to be.

7

NO COMPROMISE

Exodus 7:1-8:32

In the last chapter we saw how God promised to reveal Himself to Moses in a new way. He promised to empower and provide for him as he stepped out in obedience to His call. We should not assume from this that things would be easy. God's empowerment and presence do not remove the struggles or difficulties in ministry. Those who know His presence and empowering must also prepare themselves to face the enemy. As we examine the story of Moses we will see that he had to face great opposition as he sought to live in obedience to God's plan for his life.

As we begin chapter 7, God commands Moses to go to Pharaoh. Notice that God told him that He would make him like God to Pharaoh and Aaron would be His prophet. In other words, God would give Moses special powers to do great miracles. Moses would hear from God and communicate what he heard to his brother Aaron. Aaron would speak these words to Pharaoh. It is interesting to note that Moses does not seem to have freedom to speak. It may be that he is still struggling with this inability to communicate in a language he has not spoken in many years.

In verse 3 God told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so he would not listen to him. This brings up an important question. Why would God send Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and then harden his heart so that he would not listen to them? The reason is found in verses 4-5. God told Moses that he would do great signs and wonders in Egypt. God's purpose was not only to deliver His people but also to show His power. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart gave God opportunity to show the Egyptians that He was a great and mighty God. By this power He would judge the nation of Egypt and punish them for the evil they had done to Israel. He would also, by those same miracles, reveal His grace and power to His own people.

Remember that whole generations of Israelites had lived in slavery. They had not seen God moving in power for many years. They needed to see God in a new way. They needed to know His power as they set out on their journey. They needed to see His justice and His mercy. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart had a purpose. It would reveal God and His character to His people and to the Egyptians in a new and powerful way. In the end, the Egyptians would know that the God of Israel was the true God (verse 5).

Even in the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, God was in control. He would use his rejection of Moses and Aaron to accomplish His purpose. The world would see His power and justice. God's people would be encouraged and equipped to face the journey back to the land He had promised. With this assurance, Moses, at the age of eighty and Aaron at the age of eighty-three, went to speak to Pharaoh on behalf of their people.

As God said, Pharaoh would not listen to them. God told Aaron to cast his rod down to the ground. When he did, it became a serpent, proving that they had been empowered by God and came in His authority (verses 8-10). When Pharaoh saw the miracle, he called his wise men, sorcerers and magicians. They threw their rods down to the ground and they also became serpents. What is interesting to note, however, is that Aaron's rod (serpent) swallowed their rods. This showed Pharaoh whose power was greater. Despite this sign, Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses and Aaron.

In verse 14 the Lord told Moses to return to Pharaoh. Notice that Moses was to wait for him on the bank of the Nile when he was going out for water. Moses was to take his staff with him (the one that had turned into a snake). When he met Pharaoh he was to tell him that the Lord God of the Hebrews had sent him. There are three important details we need to see in these verses.

Notice first that Moses is sent by God and went to Pharaoh in response to His leading. How easy it is for us to take matters into our own hands. We catch a vision and we do everything we can in our power to make it happen. Moses is led by the Lord God in what he is doing here. He went because the Lord God Almighty had led him.

Notice secondly that Moses was to take his rod with him. The rod that God had given him was no ordinary rod. It was a symbol of the power and authority God had given him. Special mention is made of the fact that this was the rod that had turned into a snake when it was cast down. Moses was to take the rod of God's empowering with him as he went to see Pharaoh. Today the empowering of God is in the person of the Holy Spirit. As we step out in

obedience we must not only do so in the leading of God but also with His enabling power.

God gave Moses directions that day. He was to go and wait for Pharaoh in a specific place and at a specific time. Moses needed to be sensitive to the leading of the Lord God for each situation. God was very specific. He told Moses to go to a particular place on the Nile where Pharaoh went for water. He told him the time he was to go. These details were important and yet how often do we trust more in our own wisdom than in the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moses needed to be sensitive to the specific leading of God.

Finally, God told Moses that he was to tell Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews had sent him. It was important that Pharaoh knew who was sending Moses. How easy is it for us to live our lives but never let people know that we are believers? We can be friendly to our neighbours and love them as God would have us to love them but do they know that we are followers of Jesus? Are we ashamed to let people know that we are Christians? As Moses went he was to identify himself as the servant of God, called by God, led by God and empowered by God to speak to Pharaoh.

Moses told the king that it was the will of God that His people go out into the desert to worship. He reminded Pharaoh that despite the former sign given to him, he had refused to listen (verse 16). Moses told Pharaoh that God would give him another sign. God then told Moses to strike the water of the Nile River and it would be turned to blood. The fish in the river would die and the river would smell of these dead fish. The Egyptians would not be able to drink the water. God then told Moses to stretch out his rod so that all the water in the land would turn to

blood. The water in the streams, canals, ponds, reservoirs, wooden buckets and stone jars also turned to blood (verse 19). Verse 21 tells us that there was blood everywhere in the land. The Egyptians had no water to drink. We can only imagine the impact of this on the people of the land. What this world has to offer is like that water turned to blood. It cannot satisfy the real thirst of the human heart. Only through obedience to God and submission to His purposes can we know satisfaction in our hearts and lives.

What is particularly strange in this passage is that when Pharaoh called his magicians to his side, they too were able, by their magic arts, to turn water into blood. Because they could do what God had done through Moses, Pharaoh returned to his palace rejecting the words of Moses. Verse 24 tells us that the people had to dig wells to get drinking water. From this it appears that only the surface water was affected. This went on for seven days (verse 25).

In chapter 8 the Lord again called Moses to speak to Pharaoh. While Moses was obedient to the Lord God and His leading, Pharaoh still refused to listen. Obedience to God does not guarantee success in our human way of thinking.

Some time ago I was writing in a coffee shop close to my home. After about two and a half hours I was finishing off a chapter when my computer crashed. I lost all the work I had done over those few hours. My first response was, "Lord, why did this happen?" As I prayed about this, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "Wayne, have you been obedient?" I reflected on this for a moment and realized that God had called me to write and that is exactly what I had been doing. I did not have anything to show for my

morning's work but I could at least return home knowing that I had done what God had called me to do. That thought changed my attitude. I walked home that morning with a sense of victory. I had done what God had called me to do.

The rejection of Moses was not without reason. By this rejection God would reveal His power to both Egypt and His people. What we need to understand, however, is that God's ways are very different from our ways. What we perceive as failure may in reality be great victory. What is important for us is not to focus on the fruit but on being obedient to the call of God on our lives.

There was a cost to pay for Pharaoh's disobedience. Moses told him in Exodus 8:2 that if he refused to obey, the whole country would be filled with frogs. These frogs would be found in the palace, in the bedrooms, beds, oven and kneading troughs of the people of Egypt. We can only imagine how difficult this would have been to have these unclean animals everywhere in the land. While Moses spoke to Pharaoh, Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters and the frogs came up and covered the land (verse 6).

Note in verse 6 that it was Aaron who took the rod of God and stretched it over the waters. This shows us that the power to do the miracles was not in Moses but in the Lord God. The rod that they carried was a symbol of the power of God that was with them both. How easy it is to believe that if it weren't for us God would have no way of accomplishing His purpose. This passage shows us that God can use anyone He sees fit. Aaron also could use the rod of God's power. It was not limited to Moses. Our confidence should not be in ourselves but in the Lord God and His enabling power.

Notice again that Pharaoh's magicians were able to repeat the same miracle by their secret arts (8:5). It is important that we note that the ability to do miracles does not guarantee that we are from God. To this point, the magicians who did not know or serve the God of the Hebrews were able to do all the miracles Moses did. We need to be careful not to be deceived by the signs and wonders done through the power of Satan. He too is able to do "wonders." You can be sure that he will do his best to deceive in this way. Pharaoh was unwilling to turn to the God of the Hebrews as long as his magicians could repeat the same miracles.

From Exodus 8:8 we understand that the plague of frogs did have an impact on Pharaoh. He called for Moses and Aaron and asked them to pray to the Lord their God to take them away. He even promised that he would let the people go to offer sacrifices to their God. So that Pharaoh would have a clear understanding that this was from God, Moses asked him to choose the time for him to pray. God would cause the plague to stop at that very hour. In this way, Pharaoh and all the people would know that the Lord God had done this in answer to prayer. Exodus 8:12-14 tells us that when Moses cried out to the Lord God, the frogs died in the houses, courtyard and fields throughout the land. They were gathered up and piled in heaps. Verse 14 tells us that the whole land stunk with the smell of the rotting frogs.

When Pharaoh saw that the plague of frogs was over, he hardened his heart. He did not keep his word to Moses and again refused to let the people go. This shows us something of Pharaoh's character. He was not a man of his word.

After Pharaoh's refusal to keep his word, the Lord God again spoke to Moses and told him to stretch out his staff and strike the ground so that gnats would rise up from the dust. These insects would be all over the land. They would afflict the animals and the people. Notice in verse 18 that this time when the Egyptian magicians tried to repeat this miracle they were unable to do so (Exodus 8:18). When they saw that they were unable to reproduce the miracle that Moses had done, the magicians told Pharaoh that it was the "finger of God" that had done this. While the magicians were convinced the hand of God was in this, Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

In reality Pharaoh was taking his stand against God. There are many people like this in our day. Even when they know what is right they refuse to obey. They willingly shake their fist at God and challenge Him. Knowing they cannot win, they still defend their sins and evil lifestyle. This is the attitude of Satan. He knows he is defeated but refuses to surrender.

God told Moses in Exodus 8:20 to go again to see Pharaoh in the morning as he was going for water. He was to ask him again to let His people go or he would send swarms of flies on the land. Notice in Exodus 8:22-23 that God would deal differently with His people in the land of Goshen. They would be free from this plague. The flies would not be in part of the land. This would show Pharaoh and his people that the Lord's favour was on the Hebrews.

Exodus 8:24 tells us that the land was ruined by flies. Once again Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. When they arrived, he told them that they could sacrifice to the Lord their God but they were to do so in the land of Egypt. Moses refused to compromise. He told Pharaoh

that the sacrifices they were to offer were detestable to the Egyptians. They required a three-day journey into the desert to make their sacrifices as the Lord had commanded. How easy it would have been to settle for a partial victory. Moses could have offered the sacrifices in the land. He could also have chosen to do these sacrifices in a way that was not offensive to the Egyptians. To do this, however, would have been contrary to the will of the Lord God. Moses would not settle for anything less than complete obedience to the command of God.

In our day how easy it is for us to settle for partial victories. The message of the gospel is watered down so that it is not offensive to the unbeliever. Lifestyle is compromised so that it is more acceptable to the worldly minds of our friends and co-workers. God is calling us to absolute obedience. Moses would not accept a partial answer from Pharaoh.

Moses told Pharaoh that he would pray to the Lord God to remove the flies when he left Pharaoh's presence (Exodus 8:29). He warned him not to trick them again by going back on his word. As soon as Moses prayed and the flies left the land, however, Pharaoh again hardened his heart and refused to let the people go

Moses and Aaron struggled as they walked in obedience to the call of God on their lives. Their ministry was not an easy one. They wrestled with a Pharaoh who wanted to see them compromise and settle for less than God's purpose. They persevered in what God had called them to do and despite the many obvious setbacks they would see the victory of God as they walked in obedience.

For Consideration:

- What did the hardness of Pharaoh's heart accomplish in the lives of God's people? How did He use this to reveal His glory?
- Why do you suppose God's people needed to see His power? How would this have helped them as they left Egypt and faced the wilderness?
- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of following the leading of the Lord God and walking in His empowering? Have you ever tried to serve God in your own strength and wisdom? What was the result?
- Are signs and wonders always in indication of God's presence? What do we learn in this passage about the ability of the magicians to duplicate the signs Moses gave to Pharaoh?
- Faithfulness is demonstrated more in obedience than in success. Do you agree with this statement? How was this true in the life of Moses?
- Moses was unwilling to compromise. Have you ever been tempted to compromise in your walk with the Lord? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He can use even the difficult things that come our way to accomplish His purpose in our lives.
- Ask God to help you to walk in obedience to Him and His commands. Ask Him to give you grace not to compromise or settle for anything less than His perfect will.
- Do you know someone like Pharaoh, whose heart is hardened to the things of God? Take a moment to pray that the Lord God would break the hardness of their heart.
- Ask God to help you to be obedient even when you don't seem to have anything to show for your obedience. Ask Him to help you to focus more on being obedient than on the fruit you produce.

8

PHARAOH CONTINUES TO RESIST GOD

Read Exodus 9:1-35

God has been speaking to Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron. The king's heart has been hardened to what God was saying. God challenged Pharaoh to let His people go but Pharaoh refuse. Each time God called Moses and Aaron to return to Pharaoh He sent them with confirming signs. These signs proved that the words they spoke were not their own but God's. In Exodus 9-10 God continued to demonstrate His power through the signs He performed in Egypt. Remember that the people of God had lived for many years in slavery. They may have wondered where God was in this time. They had likely not seen the wonders their fathers had often spoken of in days gone by. God was returning to His people in a new way. Through the signs He was performing in the land, He was showing His people who He was and that He had not forsaken them.

As we begin Exodus 9, the Lord told Moses to return to Pharaoh and ask him again to let His people go so that they might worship Him. This time the Lord told Pharaoh that if he continued to hold His people back, He would

send a terrible plague on the livestock of the land. That plague would affect his horses, donkeys, camels, cattle and goats. Notice, however, that there would be a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt (9:4). No animal belonging to an Israelite would die. It would be clear from this that the Lord was punishing Egypt for the hardness of Pharaoh's heart.

Just as the Lord had said, the very next day the Egyptian livestock died. When Pharaoh sent his men to investigate the situation they found that not a single Israelite animal died. We can only imagine the devastating consequences this would have had on Egypt. It would be obvious that the hand of the Lord God of Israel was in this. His hand was against Egypt. Notice in Exodus 9:7 that despite this very obvious blow to the economy of the land, Pharaoh's heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

How important it is for us to understand that signs and wonders are not sufficient to convince a heart to accept the Lord and His purpose. While the signs were obvious in Egypt, Pharaoh's heart remained hard. The human heart needs more than some external sign; it needs to be transformed from the inside by the power of God. The greatest miracle of all is the softening of the human heart to hear and receive the Word of God.

Notice in Exodus 9:8-12 that when the death of the Egyptian livestock does not soften the heart of Pharaoh, God told Moses to take handfuls of soot from a furnace and toss them into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. When he did so, God caused festering boils to break out on the men and animals that remained in the land. Even the magicians who stood with Pharaoh at that time were unable to stand before Moses because they were filled with painful boils. This plague touched the physical

bodies of the people of the land. Pharaoh still hardened his heart to the purpose of God (Exodus 9:12).

Notice what is happening in this chapter. The curse of God is falling on the land of Egypt because Pharaoh refused to listen to the Word of God. The same thing happens in our day. How often has the blessing of God been removed from our land and our churches because we have refused to walk in God's ways and listen to His Word? The whole land of Egypt was being destroyed for one reason alone. They were not listening to the Lord God. Their refusal to listen to the Lord God brought a great curse on their land, death to their livestock and now their physical bodies were affected. We are left to wonder what effect disobedience to God's purpose has on our nations today.

In Exodus 9:13 the Lord told Moses to get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh. Moses was to tell the king that God would send a plague on him, his officials and the people of the land so that they would know that there was no God like the Lord God in all the earth (9:14). God reminded Pharaoh that day that while He could have sent a plague that would have wiped out him and his entire nation of the earth He had chosen to show mercy so that all the people of the earth would see His power and recognize Him as the one true God. It is interesting to note that God chose to reveal Himself in this way by humbling the greatest nation on the earth. With all their strength and power, they were no match for God. They could not protect themselves from Him and His wrath.

Moses told Pharaoh that by the same time the next day He would send a hailstorm that would fall on the land. This hailstorm would be the worst storm the nation had ever seen. God warned them to find a shelter because

any animal or human being that was not properly sheltered would die (9:19).

Those who feared the word of the Lord went immediately and brought in their slaves and the livestock that remained. There were, however, those who ignored what Moses said and left their slaves and livestock in the fields (9:20-21). When Moses stretched out his hand to the sky the hail fell on the land. The hail was accompanied by thunder and lightning that flashed down to the ground (9:23). This was the worst storm Egypt had ever seen and was a visible demonstration of the wrath of the Lord God of Israel. The hail beat down over the land, stripping the trees of their leaves and devastating the crops and vegetation. Notice in particular that the only place it did not hail was where the children of God were living in Goshen (9:26). God's people were protected throughout the storm.

When Pharaoh saw the devastation caused by this storm he called for Moses and Aaron and confessed that he had sinned against God. He asked them to pray to the Lord to take away this storm. He promised that in return he would let the people go (9:28).

Moses told Pharaoh that he would spread out his hands in prayer to the Lord God when he left the city. At that point the thunder and the hail would stop. Moses was not deceived, however; he knew that there was still more work to be done before the heart of Pharaoh and his officials were softened (see Exodus 9:30). Notice the reference in verses 31-32 to the fact that while the flax and barley had been destroyed, the wheat and the spelt were still alive and would ripen later. By this, we are led to believe that as long as there was any chance they could survive, Pharaoh and his men would persist in their

disregard for God and His purpose. Moses knew that Pharaoh and his officials would resist to the very end. There are people like this today. It seems that the only way the Lord can get their attention is to strip away every hope this world has to offer them. Until He does so, they will continue to resist Him.

As promised, when Moses left the city that day, he spread out his hands in prayer to the Lord God. God stopped the thunder and hail. As soon as Pharaoh and his officials saw that the storm had stopped, they again hardened their hearts and would not let the people of Israel go.

God is giving Pharaoh and his officials every chance to repent. This chapter shows us just how hard the human heart can be. Pharaoh and his officials would resist God to the end and ultimately pay the consequence of disobedience. Their hearts would never be softened to the things of God. They gave in because of the hardship they endured, but their hearts remained untouched.

As I examine this passage, I stand amazed at the fact that the Lord God would soften my heart to the things of His Word. This is a miracle of grace. Were it not for His special work in my life, I too would have been like Pharaoh and his officials and perished in rebellion against God.

How important it is for us to understand that success in evangelism does not depend on us but on God. Moses obeyed the Lord's prompting. He demonstrated great signs and wonders in the name of the Lord God and yet the heart of Pharaoh remained hard to the very end. We, too, can walk in the power of God's Spirit and move in obedience but unless God touches the hearts of those to

whom we minister, all our efforts to win them will fail. God alone can change a heart.

For Consideration:

- How does God treat His people differently from those who do not belong to Him? What are the blessings of being a believer today? What do we have that the unbeliever does not have?
- What is the connection in this passage between disobedience to God and His Word and the curses in the land? Is this still true in our day? Are we living under a curse because our nation has turned its back on God and His purposes? Explain.
- What was Pharaoh's motivation for making a promise to obey God in this chapter? Are there motivations that do not come from the heart?
- What does it take to change a human heart? Why do you suppose God softened your heart to His Word and His purpose?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for some specific blessings you have received as a believer.
- Ask God to help you to remain soft to His Word and obedient to His purpose for your life.

- Thank the Lord that He softened your heart even though it was the same sinful heart that Pharaoh had.
- Ask God to give you a greater desire to serve Him. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have not listened to Him and followed His Word.

9

THE PLAGUE CONTINUES

Read Exodus 10:1-29

The judgment of God continued on the land of Egypt. Notice in verse 1 that the Lord told Moses that He had hardened the heart of Pharaoh and His officials. This is a difficult concept to understand. Why would the Lord God harden someone's heart and then judge them for it? Did Pharaoh really have any other option but to resist God and His purposes if God was hardening his heart? Let me make several points here in an attempt to resolve this matter.

First, in order to understand what God is saying we need to understand the human heart. Genesis 6:5 shows us the nature of the heart when it says:

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

From this we understand that the human heart, in its natural state, is evil and rebels against God and His purpose. Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah had to say about the heart in Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

In other words, there is nothing more deceitful in the world than the human heart. Notice in this verse that the prophet Jeremiah saw the human heart to be beyond cure.

Jesus tells us something about the nature of the heart in Matthew 15:19 when He said:

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

The human heart has imagined all kinds of evil. Every evil that this world has known has had its root in the sinful human heart.

Having understood the nature of our heart there is another important detail we need to understand in this context. The apostle makes it quite clear in James 1:13-14 that God never tempts anyone to sin:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Maybe you have met individuals who have told you that the Lord God led them to do something that was contrary to His will. We know from what James tells us that this is not possible. God will never lead us to do something that is contrary to His will. When the Lord Jesus was accused

of doing His miracles in the power of Satan, He quickly told the religious leaders that no kingdom divided against itself could possibly stand (see Mark 3:22-26).

Any interpretation of this passage must begin and end with these two important details. First, the human heart is sinful and second, that God is holy and will never tempt us to sin. What does it mean for God to harden a heart? What happens to the earth when there is no rain? Does it not become hard and cracked? What happens to the human heart when God does not pour out His love and grace into it? Does it not also become hard and cracked? All it takes for the human heart to become hard is for God to withdraw His presence. This seems to be what the Lord God is doing here. He is removing His restraining presence from Pharaoh and his officials and leaving them to their natural ways. God did not cause them to sin or resist His word. They did this of their own free will and would be responsible for their decision.

Notice that God would use the hardness of Pharaoh's heart to perform His miraculous signs so that His people would understand His power and grace (see verses 1-2). The work of God in those days demonstrated His power. Those who saw this power would tell their children and grandchildren the wonderful way in which the Lord God delivered them from the power of Pharaoh.

In verse 3 Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh and asked him how long he would continue to refuse to listen to the Lord God and let the Hebrews go. They told him this time that if he did not let their people go, God would send locusts onto the land. These locusts would be so plentiful that they would cover the surface of the ground. They would devour what the hail had left. This plague of locusts would not be like anything they had ever seen in

the history of the nation. The land had been devastated. The cattle and animals of the land had been killed. The crops of the fields had been destroyed by the hail. Now the green leaves would be eaten off the trees of the fields. The nation would be bare and empty. People were beginning to die of starvation. Disease and sickness was spreading throughout the land. Rotting corpses of dead animals were decaying and emitting their foul odours. This was a land in crisis. Soon even more devastation would be upon them.

When Moses left, Pharaoh's officials asked him how long he would let Moses be a snare to them. They were seeing the effects of the plagues on the land and their economy. They had come to realize that they could not resist the God of the Hebrews. While losing their Hebrew slaves would have been disastrous, not obeying the God of Moses would certainly bring an end to their nation. Notice in verse 7 what they said to Pharaoh: "Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?" Pharaoh's officials were now counselling him to let the people of God go to worship their God. There seems to be a certain tone of frustration in their voices as they speak to Pharaoh. They challenged him and the hardness of his heart.

Moses and Aaron were called back to Pharaoh. Pharaoh told them that they could go to worship the Lord their God. Before letting them go, however, he asked Moses who would be going with him (verse 8). Moses told Pharaoh that he would take the young and the old as well as their flocks and herds.

When Pharaoh heard that he was taking everyone with him he was afraid. He accused Moses of evil. In other words, he believed that Moses and the people would escape and never return to Egypt. He told Moses,

therefore, that he could go with the men to worship the Lord but he was to leave the women and children behind. Moses refused Pharaoh's request and leaving his presence stretched out his hands over Egypt. God sent the locusts he had warned Pharaoh about. These locusts came in a wind that blew across the land all that day and night. When morning came the country was filled with great numbers of them. Verse 15 tells us that they filled the land until it was black. These locusts devoured the vegetation of the land. They ate everything growing on the trees. Verse 15 tells us that "nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt." We can only imagine the impact this would have had on the nation.

When Pharaoh saw what had happened to his land, he quickly called for Moses and Aaron. He confessed that he had sinned against the Lord and against his servants. He begged them to forgive his sin and pray that the Lord would take the plague away. Moses did pray and the Lord sent a very strong wind that carried the locusts out to the sea. Not a single locust was left in the land. When Pharaoh saw this he again hardened his heart and refused to let the people go (verse 20).

It is important that we consider the repentance of Pharaoh in this passage. Pharaoh no doubt realized that he had done wrong. He saw the consequences of his actions in the devastation of his country. He could, no doubt, hear the cries of despair from his people who would have been suffering worse than him. He also knew that the God of Moses was speaking to him. He saw the power of God. He knew he was wrong to disregard the commands of God through Moses. There was a sense in which these things grieved him and he knew that the only way to get out of this mess was to repent and make things right with Moses and his God. What we see from

Pharaoh, however, was that as soon as the plague stopped, he returned to his old ways. We understand from this that his confession was did not come from his heart but was simply a means of getting out of his problems.

These kinds of confessions are practical in nature. Those who confess, recognize their error and realize that if they don't confess their sins and failures things will only get worse. They confess to make things better and easier for themselves but deep down inside they have no real grief for what they have done nor do they have any real desire to make a change. This was the nature of Pharaoh's confession. The moment things returned to normal he was back to where he was in the beginning, refusing God's purpose and resisting His will.

When Pharaoh hardened his heart this time, the Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand toward the sky. Darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days. The darkness was so great that, for those three days, no one left their house. What was particularly interesting was that while darkness filled the land where the Egyptians lived, the Hebrews had light. God was making a clear distinction between the Egyptians and His own people. Again we can only imagine the emotional toll this would have taken on the inhabitants of the land. They were already without food. Their animals had died. Now there was no sun. They had never seen anything like this before. They would have been afraid. They would have felt helpless against such power. Their gods could not protect them against the wrath of the God of the Hebrews.

When Pharaoh summoned Moses this time, he told him that he could take his women and children with him but he would have to leave his flocks and herds behind

(verse 24). Pharaoh may have been wanting to keep these to feed his people. Moses refused. He was not going to compromise with Pharaoh. He told the king that they would not leave a single animal behind. He told him also that they would need these animals to offer their sacrifices to the Lord their God.

There is a strange picture in these verses. All around the people of Egypt are dying of starvation. They have been humbled and their land crushed. The months that followed would be difficult months for these people. It would take them years to recover from this terrible judgment of God. In the land of Goshen, God's people lived in prosperity with animals to spare for sacrifices to the Lord their God. The Egyptians were dying while God's people had food to spare. Instead of asking His people to share with the Egyptians, God required that they sacrifice their animals as an offering to Him. In John 12 we have the story of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus with a very expensive perfume. Listen to the response of Judas in John 12:4-5 when he saw what he perceived to be a waste:

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

While the concern of Judas in John 12 was not for the poor but to fill his own pockets (see John 12:6) he does bring up an important question. What obligation do we have toward those in need around us? There is no easy answer to this. Our responsibility is to be sensitive to the leading and direction of the Spirit of God. What would have happened if God's people, out of the generosity of their hearts, began to supply the Egyptians with animals

for food and crops to feed their starving people? This was not the purpose of God for them at that time. While it certainly is the purpose of God that we care for those in need around us, we also need to be sensitive to His leading. Jesus defended the woman who poured a year's worth of perfume on His feet instead of using it to feed the poor. Moses knew that it was not God's purpose for His people to minister to the hurting Egyptians at this time. God had another plan for them.

When the apostles learned how the widows of the Grecian Jews were being overlooked in Acts 6:1 they gathered the disciples together and told them that while the situation needed to be addressed, it would not be right for them "to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables." These apostles knew that God had another purpose for them. How easy it is for us to allow good things to get us distracted from the purpose and plan of God for our lives. Moses knew the purpose of God. Out of compassion he could have left some of his animals for Pharaoh and the Egyptians but he made it clear that day that "not a hoof" would be left behind (verse 26). Like Moses, we too need to be sensitive to the leading of the Lord in the ministries we undertake.

Pharaoh again hardened his heart. This time he was angry with Moses and told him to get out of his sight and never appear before him again. He told Moses that if he ever came to see him again he would kill him (verse 28). Moses responded by telling Pharaoh that it would be just as he had said. He would never again appear before him.

Despite his false repentance and his compromises, Pharaoh still refused to be made right with God. Every opportunity had been given him but he refused. God had

finished pleading with him. He would perish with his hard heart.

For Consideration:

- How did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Does this mean that God was encouraging him to sin? Explain.
- How would God use the evil of Pharaoh's heart to accomplish good in the lives of His people? What lessons were they learning as the plagues were unfolding in the land of Egypt?
- What is the difference between false repentance and a repentance that comes from the heart? How does Pharaoh demonstrate that his repentance is not a true repentance?
- What does this chapter teach us about the importance of seeking the leading of God in the ministries that God would have us to undertake? Is it possible to get side tracked by good things?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He softened your heart and keeps it soft to the things of His Word.
- Thank the Lord that He can turn the evil done against us into good. Take a moment to thank Him for what He has taught you through the difficulties you have faced in life.

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more sensitive to His leading in the things you undertake in life. Thank Him that He has a purpose. Ask Him to set you free from false guilt when needs are presented to you that you know He has not called you personally to meet.

10

THE FINAL

PLAGUE ANNOUNCED

Read Exodus 11:1-10

God had been speaking powerfully to Pharaoh in Egypt. His nation had been devastated, but still Pharaoh would not listen. In chapter 11 God releases the final plague. This plague would touch very close to home and force the nation into submission. In fact, after this particular plague, Pharaoh would drive the people of Israel out of his land.

Notice from verse 2 that the Lord told Moses that when the people were released by Pharaoh they were to ask for silver and gold. God would move the hearts of the Egyptians to give generously to His people. Notice that verse 3 tells us that Moses was highly regarded by Pharaoh's officials. While these officials did not like what was happening to their land, they knew that Moses was the servant of God. They saw the power of God at work in his life and knew that the God of the Hebrews was with him. They respected him as a man of God. The same was true for the Hebrews. After years of oppressing them and treating them as slaves, now the Egyptians were

seeing that their God favoured them. The Hebrews would leave the land respected and envied by the Egyptians.

In verse 4 God revealed His plan to Moses. At midnight He would move throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son of Egypt would die. Notice that this plague would not only affect humans but also the cattle that remained in the land. Every first born male in the land of Egypt would die. The whole land would be filled with people wailing for their firstborn sons. This plague, however, would not touch the Israelite nation. Their children would be safe. All of Egypt would know that that the Lord had made a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. Moses told Pharaoh that after this final plague his officials and people would plead with Israel to leave their country. When Moses left the presence of Pharaoh for the final time he was "hot with anger." He felt the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. No doubt he wondered why Pharaoh had caused so much devastation to his own country through the hardness of his heart.

We see clearly the effect of pride and sin. Pharaoh's hard heart literally destroyed his nation. He saw what was happening to the average person in the land but he didn't seem to care. He would not submit to God and His ways even at the cost of his nation. Perhaps you have met individuals like this who seem to be so trapped by sin that they destroy their families, lose their jobs and ultimately ruin their own lives for love of sin. Our stubborn resistance to God and His will has the potential to destroy many people on our path. Pharaoh is a clear example of this. His nation was devastated because he refused to surrender to the Lord God and His ways.

Notice once again in verse 9 that God would use the hardness of Pharaoh's heart to show His wonders in the

land of Egypt. God's people would not be released in a quiet way. They would be released from the bondage of Egypt with a powerful display of the glory and power of their God.

Sometimes the Lord allows us to fall into situations that seem hopeless in order to show us His power and love. For four hundred years the people of God had been slaves in the land of Egypt. Whole generations had grown up believing that this was their lot in life. They knew nothing of freedom. It would have been difficult for them to imagine that they could have their own nation and be free to govern themselves. They had become accustomed to the Egyptian whip and the cruelty they had known for so long. Living in their own land or experiencing freedom from slavery was a thought that was far from their minds.

God would break into the hopelessness of their situation and do a miracle among His people. I don't suppose that many of the Hebrews could have imagined that God would actually do this for them even though they cried out to Him for it. Maybe you have found yourself in a situation like this. For years you have been praying to God for victory but have not yet seen the answer to those prayers. Maybe you have simply settled in your mind that you are going to have to live with your situation. What we see in this passage is that God is the God of the impossible. He hears our prayers and will answer in His time. Sometimes we need to understand the hopelessness of our situation before coming to understand the wonder of God and His answer. Don't lose hope. God is able to do far more than you could ever think or imagine. At this point in the life of Israel, God was preparing to do something that His people could never have imagined. The most powerful nation on the earth was about to be crushed. The

officials of that nation would bow in respect to God and His people, releasing them from bondage. God's people would leave Egypt, loaded down with gold and silver given freely to them by the inhabitants of this nation that had enslaved and beaten them for years. The God of Moses is the same God today.

For Consideration:

- Do God's people have to face difficulties on this earth? Consider the example of God's people in Egypt.
- Is an easy and blessed life the only indication of what God thinks of us?
- How does our pride and sin affect other people? How did Pharaoh's pride affect his nation?
- Why do you suppose God sometimes allows us to come to a place of hopelessness before bringing an answer to our prayers?
- Have you been praying for something but lost hope of any real answer? What do we learn here about continuing to trust God for the answer we need even when things seem hopeless?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He loves you even when you are facing difficulties and trials in your life. Ask

Him to open your eyes in these times to see evidence of His loving care.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the way your pride and sin has affected others in your life. Ask Him to heal the hurt you have caused others. Ask Him to humble you.
- Thank the Lord that even when things seem hopeless God is still able to do the impossible.
- Ask the Lord to give you patience as you wait on Him for the answer to your prayers.

11

THE PASSOVER

Read Exodus 12:1-50

The final plague was about to be unleashed on the people of Egypt. This plague would be more than they could handle. Pharaoh and his people would plead with Israel to leave the land (Exodus 10:8). The Hebrews would finally be free from four hundred years of slavery. In chapter 12 God instructed Moses and Aaron on how to keep the memory of this tremendous event alive in the minds of His people.

Notice in verse 2 that God told Moses and Aaron that the month of the release of their people from the bondage of Egypt was to become the first month of their year. From that point on God's people were going to have a new start. Their calendar would change to mark this incredible event. The month of their deliverance from captivity would now become the first month of their new calendar.

In verse 3 God instructed Moses and Aaron to tell the people of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man, as the head of his household, was to take a lamb and care for it until the fourteenth day of the same month (verse 6). On the fourteenth day of the month they were to slaughter the lamb just as the sun was beginning to

set. The lamb that was chosen had to meet certain qualifications. It had to be a one-year-old male without defect, either a sheep or a goat (verse 5).

If a household was too small to eat a whole lamb, they were to share it with their neighbour (verse 4). They were to determine how many people it would take to eat the lamb so that there were no leftovers (verse 10). The lamb was to be roasted over a fire and eaten with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. It was not to be boiled in water nor could it be eaten raw (verses 8-9). If any meat was left over after everyone had eaten it was to be burned before the next morning.

God also instructed the people to take some of the blood of the lamb and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames in the houses where they ate the lamb (verse 7). Verse 11 tells us that they were to eat this meal in a special way. They were to have their cloak tucked into their belt, their sandals on their feet and their walking staff in their hand. They were to eat quickly. In other words, they needed to eat with the realization that they would have to flee at a moment's notice. We can only imagine the excitement there would have been as these individuals took part in that meal knowing that their bondage would be coming to an end very shortly.

As God's people were eating their meal, the Lord God would pass through the nation of Egypt and strike down every firstborn male, both human and animal. In this way He would bring a final judgement on the nation (verse 12). Only those homes with blood painted on the doorposts would be spared from this devastation (verse 13).

God instructed His people to remember this day from generation to generation (verse 14). It was to become a

great festival in celebration of the Lord and His work on behalf of His people. The celebration of this festival was to take place over seven days (verse 15). Verse 18 tells us that this festival was to be from the fourteenth to the twenty-first of the month.

There were three requirements for God's people on those seven days. The first was that the bread they ate had to be without yeast. God felt so strongly about this that in verses 15-20 it is repeated six times. In fact, in verse 17 he called the festival, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the first day of the festival God's people were to remove all yeast from their houses. If anyone ate anything with yeast on those days, they would be cut off from the people of God (verse 15). In other words, they would be removed from the Israelite society and be treated like a pagan unbeliever. This rule applied to everyone living in the land whether they were native born Israelites or foreigners living with them (verse 19). Everyone was to observe these days by not eating anything with yeast.

The second requirement during those days was that they were to attend two great meetings. The first meeting was to be held on the first day of the Festival (verse 16). The second meeting was held on the seventh and final day.

The final requirement was that during those seven days there was to be no work done in the land. The only work permitted was the work required to prepare food for everyone to eat. The whole country would come to a stop on those days as everyone focused their attention on remembering what God had done in setting them free from the bondage of slavery.

When Moses received these instructions from the Lord God he called all the elders of Israel and told them to

select the animals for their families and slaughter the Passover lamb (verse 21). He also instructed them to take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood and paint it on the top and sides of their doors. He told them that no one was to leave their houses until the morning.

It is interesting to note that, so many years later, the Lord Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover. He would become the sacrificial lamb for us so that we could be delivered from the bondage of sin.

Moses made it quite clear to the people that as the Lord went through the land to strike down the Egyptians, when He saw the blood on the tops and sides of their doors He would pass over that home and not permit the destroyer to strike down their firstborn (verse 23). This is exactly what the Lord Jesus has done for us. His blood protects us from the destroyer. It is only when God sees that we are covered by the sacrificial death of His Son that He passes over us and spares us from the wrath of His judgement.

Moses reminded the people in verse 24 that the celebration they were beginning that day was to be passed on from generation to generation. They were to teach their children how to observe this celebration and explain to them its significance. They were to share the story of God's deliverance from Egypt with their children. When God's people heard Moses' instructions, verses 27-28 tells us that they responded in worship and obedience to God and His instructions.

It was at midnight that the Lord God passed over the land of Egypt. He struck down all the firstborns of the nation from Pharaoh's son to the prisoners in the dungeons and the animals of the land. When the people of Egypt woke

up the next day they discovered that their firstborn children had died. The whole land grieved. There was not a household in the land not affected by this tragedy.

During the night, Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron. He told him to take the people, their flocks and herds, and leave his land to worship the Lord as they had requested. Pharaoh also asked Moses and Aaron to bless him (verse 32). Pharaoh knew he had been defeated.

Notice from verse 33 that the people of Egypt urged the Israelites to leave the land. They were afraid that if the people of Israel stayed, all of Egypt would die. The people of Israel gathered their dough before the yeast had been added, wrapped it in cloth and left the land. As they left, they asked the Egyptians for articles of silver, gold and clothing as the Lord had instructed them (see Exodus 3:21-22). The Lord blessed His people that day and the Egyptians gave abundantly to them (verse 36). This was not necessarily out of a generous heart but rather because they feared for their lives and wanted to do all they could to get rid of the Israelites.

The Israelites travelled south east from Rameses to Succoth. As they left there was an estimated six hundred thousand men plus women and children. It should be remembered that Pharaoh had set out on a campaign to kill all the male children of Israel during the days of Moses. We can assume from this that if there were 600,000 men there would likely have been a greater number of women. We also understand that God had wonderfully blessed the nation of Israel so that they became "fruitful and multiplied greatly" (Exodus 1:7). From this we can assume that there were a large number of children as well. If we estimate that there were two

children for every man and woman who left, it would be safe to assume that 2-3 million people left Egypt that day. This crowd also had a large quantity of livestock, flocks and herds.

Verse 39 tells us that they made cakes from the unleavened bread they had taken with them. They had to bake these cakes on the way because they did not have time to prepare the food before they were driven out of Egypt. God's answer came in an instant. When God started to work things happened quickly. One day they were slaves in Egypt and the next morning they were free. Verses 40-41 tell us that God's people had been in bondage in Egypt for a total of 430 years to the very day. This was a very special day set apart for the deliverance of His people. God was in absolute control and delivered His people on the exact day of their 430th year of bondage.

As we conclude this chapter Moses explained, in more detail, the regulations for the celebration of the Passover. Notice God's requirements in verses 43-49.

First, the meal was for the Israelites only. No foreigner was to take part in the celebration of the Passover meal (verse 43). This was a very personal matter between God and His people. The foreigner had not experienced God's deliverance in the way Israel had experienced it. The only way a foreign slave could eat the Passover meal was for him or her to become a Jew. This meant that they had to be circumcised and identify with the God of Israel alone (verse 44). In fact, verse 48 tells us that the foreigner who wanted to celebrate the Passover with them would be required to have all the males in his household circumcised. In other words, he was to commit not only himself to serving the Lord God, but also to raise his family in the ways of the Lord God of Israel. From that point onward

he would be under the requirements of God and live as one of His people with all the obligations. Only then could the foreigner join with the people of God in the celebration of this important meal. No temporary resident or hired worker who was not a circumcised Jew could eat the Passover meal (verse 45).

The second requirement for eating the Passover meal was that it had to be eaten in a house. The meal could not be taken outside the house (verse 46). This comes from the fact that the house had the blood painted on the door posts and was their protection. By remaining in the house they were remaining under the protection of the blood.

In verse 46 we read that the third requirement was that the bones of the lamb slaughtered and eaten at Passover were not to be broken. It is of great importance to note here that when the Lord Jesus was crucified as a Passover Lamb on the cross of Calvary, the soldiers, finding that He was already dead did not break His bones in fulfilment of this requirement of God in Exodus 12:46.

(33) But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. (34) Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. (35) The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. (36) These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of His bones will be broken" (John 19:33-36)

Fourth, verse 47 tells us that the whole community of God's people was to celebrate this Passover. There was

to be no exception to this. God's people had an obligation before their God to celebrate this meal. Some people may have felt unworthy of the meal. Others may have had other things to do on that day. None of these things mattered. This was a time for them to set aside their feelings and their work and remember the Lord their God.

God expected His people to remember and celebrate their deliverance from bondage. As they celebrated this Passover they remembered that they had been slaves. They remembered how God had reached down to them as slaves and set them free. They remembered that His blessing was on them that day. More than this, however, they looked forward to the day when the Lord Jesus would come as a Passover Lamb and set them free from the bondage of sin.

For Consideration:

- Why do you suppose God wanted to change the Jewish calendar to begin with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover?
- Consider what took place during the time of the Passover. How is the work of the Lord Jesus symbolized by the events that took place during this celebration?
- God required that His people take seven days off work to remember His deliverance. Why is it important to pause from time to time and consider what God has done? What are the benefits of this time of reflection?

- Notice in this chapter that God delivered His people after 430 years of bondage to the exact day. What does this tell us about God's timing and control over the circumstances of our lives?
- Did God accept foreigners in the Old Testament? What does this passage teach us about God's missionary heart?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has been your salvation and protection from the judgement to come. Thank Him that His blood gives you assurance in your relationship with the Father.
- Ask God to give you time to spend in reflection on what He has done for you. Consider taking some time for worship and reflection on His goodness.
- Thank God that His timing is perfect. Ask Him to give you patience as you wait on His timing.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He accepted you as His child. Ask Him to give you opportunity to share this acceptance with others.

12

ISRAEL BEGINS

HER JOURNEY

Read Exodus 13:1- 22

The people of God had been delivered from 430 years of bondage in Egypt. The final plague consisted of the death of the firstborn male of each family in Egypt. Only the Israelites were spared this tragedy. God asked His people to celebrate the Passover in memory of the events that took place at that time. It was important to God that His people remember what He had done for them.

Verse 3 tells us that the day that they came out of slavery in Egypt was to be a special day in their calendar. On that day they were not to eat anything with yeast. We saw in chapter 12 that the reason for this was because when they left the land of Egypt they had to do so quickly. They did not have time to add yeast to their bread and wait for it to rise.

(33) The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" (34) So the people took their dough

before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. (Exodus 12:33-34)

When the people of Israel celebrated the Passover by eating bread with no yeast they were reminded of the situation under which they had left Egypt. As with many of the symbols of the Old Testament, however, there was also a deeper meaning. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians about the Passover says:

(6) Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? (7) 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. (8) 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 Corinthians 5:6-8)

In this passage Paul speaks about the deeper symbolism of yeast. He compares yeast to sin in our lives. In the case of the Corinthians it was the sin of boasting, malice and wickedness. Notice however, what he says about yeast in 1 Corinthians 5:6. "Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?" In other words, sin has a tendency to quickly gain control of our thoughts and actions. It spreads from us to others around us and can ultimately affect an entire church. Paul challenges the Corinthians to get rid of the yeast of sin because Christ the Passover lamb had been sacrificed. In other words, the matter of sin has been addressed by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus as a Passover lamb. Because Jesus died to deal with sin we need to do all we can to turn from it.

This was the deeper significance of the requirement of God concerning yeast during the Passover. During every Passover celebration a lamb was to be killed. His blood was to be painted on the doorposts of their homes. They were to remain in their homes under the protection of that blood while the angel of death passed over them. As long as they remained under the blood they were protected. This was a symbol of what the Lord Jesus would do for them in the years to come. He would die as a Passover lamb to protect all who accepted His work of covering their sin, freeing them from the punishment of death and satisfying the wrath of a holy God. Because the Lord God spared His people, they had an obligation toward Him. They were to live for Him and turn from their sin. They were to honour him in all they did. By not eating yeast during this holy celebration, God's people were reminding themselves of their obligation to turn from sin and follow their God. The same is true for us today. As Paul challenged the believers in Corinth, we also are to get rid of the old yeast of sin because Christ the Passover lamb has been sacrificed

The Passover was to be celebrated every year not only as a reminder to God's people of what He had done but also of their obligations toward Him because of His deliverance. In verses 4-7 the Lord reminds His people of His requirements for this celebration. They were to celebrate it in the month of Abib, the month they left Egypt (verses 4-5). The celebration was to last for seven days and on the seventh and final day they were to hold a special assembly in honour of their Lord (verse 6). During those seven days they were to eat bread made without yeast, there was to be no yeast seen anywhere in their borders during that time (verses 6-7). During the celebration of the Passover they were to tell their children what the Lord God had done for them in delivering them

from their bondage in Egypt. This way the next generation would remember the goodness of God in setting them free.

Notice in verse 9 how the Lord told His people that this observance of the Passover was to be like a sign on their hands and a reminder on their forehead. Something that is written on the hand or on the forehead is hard to forget. God is simply saying here that by observing the Passover and telling their children year after year what He had done, it would become a constant reminder to them of God's goodness and mercy so they would never forget.

The Passover was one way of remembering their deliverance but it was not the only way. In verses 11-16 God told Moses that the firstborn of every womb among the Israelites was to be consecrated to Him. The firstborn male whether man or animal, belonged to the Lord (verse 1). When they arrived in the land of Canaan, they were to give the firstborn of every womb to the Lord. If a firstborn animal was unclean, the owner was to pay five shekels of silver and buy it back from the Lord (Numbers 18:14-16). If the firstborn animal was a clean animal (ox, sheep or goat) it was to be sacrificed to the Lord (Numbers 18:17-19). If the firstborn was a male child born to a family in Israel, the parents would have to pay five shekels of silver and buy him back from the Lord (Numbers 18:14-16). The process of buying back a son was called redemption. Every firstborn child was to be redeemed (verse 13).

God had a reason for demanding the firstborn male of every womb. It was to remind His people of what He had done for them in Egypt by sparing their firstborn males. From generation to generation God's people were to practice this tradition in remembrance of what the Lord

had done for them. When their children asked what this practice meant, they were to tell them the story of how God had killed all the firstborn males of Egypt but spared them. This practice would be like a sign on their hand and forehead so that God's people would never forget what He had done for them.

It is important for us to notice that there was an obligation placed on those who had been delivered from bondage. Their firstborn male child had been saved from the wrath of God who passed over the land of Egypt. That child now belonged to God. They would have to pay a price to redeem him as a reminder of what God had done for them. In a similar way, while our salvation is free, it places us under an obligation. There is a cost to pay for being a believer. God demands our lives, our obedience and our faithfulness. All too many believers have never counted the cost of following the Lord Jesus, the Passover lamb.

With these words of God ringing in their ears, the people of God left the land of Egypt. Notice in verse 17 that the Lord did not take them by the shortest path. That short path would have taken them through the territory of the Philistines. God knew the hearts of His people. They would face war if they went through Philistine territory, and many of the people would have lost heart and want to return to Egypt. God chose instead to take them the long way through the desert toward the Red Sea.

God could have given His people victory over the Philistines. Even though verse 18 tells us that "the Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle," God knew they were not ready for battle. They were not strong enough in their faith and commitment to the Lord God. They needed

to be strengthened, so God chose to take them through the desert to prepare and strengthen them.

The desert would prove to be a difficult place for God's people. There in the desert they would be tested. They would be shaped as a nation and come to know the requirements of God in a new way. God would reveal Himself to them and teach them many things about Himself and His purposes. Only then would they be ready for the battle before them and the conquest of the land He had promised to their fathers.

Maybe you are like the children of Israel right now. You know God's wonderful salvation. You have spiritual gifts to use for the sake of the kingdom. You want to do battle but the Lord has not led you into that battle. Instead He has taken you through the desert. There in that desert you feel alone. You wonder if God is ever going to use you. You are being stretched day by day in your faith and sometimes you wonder if you are ever going to get through the desert to the other side. Take heart from this chapter. God is taking you through the desert for a reason. He is preparing you for what is ahead. He wants to use you but He needs to refine and train you more for the ministry He has prepared.

As they left the land of Egypt Moses took the bones of Joseph with him so that they could be buried in the land God had promised him. Before he died, Joseph made his brothers promise that they would take his body with them when they were released from Egypt (see Genesis 50:25-26). Here in this verse we see a fulfilment of this promise.

God led His people by way of the Red Sea through the desert to the Promised Land. Verses 20-22 tell us how God led them. During the day the Lord went before them

in a pillar of cloud. Moses and his people followed the pillar wherever it went. At night the pillar was like a pillar of fire clear enough for them to see. This way they could travel either during the day or the night. Verse 22 tells us that the pillar never left its place in front of God's people. God never left them.

What an encouragement this is for us. We may not see a cloudy or fiery pillar, but God still promises to lead us every step of the way. Are we willing to follow? Will we move with Him or will we rush ahead? Will we move where He wants us to move or will we do what we think best? God would go before His people to lead and direct them. He would not leave them. They could face the journey with confidence in the Lord their God.

For Consideration:

- What does Paul tell us about the symbolism of yeast in the Passover celebration? What does this teach us about our obligation to Christ our Passover lamb?
- What sins do you need to let go of today?
- What does this passage teach us about our obligation to remember the things God has done for us? How have you been passing the remembrance of God's goodness on to the next generation?
- What does the law of the firstborn teach us about the responsibilities of those who have been blessed and protected by God?

- Why did God lead His people through the desert and not the shortest path to the Promised Land? What is your desert today?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that the cloud never left God's people? Are you following His leading today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any sin you need to address in your life. Ask Him to help you to realize your obligation toward Him as your Passover lamb, to walk in obedience and purity of heart.
- Ask God to help you to remember His goodness in your life. Ask Him to give you opportunities to share what He has done for you with others.
- Are you going through a desert-like experience in your life today? Ask God to teach you the lessons He wants you to learn. Ask Him to show you His purpose and train you in this time. Ask Him also to give you grace to accept this with a thankful heart.
- Thank the Lord today that He never leaves us but always leads us in the path He has for our lives. Ask the Lord to help you recognize His leading and keep you faithful to it.

13

A LESSON IN TRUST

Read Exodus 14:1-31

God's people had been set free from their slavery in Egypt. The Lord chose not to lead them through the region of the Philistines which would have been much shorter. Instead He chose to take them the longer route through the desert. While this route would be difficult, it was God's way of training and strengthening them as a nation.

God had led His people to the region of Etham, which was on the edge of the desert (Exodus 13:20). In Exodus 14:2 God spoke to Moses and told him to take the Israelites to Pi Hahiroth which was between Migdol and the sea directly opposite of Baal Zephon. We are somewhat uncertain as to this exact location.

Notice in verse 2 that the Israelites were to "turn back." This is quite a strange phrase. One would think that as they were escaping they would have wanted to get as much distance as they could between themselves and the Egyptians, but God has another plan. Instead of having them pass by the sea and into the desert, He delayed them for a time in the region of Egypt. Verses 3-4 give us the reason for this. God told Moses that Phar-

aoh would think that the Israelites were wandering around in confusion not wanting to venture into the desert. God told Moses that He would harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he would pursue them. Through this, however, God would show His mighty power and the Egyptians would know that He was God. Here is a case where human reason was not sufficient. God's purposes don't always make sense to our human way of thinking. Instead of getting His people as far away as possible, God kept them in the land and allowed the Egyptian army to attack.

When Pharaoh and his officials saw that the Israelites had left, they changed their minds. They regretted letting them go. They no longer had slaves to do their work. Pharaoh had his chariot made ready and took his army to pursue the Israelites as they fled. Verse 7 tells us that he took six hundred of his best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt. By chasing after Israel, Pharaoh defied their God and challenged Him to a fight to the end. The Egyptians overtook the Israelites while they were camping by the sea near Pi Hahiroth (verse 9).

When the people of Israel saw the advancing Egyptian army, they were terrified (verse 10). Notice in verse 10 that they cried out to the Lord. Their cry, however, was not a cry of faith and confidence in God but the cry of defeat. In verse 11 they asked Moses why he had brought them into the desert to die. In fact, they told him that they would rather have stayed in Egypt as slaves than die in the desert (verse 12). God had set them free through wonderful miracles but they still don't understand how His power could set them free in this new situation. They questioned His protection and devotion to them as a people. They failed to believe the promises of God to their fathers. They carried the bones of Joseph with them

because he prophesied that the Lord would set them free and give them their own land, but they still didn't believe. God still had much to teach them. This incident would be one of those lessons.

Moses alone seems to have had the faith to believe that God would be true to His word. Moses told his people to stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord would bring to them that day (verse 13). He went on to tell them that they would never see these Egyptians again. God would fight for them. They didn't need to do anything. They just needed to be still (verse 14).

The stillness that Moses speaks about here is a stillness of confidence and trust. This stillness keeps us from making decisions in our own wisdom. It keeps us from running when things get hard. To be still is to wait on the Lord and trust that He will intervene. It is to stand our ground when things get tough. It is to listen for His leading. When things get difficult and the enemy presses in on us "doing nothing" and "being still" are not easy. Everything in us wants to respond. Our feet want to run. Our lips want to cry out. Our hands want to do something. God is asking His people here just to be still and watch what He was going to do.

As the Egyptian army pressed forward, God told Moses to raise his staff and stretch it over the sea before them. God told him that when he did so the waters would divide so that His people could pass over on dry ground. It is important that we see what is taking place here. God has placed His people in an impossible situation. If they were to move forward they would run into the Egyptian army. If they moved backward they would drown in the sea. Blocked by the Egyptian army on one side and the sea on the other there was literally no way of escape. How

many times have we found ourselves in this situation in life? Humanly there is no escape for us. We don't know where to turn.

What we need to understand in these times is that God is able to make a way of escape where there is presently no way. He puts doors in the walls that block our path. One moment there is no way of escape and in an instant the Lord bursts through the wall and opens a path of escape. This is exactly what is happening in this passage. God miraculously breaks through and provides a way of escape. Again we see that human reason is very limited. What is impossible to us is not impossible to God. To trust our human wisdom is to fail. God's ways are much greater than our ways and His purposes beyond our understanding.

God told Moses that He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that he would pursue the Israelites into the sea but the Lord would gain great glory in what would happen to them (verses 17-18). As Moses stretched out his hand, the angel of God and the great pillar of cloud that had been travelling in front of Israel moved to the rear and stood between them and the Egyptian army. The result was that the Egyptians could not advance. On the Egyptian side of the cloud there was great darkness while on the Israelite side the light shone all night long (verse 20). The Lord divided the waters of the sea so that there was a wall of water on each side with a path of dry ground in the middle. During the night, the Israelites quickly crossed over to the other side on dry ground.

When the Egyptians saw that the water had divided and the Israelites had crossed over to the other side they pursued them. It was during the last watch of the night (likely from 2 a.m. to sunrise) that the army of Pharaoh

was crossing the sea. As they crossed, the Lord threw them into confusion. Verse 25 tells us that the Lord made the wheels of the chariots to fall off so that they had great difficulty driving. This caused the Egyptian soldiers to panic. They realized that the Lord God was fighting for Israel. They decided to abandon their pursuit and flee saying: "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt" (verse 25).

While the army of Pharaoh was in this state of confusion in the middle of the sea, the Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand again so that the walls of water would come crashing down on the Egyptians. Moses obeyed and at daybreak the walls of water crashed down on top of the Egyptian soldiers drowning them. Verse 28 tells us that the entire army of Pharaoh who had followed the Egyptians through the sea were killed. "Not one of them survived."

The Israelites, however, crossed safely over the sea. When the light of morning came, the Israelites looked out and saw the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers on the shore. They had seen a demonstration of the wonderful power of God that night. The result was that they "feared the Lord and put their trust in Him and in Moses His servant" (verse 31). God used what appeared to be an impossible situation to strengthen their faith and confidence in Him and in His servant.

God's purposes were accomplished through the difficulties that His people faced that day. There are those who teach that it is not the will of God that we have to face difficulties in this life. The reality of the matter is that God led His people into a situation that would be very difficult. God wanted to stretch them by putting them in an impossible situation and delivering them from it. God taught His

people about Himself and His care through this incident. God will teach us in the struggles He allows us to face as well if we are still and wait on Him.

That day the Israelite's confidence in the Lord their God was strengthened. They would need to trust Him as they went through the desert. Notice also in verse 31 that the people also put their trust in Moses as God's servant. They saw that God was speaking to him. They saw the power of God at work in his life and realized that he was the leader God had given them. God wanted His people to be able to trust their earthly leader as well. Moses' life clearly demonstrated that he was God's servant. I wonder if our lives show forth the power and wonder of God in this way.

For Consideration:

- God seems to lead His people into a very difficult situation. Is it always the will of God that things be easy for us in life?
- What lessons did God's people learn in this difficulty? What struggles have you had to face in life? What lessons has God taught you in those times?
- Did God deliver His people in this passage because they had faith in Him? What was their attitude toward God and Moses before crossing the sea? What does this teach us about the grace of God?

- How was human wisdom insufficient for Israel's situation? What does this teach us about the importance of trusting God and His leading?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to use the circumstances you face in life to teach you many lessons and draw you closer to Him.
- Thank the Lord that even when we were living in disobedience and disbelief He still reached out to deliver us.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you trusted your own wisdom and strength to do His work. Ask Him to help you to listen to Him more.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the many ways He has protected and kept you.
- Do you have a friend or loved one who, like the Egyptians of this passage, has rejected the Lord God? Ask the Lord to soften his or her heart toward Him before it is too late.

14

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE

Read Exodus 15:1-27

The Lord God had wonderfully delivered His people from the Egyptian army. The dead bodies of the Egyptian soldiers that had pursued them were a testimony to the protection and grace of the God of Israel. This would have been a devastating blow to Egypt. Their land had been destroyed and now their army was wiped out. God's people were truly free from Egypt and its threat.

That day Moses wrote a song to commemorate the wonderful deliverance of the Lord. In verse 1 we see that Moses and the Israelites sang this song together in celebration of the great work of God that day. Let's consider briefly the words to the song of Moses.

Our God is Highly Exalted

The song of Moses begins with praise to the Lord God. Moses sings to the Lord because He is "highly exalted." While God has always been highly exalted, the events of that day served as a reminder to Israel that God was greater than the greatest nation on earth. In an instant He had wiped out the entire army of Egypt. There was no power like His. He hurled the horses and riders of the

powerful nation of Egypt into the sea and destroyed them. They were helpless before the God of Israel. No one could stand before Him. He was exalted above all kings and all gods.

God is our Strength and Salvation

The song of Moses went on in verse 2 to remind the people of Israel that the strength and power of the Lord their God had worked on their behalf. "The Lord is my strength," Moses sings. "He has become my salvation." What an awesome thought! The power of the exalted God of Israel works for us. He reached out to His people in their time of need and ministered to them. The powerful arm of God stood against their enemy. He saved His people. That same arm is available to us as His people today. No matter how difficult the situation may appear, the Lord God is our strength and salvation. This is cause for praise and thanksgiving. Moses praises God in verse 2 because He was the strength and salvation of His people. He was their father's God but He was also their God. Together as a nation they would exalt Him and give Him the honour and glory due to His name.

God is a Mighty Warrior Who Defends His People

Verses 3-5 recall the events of that day. God is described as a warrior who stood firm against the army of Egypt. He hurled Pharaoh's chariots and his entire army into the sea where they were drowned. Pharaoh's army had no chance against the force of the God of Israel who stood against them like a mighty warrior to defend His people.

Moses describes what happened that day as being "majestic in power" (verse 6). What God did for His people was magnificent, glorious and awe inspiring. This

was the kind of thing that made you fall on your face in worship and fear. The enemy was shattered by the right hand of God. God's people were left in awe of His power and majesty.

God is an Angry God of Justice

Israel saw something else about God that day. God threw down those who opposed Him (verse 7). He unleashed His burning anger and it consumed His enemies. The waters piled up by the "blast of His nostrils" (verse 8). The proud enemy boasted that he would pursue and overtake God's people and gorge himself on them like birds of prey (verse 9). God saw the pride of his heart and blew with His breath so that the waters of the sea crashed down on him. The enemy sank to the bottom of the sea like lead. The mighty waters of God destroyed him (verse 10). Moses reminded his people in this song that their God was an angry God. Those who stood against Him would face His wrath. This was a powerful reminder to the people of Israel. They could not take this God for granted.

God's people knew the wonderful salvation of God that day. His hand had worked in their favour. They also were reminded, however, of the power of His anger. There are those who focus so much on the love and deliverance of God that they fail to see that He is also a holy God who will judge. God's people needed to understand His justice and anger. That anger would lash out many times against His people over the course of their journey through the desert. Many would perish in the desert because they did not respect the Lord their God. God is a God of tremendous love but He will also punish those who do not walk in His ways.

God is Majestic in Holiness and Awesome in Glory

Moses describes God in his song as a God like no other. He is majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders. As a holy God sinful men tremble before Him. He stands for truth and righteousness and resists sin. He is the measure of all that is right and pure. As a glorious God, He is awesome to behold. There is no god like the God of Israel. He stretches out His hand and the earth swallows up all other gods. The power of all these gods is destroyed in an instant.

God is a God of Unfailing Love for His People

Who could stand before such an awesome God? How could we live before such power, holiness and majesty? Would we not live in constant fear of offending this God? God's power, holiness and anger are combined with another important characteristic. Moses speaks in verse 13 of His "unfailing love." God's love for His people is what sets them free from constant fear in His presence. This holy God of righteous justice loves His people. He commits Himself to lead those He has rescued. He will guide them to His "holy dwelling," where they will live forever under His reign of love (verses 13). How thankful we need to be for the love of God. It is our protection and security.

God Will Judge His Enemies

Notice, however, that not everyone will experience the love that His children do. Verse 14 reminds us that the nations (the pagan ungodly) will tremble in anguish. The pagan nations of Philistia, Edom, Moab and Canaan would be seized with terror and melt away in fear (verses 15-16). These nations did not know the love of God as

His people did. They were under His wrath and judgement. They would perish and be forever banished from His presence.

The song of Moses is a reminder of the forgiveness and mercy of God in accepting us as His people. What a privilege we have to belong to Him today. What security there is in knowing His love and walking in His favour. We don't understand the privilege that is ours until we understand the destiny of those who are outside of His love. They will perish and live forever separated from Him. If you know the Lord today and are covered by His love, this is cause for great celebration.

God Protects His People until the Battle is Over

Verse 16 goes on to say that by the power of God's arm the enemy will be held back until His people pass by to safety. The reference here is to the way the pillar of fire held the Egyptian army at a distance until God's people passed over safely to the other side of the sea. What is true of God's people in the day of Moses is also true for us today as well. God's protecting and loving hand is on His people. He keeps them from the enemy until they have safely passed over into His presence. God will not leave you or abandon you. If you are His child, He will do everything in His power to assure your salvation. This does not mean that you will never have to face difficulties in life. You will have many battles to fight. God led His people through the desert toward the Promised Land. He did not choose the easy way for His people. He wanted them to learn through the things they suffered just as Jesus His son would learn (see Hebrews 5:8). While there will be struggles and suffering in this life, God promises to keep us by the power of His arm until we

have passed safely over to the other side. We do not need to fear.

God will Reign with His People Forever and Ever

Moses ends his song with a wonderful thought. God will bring His people safely over to the mountain of His inheritance. Moses describes this mountain as the place where God had made His dwelling place. It is a sanctuary established by the hands of God (verse 17). This is the destiny of God's people. Satan would like nothing better than to strip this away from us but the power of God and His unfailing love will not allow this to happen. Satan is not powerful enough to take what God jealously guards.

Notice in verse 18 that Moses concludes by reminding His people that the Lord will reign forever. Nothing will ever defeat Him. He will reign as our loving and faithful protector and king for all eternity. We will live in His presence and nothing will ever take this away from us.

When Moses had finished his song, his sister Miriam who was a prophetess, took up a tambourine began to sing and dance. All the women followed her example singing:

“Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.”

What a joyous celebration that would have been. How I would love to have been there at that great worship celebration inspired by the mighty work of God. This was a glorious time of singing and dancing before the Lord in honour of His name and the great work He had done. We can safely assume that it had been hundreds of years since there had been such a joyous celebration in honour of the Lord God.

What is particularly striking is what would happen just three day later. From the Red Sea, God led His people into the Desert of Shur. They travelled for three days in the desert without finding water. After three days they arrived at Marah where they found water but it was so bitter they could not drink it. The word “*marah*” literally means “bitter” and the place received its name because of its bitter waters.

When the people saw that the water was so bitter, they began to grumble against Moses asking him what they were to drink (verse 24). The song they sang together three days ago was quickly forgotten. They had sung of a great God who would keep them until they arrived at the Promised Land. They had sung of a God whose deeds were awesome and whose power was majestic but these were just words to them now. Here, when faced with a shortage of water, they doubted God’s love and devotion.

This is often the case for us as well. We sing about a powerful God who keeps, protects and provides for His people but we struggle when things don’t go as we expect. Do we experience the reality of what we sing about in our hymns and spiritual songs? Do we live the truth of the doctrines we say we believe? God shows us here that there is a difference between our words and our actions. It is our action that shows what we believe more than our words. Facing the lack of water, the people of Israel showed what they truly believed. They believed that somehow God had failed them. They believed that He would not protect them or keep them.

Despite their unbelief, God showed Moses a piece of wood. He asked him to take that piece of wood and throw it into the water. When Moses did, the waters became sweet (verse 25). In an instant the Lord provided for their

need. There couldn't have been anything easier. What seemed so impossible to God's people was as simple as throwing a piece of wood in the water. Even a young child could have done this. From the perspective of God's people, the problem was huge. From God's perspective it was very small indeed. If only we could see things more from God's perspective.

Verse 25 tells us that the Lord allowed this to happen to test His people. He wanted to teach them an important lesson. In verse 26 He told His people that if they would listen to His voice and do what was right He would protect them from the diseases He had brought on the Egyptians. In other words, if they wanted to act like unbelievers and walk in disobedience to His commands and laws than God would treat them as He had treated the Egyptians.

Notice the connection between obedience and blessing. The blessing of God falls on those who are obedient. Sometimes when God wants to bless His people, He will allow them to face difficulties in order to test their commitment to Him. As they face those difficulties He prepares them for further blessing. God blesses those who are faithful to Him in the hard times. He equips us through the suffering we face for greater blessing. Notice that after being tested at Marah, the Lord led them to Elim where they camped in the shade of the palm trees by an abundant supply of water (verse 27). God used their time at Marah to strengthen His people and teach them more about His provision.

For Consideration:

- What does the song of Moses teach us about God and His character?
- What does the song of Moses teach us about God's relationship with His people and His commitment to them?
- How do the people who worshipped God on the shores of the Red Sea show what they really believed at Marah?
- What is the true test of what we believe?
- What is the connection between obedience and the blessing of God in this passage? Can we live how we want and still expect the Lord to bless us?

For Prayer:

- Consider the things Moses said about the character of God in his song. Take a moment to thank the Lord for these characteristics.
- Take some time to consider the things God has done in your life. Thank Him for the way He has blessed you. Thank Him also for His promises for your protection and blessing.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times your words did not reflect what you truly believed. Ask Him to help you to live out in daily life what you say you believe.

- Thank the Lord that He blesses those who are faithful to Him. Thank the Lord for the trials that He has allowed to come your way to test and strengthen you for greater blessing in your life.

15

ANOTHER TEST, ANOTHER ANSWER

Read Exodus 16:1-36

God's people had been in the region of Marah where the water was so bitter they could not drink it. God healed the water and then led them to Elim, which was a place of rich blessing for His people. There they camped under the palm trees near twelve streams of water. God showed His people that He was fully able to meet their needs. This was important for them to know as they faced the next leg of their journey.

In Exodus 13:1 we read that the Israelites set out from Elim and came into the Desert of Sin. It would have been great to have remained under the palm trees in Elim but this was not the will of the Lord for them. The Christian walk is not a walk of constant ease. We praise God for refreshing times but I have found that the greatest growth comes in the times of struggle in the desert places. The desert is a place of barrenness. It is the place where we are cast fully on God in dependence and trust. The desert is not an easy place. Notice in verses 2-3 that the Israelites immediately began to grumble against Moses and Aaron.

“If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

God's people looked back to the land of Egypt with longing. They wished that they had died in that land where they had plenty to eat. Notice also how they accused Moses and Aaron of bringing them out into the desert to starve to death. There are several things we need to see here.

First, notice how quickly the Israelites had forgotten their agony in the land of Egypt. They had been abused and beaten, reduced to slavery. Their male children had been slaughtered by the jealous Pharaoh of Egypt. Now, for the sake of their stomachs, they wished they were back there.

Notice also how quickly they had forgotten the wonderful provision and protection of God on their journey so far. God had separated the waters of the sea so that they could pass over on dry land. He had healed the waters of Marah so that they could drink. Where was their faith now that they faced the desert? God had not changed. He was still able to provide for their every need.

As they faced that desert, all God's people could see was their present situation. They could not see the overall purpose of God for their good. They failed to understand how the Lord God had been leading them and how He would provide for them in their trial and bring them to the place He had promised their fathers.

How this lack of faith and trust must have grieved the Lord God. How it must still grieve Him when we feel the same way in the trials He allows to come our way. Remember that it was the Lord God who was leading His people through the desert. There was a purpose for this. He wanted to train and strengthen them through what they would face, but God's people wanted nothing of this training. They grumbled and complained, demonstrating a complete lack of faith and confidence in the God who was leading them by the cloud and the pillar of fire. How about us, can we trust Him in the difficult times of our lives?

Notice the response of God toward this complaining and faithless people. In verse 4 He told Moses that He would rain down bread from heaven for them. Notice that He would only provide them with enough bread for one day at a time (verse 4). On the sixth day, however, He would provide them with bread for two days so they would not have to gather it on the Sabbath. Verse 4 makes it quite clear that there was a very definite purpose for this. God wanted to test His people to see whether they would obey Him or not.

Imagine for a moment the temptation for the people of God. When they saw this food from heaven on the ground, they would be tempted to gather as much as they could and store it up for the future. God, however, was only providing them one day's supply of food at a time. They would have to trust Him for every day. God wanted His people in this place of absolute dependence on Him. Each day they would have to look to Him and trust Him for the day's requirements. Not everyone is ready to live this kind of life. We like to think that we are in control of our future. We depend on our ability to provide for our own needs. God's people in the desert did not have this

luxury. They would have to wait on Him each day for His provision. How rewarding it must have been to see the faithfulness of God for each day. God never forgot His people. He always provided.

God responded to the faithless grumbling of His people by providing them with food to eat. How thankful we need to be that He is so patient with us in our failures. Even when we lack faith and fall into disobedience, He still is faithful and provides for our needs.

It is also important that we note in verses 7-8 that the faith of Moses and Aaron was also being stretched. Notice what Moses said to the people in verses 7-8:

(7) Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" (8) Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

Moses and Aaron were fully aware of their inability to meet the needs of the people. They did not have the resources to provide for their hunger. They too were cast on the Lord. While the people expressed their grief and dissatisfaction to Moses and Aaron, they were in reality grumbling against God. How easy it is to fall into this trap. God provides us with a job and we complain because the people we are working with are difficult. God provides us with a husband or wife and we complain because we don't like how they do things. While we voice our complaints to other human beings, in reality we are expressing our dissatisfaction with God and His ways. His ways

are not like our ways. The difficulties we experience are for our good.

In verse 9 God told Moses to bring all the people together. Through Aaron, God told the people that He had heard their grumbling and He would respond. As Aaron spoke that day, the people of Israel looked out into the desert and saw the glory of God in the cloud that was leading them. We are not told what that glory looked like. We can be assured; however, that there could be no doubt that God was present that day. It is significant that the glory of God appeared in the desert. As people looked deeper into this wilderness they could see His presence. God was showing them something very important that day. It would be in the desert that God's people would see His glory and provision. They were not to fear the desert because God would be with them in it. He would provide for their need and care for them each step of the way.

How often do we try to avoid the desert in our lives? We don't like the difficulties that come our way. We would rather live a life of ease under the palm trees of Elim but this was not what God had in store for His people. He wanted to stretch and strengthen them. It was His purpose that these little children in the faith grow up to be mighty warriors for His kingdom. The desert was part of their training. They did not need to fear it for He would reveal His glory to them through the difficulties they experienced. What is true of the Israelites is also true for us. Let us not fear the desert. Let us make it our deep desire however, to learn the lessons God wants to teach us in the difficult times of life so that we will be strengthened and better equipped for greater service.

As evening fell that day quail covered the camp. Verse 13 tells us that in the morning a layer of dew covered the camp. When the dew was gone thin flakes like frost appeared on the desert floor. The Israelites were surprised to see this and asked "What is it?" Moses told them that it was bread from the Lord for them to eat. He told them that each of them could take an omer (1.7 litres or 0.46 US gallons) for each person they had in their tent (verse 16). Moses also told them that they were not to keep any of this food until the morning (verse 19).

The Israelites did as the Lord had commanded and gathered the amount they needed according to the regulations God had set out for them. There were some people, however, who kept part of it until morning. What they kept, however, by the morning was full of maggots and was beginning to smell bad. In this way, the Lord kept the people absolutely dependant on Him day by day.

Every morning the people would gather what they needed from the desert floor. When the sun came up the manna would melt away. What was particularly striking was that on the sixth day there was twice as much on the desert floor. God's people were instructed on that day to gather what they needed for two days so they would not have to work at gathering on the Sabbath day. On that day the Lord permitted the people to keep what was left over for the Sabbath. Verse 24 tells us that what they kept on that day was protected by the Lord and did not stink nor get maggots in it. It is also of importance to note from verse 26 that on the Sabbath day there was no manna on the ground. Obviously this would have been a very clear reminder to the people that it was the Lord who was providing.

Again there were some Israelites who disregarded the command of God and went out on the Sabbath to gather their food. There was none to be found on that day. God reminded His people through Moses that the Sabbath day was set apart as a special day to remember Him. On that day they were not to gather food. God would provide all they needed to eat before the Sabbath so that they would not lack anything on that holy day.

Notice from verse 31 that the people called the bread manna. It was white and tasted like wafers made with honey. So that His people would remember this provision, the Lord commanded Moses to keep an omer of manna for the generations to come so that they could see how the Lord fed and provided for His people in the desert (verse 32-33). Aaron put an omer of manna in a jar and placed it in front of the Testimony. Hebrews 9:4 tells us that the jar that contained the manna was made of gold and placed inside the Ark of the Covenant. The reference to “the Testimony” here is obviously, therefore, a reference to the Ark of the Covenant which contained important reminders for God’s people of His provision and leading during this important time in their lives.

The Israelites would eat manna for forty years until they settled in the land of Canaan. Every day the people of God would be reminded of His provision. God kept them dependent. Being kept in this state of daily dependence is not easy, but there is something about having to depend on God that keeps us focused on Him.

There is one more detail we need to mention in this context. Those who kept the manna overnight during the week found that it was infected with maggots. On the Sabbath, however, it was protected by God. What was stored for their selfish intentions was quickly destroyed.

What was used as God intended was blessed. The temptation of some people was to store up the manna. While there is nothing wrong with storing things up for tomorrow, this was not the particular purpose of God for His people at this time. The desert was a training ground for them. God wanted to teach His people how to trust Him for their daily needs. God refused to bless what He did not lead His people to do. All manna that was stored up against His purpose was infected with maggots and had to be thrown away. How easy it is for us to assume that we can do whatever we want with the blessings God has poured out on us. We claim these blessings as our right. God, however, blesses us for a reason. He expects that we use what He has given for Him and according to His purpose and plan. This means that we need not only to receive our blessings from Him but also seek Him about how He would have us use the blessings He has given.

For Consideration:

- Elim was a place of blessing for the people of God but God led His people from there into the desert. What does this teach us about the purpose of God for our lives?
- What was the response of God's people to the desert? How often have you found yourself complaining about the lot God has given you in life?
- How does God respond to the complaints of His people? What does this teach us about His patience with us?

- God kept His people in a place of daily dependence. What do you depend on God for each day?
- As the people of God looked out into the desert they saw the glory of God. How has God revealed Himself to you in the trials you experience?
- What does this passage teach us about using the blessings God gives as He desires? Have you been using what God gives for yourself or for His glory?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He reveals His glory to us in the difficult times of life as well as the good times.
- Ask God to help you to be more accepting of His purposes for your life. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have complained about His purposes.
- Ask God to help you to seek Him more about how to use the resources He has given you. Thank Him that He has provided faithfully for you and your needs.
- Ask God to open your eyes to teach you the lessons He wants you to learn through the difficulties you are experiencing in life.

16

NO WATER AND AN ENEMY ATTACK

Read Exodus 17:1-16

The Desert of Sin was not an easy place for the children of Israel. There were numerous problems and obstacles to overcome. While God continually provided for His people in the desert, they were very slow learners. With each problem they grumbled and complained against God and His ways.

Verse 1 reminds us that the Israelite community was wandering in the desert from place to place “as the Lord commanded.” It is important that we understand that the problems the Israelites encountered were not because they were not following the Lord. In fact, the Lord sometimes led them directly into these problems to show them the greatness of His provision and protection. Each problem brought fresh lessons and provision from God. God does not always keep us from going through problems in life. We can be sure, however, that He will use the problems we face to teach us and draw us closer to Himself.

On this particular occasion the people of God were camped at a place called Rephidim. There was no water for the people to drink in Rephidim. Remember that these people were following the cloud and the fiery pillar. The Lord led them directly to this place. What would be the response of the people to the leading of the Lord to camp at Rephidim? Would they trust Him? Had they learned to trust Him? Verse 2 tells us that they began to quarrel with Moses demanding that he give them water to drink.

Have you ever found yourself complaining about God's leading in your life? He does not think as we do. His ways are different from ours. God's leading often seems strange to us. Sometimes He leads us right into the middle of trouble and confusion to teach us a lesson. Just because you encounter difficulties does not mean that you are not following the leading of the Lord? Those difficulties may be the very thing God wants to use in your life to teach you an important lesson.

Notice that when the people began to complain, Moses reminded them that they were "putting God to the test" (verse 2). What would be the response of God to the grumbling of His people? His people were failing to respect Him and what He had done for them. Why should God continue to help a people that constantly complained and fought against His leading in their lives? It was a serious thing to test the patience and mercy of God.

While the people heard what Moses had said, they continued to grumble. They were thirsty and could only see their discomfort. They show their complete lack of confidence in Moses as their leader and more importantly in the leading of God in verse 3 when they say:

“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

The people were so angry with Moses that, according to verse 4, they were ready to stone him. Things were not going their way. They could not see things as the Lord saw them. In their limited vision they only saw the lack of water. They could not see that God was an almighty and all powerful God. Their minds were worldly. Unlike Moses, they could not trust God. This shows us the kind of people Moses was leading out of Egypt. What kind of nation would they form in the land God was promising them? They were worldly in their ways and thoughts? Their nation would be no different from the nations around them. The Desert of Sin was God's way of training them and helping them to see things from a spiritual perspective. Instead of trusting their own reason, they were learning to trust His leading. Instead of trusting their own abilities they were learning to trust in His provision. These are lessons we all need to learn. All too often our churches are run like worldly businesses with very little waiting on God for His direction and leading. Perhaps we also need to learn the lessons God was trying to teach His people in the wilderness.

God told Moses to take the elders of Israel with him, along with the staff God had given him, and stand before a rock at Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock and water would come out of it for the people to drink. Moses did as God commanded in the presence of the elders, who witnesses what happened that day. Moses called the name of the place Massah (meaning testing) and Meribah (meaning quarrelling).

It is important that we see what is happening in this passage. The people of God have been grumbling and

complaining against God's leading. They have threatened to take the life of Moses His servant. They do not trust the Lord or His leading in their lives. They were worldly in their thinking and their ways. This was not the first time they had grumbled against God. Here in these verses, however, we see the complaining and sinful people of God drinking deeply from the water of God's provision and blessing. This is a picture of God's wonderful patience with us in our failures. It is a picture of His grace and mercy towards us when we fail and fall. How thankful we ought to be for His patience with us in our weakness. How grateful we need to be for the fact that He does not always give us what we deserve but reaches out to us in loving compassion and forgiveness.

Thirst was not the only problem the people of God encountered at that time. While they were at Rephidim, the Amalekites attacked them (verse 8). On that occasion Moses told Joshua to take some of their fighting men and prepare to fight against the Amalekites. Moses would stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in his hands.

It is important that we understand the reason Moses stood on the hill with the staff. The staff was a symbol of the power and authority of God. That staff had been the instrument through which God had unleashed the plagues on Egypt and separated the sea so the people could cross on dry land. More recently Moses struck a rock with that staff and it opened up a source of water for His people to drink. By holding up the staff, Moses was standing in the authority of the Lord God over the enemy.

Notice from verse 11 that as long as the hands of Moses were held up over the battle with the staff of God, the Israelites experienced victory over their enemies but when his hands grew tired and he lowered them, the

Amalekites began to win. Obviously, the hands of Moses grew tired on numerous occasions. The pattern was noted by the people. They began to see that the power to overcome the Amalekites was not in superior skills or strength. Everything depended on God and that staff being raised over them. When the men with him realized what was happening, they had Moses sit on a stone and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on each side so that his hands remained up until sunset. It was in this way that Joshua was able to overcome the Amalekites.

It could be asked why Aaron or Hur could not have given Moses a rest and raised the staff themselves. Obviously, this was not how God wanted to work. He had given that staff to Moses and it was Moses alone who could use it. Aaron and Hur could stand with him and support him but it was Moses' responsibility to hold up the staff.

In a similar way there are spiritual gifts and callings the Lord has given to us in particular. He wants to use those gifts in a special way in our lives. We alone can use the gifts God has given us. Moses was given a special responsibility and while his friends could help and support him, God chose to work through Moses in this particular situation.

We can only admire Aaron and Hur who recognized the special call of God on Moses' life. They did not try to take Moses' role themselves. They did not complain because God wasn't using them as He had chosen to use Moses. Instead, they stood with Moses and did everything they could to strengthen him so that he could do what God had called him to do.

When the battle was over, God told Moses to write what had happened in a scroll so that it would be remembered.

In particular, God told Moses in verse 14 that Joshua was to hear about what had happened on the hill overlooking the battle. Joshua was likely so heavily involved in the battle that he did not have time to see what was happening on the hill. God wanted him to understand that the battle was won not because of his skill and strength but because of Moses who stood over him with the rod of God raised in the air. How easy it is to forget the source of our victories. How easy it would have been for Joshua to begin to place his confidence in himself. Our victories can be our greatest downfall if we lose sight of their source. How often have we seen servants of God becoming confident in themselves, their wisdom and their experience? The moment we lose sight of God as our source of victory we begin to fall. God wanted Joshua to understand and remember that his victory was not in human strength but in the power of God.

Moses built an altar to the Lord in remembrance of this wonderful victory. In verse 15 we read that he called the altar "The Lord is my Banner." He called it this because God had defended His people and given them victory over the Amalekites. The banner was the symbol the army would go to war under. The banner represented the nation of the king under whose authority the army fought. In this case the army of Israel fought under the authority and in the name of the Lord God. Wherever we go today as well we go under His banner. We minister in His authority and in His name claim enemy territory. He is our leader, our strength, our authority and our provider. The enemy fears those who walk under His banner because no one can stand against Him.

For Consideration:

- Why does God sometimes lead us through difficult times? What was the spiritual condition of the people of God as they wandered in the desert? What did they need to learn?
- What lessons has God taught you through the difficult times in life?
- Have you ever grumbled and complained about the leading of the Lord? Explain.
- What do we learn about the patience and grace of God toward His grumbling people in this passage?
- What do we learn about the gifts and responsibilities God has given to us? How has God uniquely gifted you?
- How easy is it for us to trust in our experience, wisdom or gifts? Did the way God give His people victory in this chapter make sense humanly? What does this teach us about how important it is for us to seek Him and His strength in all we do?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He uses difficulties in our lives to teach us important lessons.
- Ask the Lord to help you accept His plan for you. Ask him to keep you from grumbling and complaining when things don't seem to be going your way?

- Thank the Lord for His patience with us when we fail. Ask Him to give you more patience for your brother or sister when they fail.
- Thank the Lord for the gifts and ministries He has given to you. Thank Him that those gifts and the personality He has given you make you uniquely qualified for special tasks. Ask Him to give you eyes and ears to see and hear His leading.
- Thank the Lord that He is the source of our victory. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you trusted in your own wisdom and strength. Ask Him to give you grace to follow Him and trust in His strength.

JETHRO'S WISE COUNSEL

Read Exodus 18:1-27

My experience tells me that it is often in the difficult times that God receives more glory than in the good times. When things are going well for us we often forget God. We cling more closely to Him in the difficult times. People take notice when God takes us through the difficulties of life. They marvel at His provision and the strength He provides. God was not only using the desert to teach His people but also to demonstrate His glory and power to the world.

This is what was happening as the people of God were going through the desert. The news of what God was doing for His people travelled. The nations were seeing how God was delivering them in their hardships. Of particular importance for us in this chapter is that Moses' father-in-law heard what God was doing for him and his people (verse 1).

Note in verse 2 that Moses had sent his wife Zipporah and his two sons Gershom and Eliezer away. Jethro, her father, had taken them in and cared for them. Exodus 4:20 makes it quite clear that his wife and sons had gone with Moses to Egypt. We are not told why Moses would

send them away at this time. Did he send them away to protect them? Was Zipporah simply not ready to face the struggles in Egypt and returned home? Had something gone wrong between them? We do not have an answer. Verse 5 tells us, however, that when Jethro went to visit Moses in the desert he brought Zipporah and Moses' two children to him. Notice what Jethro told Moses in verse 6:

Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

Verse 27 tells us that after Jethro's visit Moses sent him back to his homeland. There is no reference here to Zipporah or his children returning with Jethro. The words of Jethro and the reference to Jethro alone returning home leave us to believe that one of the purposes for Jethro's visit was to bring Zipporah and her children back to Moses. Could it be that Jethro felt that Zipporah's place was to be with her husband at this time? While we do not know for sure, it is of significance to note that God saw fit to lead Zipporah back to her husband to stand with him at this important time in his ministry. Her name is rarely mentioned but God felt her role in the life of Moses was significant enough to bring her back to him to stand by his side as he led the people of Israel. The importance of her role cannot be underestimated.

When Jethro arrived, Moses greeted him by bowing down and kissing him. After their greeting Moses offered hospitality to his father-in-law by bringing him into his tent (verse 7). There Moses told the story of what God had been doing and how He had humbled Egypt. He shared with his father-in-law the struggles they had encountered on the way and how the Lord had set them free.

Jethro was “delighted” to hear the good things God had done in rescuing His people from Egypt. It should be remembered that Jethro was not an Israelite. He did not serve the God of Israel. His gods were the gods of the Midianites of whom he was a priest. Notice, however, in verse 10 how he praised the Lord because of what he had heard. What he saw and heard that day convinced him that the Lord God of Israel was greater than all other gods (verse 11). Verse 12 tells us that Jethro brought a burnt offering and sacrificed it to the Lord God of Israel. After this offering, Aaron and the elders of Israel came together to eat bread with Moses and his father-in-law in the presence of God. This was no ordinary meal. Verse 12 makes it clear that they ate this meal in the presence of God. This was a holy and sacred meal. It celebrated the goodness of God and His provision for His people. Jethro, recently convinced that the God of Israel was the true God, celebrates now with them.

The next day, from morning to evening, people came to see Moses about various problems. Moses would seek the will of the Lord and bring a judgement on the matter presented to him. Some of these people had to wait for hours to see Moses. When Jethro saw what was happening, he asked Moses what he was doing and why he sat alone as judge for all these people (verse 14). Moses told him that the people were coming to seek the will of the Lord. He would judge their cases and inform them of God’s decrees and laws concerning their situation (verse 16).

When he heard Moses’ reply, Jethro told him that what he did was not good. Jethro is not speaking about Moses seeking the will of the Lord for the people but rather in how Moses was dealing with the situation. The task Moses had taken on was too big for him. The people

were becoming weary because they were waiting for so long to get an answer to their problem. Jethro evaluated the situation and offered Moses some wise counsel concerning how he could better accomplish the task. Jethro has four points to give Moses that would help him be more effective in his work.

First, he challenged Moses in verse 19 to bring the people's disputes before God. Jethro is telling Moses that he had a general obligation to continue to seek God on behalf of his people. This would mean praying for them and listening to God about the specific problems His people were facing. Jethro is reminding Moses that the solution to the problems His people faced was not in human wisdom but in the will of God.

So often we counsel people through our own wisdom and experience rather than seeking God on their behalf. Jethro reminded Moses that he was not to trust his own wisdom, but to bring every situation to the Lord.

Second, Moses was to teach the decrees and laws to the people (verse 20), showing them how to live before God. By teaching the people about the laws and requirements of God, Moses would help the people deal with certain situations themselves. For the most part, the people of God were ignorant of His requirements. They simply did not know what God wanted them to do. They had never been taught in His ways. Many of the problems we experience today as believers are the result of not understanding God's Word. Jethro's counsel is very wise. Christian leaders need to be teachers of God's Word. Instead of constantly trying to solve every problem, Jethro counsels Moses to teach the people so that when problems did arise they would know what God expected.

Fewer people would be lining up to see him because they already knew what God required.

The third piece of advice Jethro brought to Moses was that he select capable men from among the people and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. These individuals were to act as judges for the people. Notice that Jethro gives some qualifications for these judges in verse 21. They were to be men who feared God, were trustworthy and hated dishonest gain (i.e. bribes). These men would give counsel on the various cases that were brought to them based on what they knew to be the requirements of the Law of God.

Finally, in verse 22, Jethro advises Moses to continue to judge the difficult cases himself. Whenever there was a problem that needed special attention, the judges were to refer these cases to Moses who would seek the counsel of the Lord specifically for their situation.

Jethro told Moses in verse 23 that if he did this, there would be less strain on the people and that his load would be lighter because others were sharing it with him. Notice in verse 23 that Jethro was very careful not to assume that his wisdom was going to solve all Moses' problems. Notice what Jethro says in verse 23:

If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.

Notice particularly the words, "If you do this and God so commands." These words are significant. Jethro was offering his human wisdom but he knew that there was something more important than his wisdom. Jethro recognized in these words that the desire and purpose of

the Lord was also even more important. Moses could follow Jethro's wisdom but if this was not what God commanded then Jethro knew his ideas were useless. Jethro tells Moses that his wisdom was only valid if it was also what the Lord commanded. In saying this, he recognized a higher authority and wisdom than his own and challenged Moses to seek God about whether what he suggested was in the purpose of God for him. In this particular case, the wisdom of Jethro was from God and Moses listened to what he said and appointed capable men to help him judge the cases brought before him.

Notice the result of following the advice of Jethro in verse 23. First, the people were satisfied. That is to say, they were able to deal with their problems in a more efficient way. They did not have to wait hours each day to have their conflicts addressed. Things were less stressful for them and they were more at peace.

The second result of following Jethro's advice was that Moses himself was able to "stand the strain." The burden of caring for all these people had been more than Moses could handle by himself. Jethro knew that Moses, as a mere man, was only able to handle so much. Sometimes we get the impression that with God on our side we can handle everything. We consider it a weakness to be tired and not to take on more and more ministry. I have met people like Moses who were overwhelmed with responsibility. I have also been like Moses taking on much more than I should. Let's remember that God has not called us to solve the problems of the world on our own. He has given us people to stand with us and support us in the ministry to which He has called us.

Jethro reminds us that we need each other. He challenged Moses to find people to stand with him to accom-

plish the task God had called him to do. Jethro also brings Moses' wife and children back to him as well because he believed that they, too, were important to Moses if he was going to become all that God intended him to be. May God give us grace to see how Jethro's advice needs to be applied to our own lives and ministries.

For Consideration:

- How did God receive glory through the difficulties that Israel faced in Egypt and in the wilderness? How has God received glory in the struggles you faced in life?
- What role do spouses play in the ministry to which God has called us? How can you be more effective in supporting your partner in their ministry or spiritual walk?
- How was Jethro impacted as a pagan priest of Midian by the stories of what God had done for His people? What stories do you have to tell?
- What does Jethro show us about the importance of teaching God's Word today? How does good teaching help God's people deal with conflict?
- What does Jethro teach us about the importance of finding people to stand with us in the ministry to which God has called us?
- How important is it that we not only listen to human wisdom but also to the commands of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that His glory is often revealed through the trials we go through in life. Ask Him to reveal His glory through the trials you are facing now.
- If you are married, take a moment to thank the Lord for the support of your husband or wife. Ask the Lord to show you how you can be a greater support and encouragement to them in their spiritual life and ministry.
- Ask God to give you opportunities to share stories of His goodness with others.
- Thank God for those He has put around you to help you in your ministry and spiritual life.
- Ask God to help you to seek His will and purpose for your life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you did what made sense humanly speaking without seeking His heart.

18

THE LORD VISITS MOUNT SINAI

Read Exodus 19:1-25

It had been exactly three months to the very day since the Israelites had left the land of Egypt. The Lord led them through the desert to the base of Mount Sinai. They camped there by the mountain.

Here the Lord spoke to Moses and gave him a word for His people. In verse 4 the Lord reminded His people of how He had taken them out of Egypt and carried them on eagles' wings to Himself. We need to consider this statement briefly.

A quick look at the people of God shows us that they were a grumbling and thankless people. Their faith was very weak. They had already considered stoning Moses the leader God had put over them (see Exodus 17:4). They told Moses that they would rather be in Egypt than perish in the desert (Exodus 16:3; 17:3). What made these people any better than the Egyptians? They were not thankful to God for delivering them. They argued with Him and complained about how He was leading them.

Despite their constant failures and bad attitude, God still loved them. He devastated the nation of Egypt in order to set them free. This is a picture of the grace of God that reaches out to those who do not deserve His love and compassion. Why should God have chosen Israel over Egypt? The answer lies totally on God's free and loving choice.

Verse 4 tells us that God carried His people on eagles' wings. What is important for us to see is that God does not call us and leave us to fend for ourselves. He carries those He calls. In other words, He supplies all the strength, wisdom and provisions necessary. What a blessing this is. If God has saved and called you to minister in His name, you can be sure that He will also provide you with everything you need. He will carry you all the way. You will not have to face life with all its obstacles alone. God will see you through. Again, we cannot rush over this too quickly. Let me repeat what this verse is telling us. The all-powerful God who created this world has chosen to carry you. You can face every obstacle with confidence and assurance. In Him you will be victorious.

Notice finally in verse 4 that God called and carried His people for the purpose of bringing them to Himself. His goal was intimacy with His people. The obstacles they faced on the path were not to harm them but designed to draw them closer to Him. This is God's great desire. He wants a people to love and keep. Why He would focus such attention on us is something we will not likely ever understand. What a privilege, however, to be the objects of God's loving focus. There could be no greater honour than this. Israel was a special nation not because they were better than any other nation but because they were the object of God's attention.

In verse 5 God challenges His people to live in obedience to Him. Notice that if they obeyed and fully kept His covenant then they would be, out of all the nations, His treasured possession. While God owned the whole earth, this nation would be a special kingdom of priests for Him. Again it is important that we take a moment to consider what God is saying here.

It would be easy to assume from verse 5 that God's love for His people was conditional. "If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession." We need to understand this verse, however, in its context. God had set His people free from their bondage not because they deserved it but because He loved them. He carried them through the desert not because they had been obeying Him but because of His great mercy and compassion. God does not only love those who obey Him. Listen to what Paul told the Romans in Romans 5:8:

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God loved us when we were at our worst. He loved us when we did not love Him. The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is a clear example of how the Lord loves His children even when they wander far from Him. His love for us is not conditional.

Having said this, however, obedience to God is vital and enables us to experience in greater ways, the fullness of His blessing. Sin, disobedience and grumbling only hinder what God wants to do in our life. Our refusal to receive from God not only harms us but also the work He wants to do through us. It reflects on us and our testimony in the world. If God's people were going to be effective

in their role as a kingdom of priests and experience the fullness of God's blessing in this role, they would need to commit themselves to walking faithfully with Him and following His ways. If they did they would experience the fullness of what He had in store for them.

When Moses shared these words, the people responded by telling him that they would do everything that he had said. Moses returned to the Lord with the answer from the people (verse 8). In response, the Lord told Moses that He was going to come in a dense cloud. The people would see this cloud and hear the voice of God speaking to Moses. God wanted the people to see this so that they would put their trust in Moses as His representative (verse 9).

The Lord told His people that they were to prepare for His coming. They were to wash their clothes (verse 10). Limits were to be put around the mountain to keep the people at a distance. Whoever touched the mountain at that time was to be put to death (verse 12). Notice that no hand was to be placed on the person who had touched the mountain. He or she was to be killed at a distance either with stones or with arrows. Any animal that wandered beyond the limit set around the mountain was to be killed (verse 13). Only when the ram's horn was sounded with a long blast could the people go near the mountain. According to verse 15, the people were also to abstain from any sexual relations until after the Lord had passed by. We should not understand from this that sexual relations in marriage are wrong. The Law of Moses, however, did state that when a man and woman had sexual relations they were unclean until the evening.

When a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both must bathe with water,

and they will be unclean till evening. (Leviticus 15:18)

By telling the people to refrain from sexual activity until after the Lord's presence left the mountain, Moses was making sure that none of His people would be ceremonially unclean.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning in the camp. A thick cloud covered the mountain and the people heard a very loud trumpet blast. We are not told the origin of that blast. It appears to have been from the cloud. When the people saw and heard these things they trembled with fear. Moses led the people to the foot of the mountain. The people looked up and saw that Mount Sinai was covered with smoke and fire. The smoke was so thick it was described as smoke billowing up from a furnace. The mountain shook violently. The trumpet continued to sound and its sound grew louder and louder. We can imagine how afraid the people of Israel would have been as they stood at the foot of that mountain. I'm sure that some may have wanted to run as far away from it as they could. God, however, called them to remain there in His awesome and fearful presence.

There is a strange contrast in this chapter. The chapter began by speaking about a God who called His people out of Egypt and carried them on eagles' wings. This is a picture of compassion and tenderness. Here now Israel saw another side of God. They were seeing the holiness and justice of God. This terrified them. It is sometimes difficult to understand these different attributes of God. We must recognize, however, that He is both a just and loving God. These attributes walk hand in hand. Understanding the justice and holiness of God ought to make us appreciate His love and compassion even more.

In verse 20 God spoke to Moses and called him to the top of the mountain where He told him to return to His people to warn them again about not forcing their way to the mountain to see Him. Anyone who did so, even if they were priests, would die (verse 20).

Moses does not seem to understand why God would ask him to return to the people to warn them. He reminded God in verse 23 that he had already told the people not to approach the mountain and had set up limits around it lest they approach and perish. God insisted, however, that Moses return with this message. He was also to bring Aaron up with him when he returned.

It is interesting to note that the Lord told Moses on several occasions that the priests were not to force their way through to the mountain. The fact that God told him to go down again with this message is an indication of just how important it was. It appears that there were two temptations for the people standing at the foot of the mountain. The first was to be terrified. The temptation for these people would be to run in the other direction or be so afraid that they could not respond to God at all. Those who fell into this category could not imagine ever standing before such a God. They feared Him so much that they could never surrender to Him.

The other temptation was to take God lightly. The priests seemed to fall in this category. They were God's representatives. They wanted to be where God was. Maybe they wondered why Moses could go up into God's presence when they couldn't. There are people like this today. They are quick to seek God and His purpose. They want to be wherever God is. They want to step out and do all they can. Where they often fail, however, is in listening to God and living in obedience to His word. All

too many servants of God break beyond the limits God has set up for them. They do things their own way. They are not listening to God. They lack a reverent fear of God. They fail to submit to His purpose and His ways. Instead they are only thinking of themselves. These individuals fail to understand the justice and holiness of God. They fail to understand their need of surrender to His purposes and plans.

The balance is not always easy to find. God is a God of tremendous love and compassion but He is also a God of jealous wrath and holiness. What is important for us is to learn to walk in humble submission and obedience.

For Consideration:

- We see from this passage that God called His people out of Egypt. Did He do this because His people deserved His love? What do we learn about the unmerited love of God toward His people?
- What did God mean when He told His people that He had carried them on eagles' wings? What encouragement do you receive from this for your own life and ministry?
- How important is it for us to walk in faithful obedience to God? How does disobedience to God affect our ministry, calling and experience of God's presence and blessing?

- What do we learn in this passage about the holiness of God? How do you respond toward the understanding that God is such a holy God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way He not only calls us but carries us through the difficulties of life.
- Thank the Lord that while we do not deserve His love and compassion, He calls us to be His representatives in this world.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to walk in faithful obedience to His Word and purposes for your life.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy and just God. Ask Him to keep you from running from Him out of fear. Ask Him also to keep you from taking this important attribute too lightly. Ask Him to help you to live with a balanced understanding of His love and compassion on the one hand and His holy justice on the other.

19

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Read Exodus 20:1-26

In the last chapter we saw how the Lord God reminded His people that He had called them out of bondage in Egypt and carried them on eagles' wings to Himself. He told them that if they walked in faithfulness to His commandments they would be His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests. The people agreed to follow the Lord and His ways. In Exodus 20 the Lord gives a summary of His requirements and showed His people how He expected them to live.

He begins in verse 2 with a reminder of His goodness toward them. The Lord brought His people out of the land of Egypt. Egypt had been a land of slavery and bondage. God saw their need and reached out in compassion to set them free. The Lord wanted His people to be a kingdom of priests, His representatives on this earth. As His representatives they were to point the world to the Lord God. God called Israel, as His priests to a certain standard of life. God sets out this standard in summary form here in the Ten Commandments. While we could write another book on these commandments our purpose here is simply to examine each of them briefly.

No other gods

The first commandment in verse 3 was that Israel have no other gods. The Lord God of Israel wanted their full attention. He wanted them to devote their lives to serving Him alone. There were to resist any other god and seek Him alone. There is something very comforting about this command. Remember in the last chapter that the Lord God had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt and carried them on eagles' wings to Himself (see Exodus 19:4). God desired a people for Himself. Like a loving husband He would not share His wife, Israel, with anyone else. This commandment is in reality a declaration of God's intense love for His people.

As His representatives, God's people were to set their minds on Him alone. They were not to let the things of the world or other interests keep them from serving and loving their God. The word "before" here gives us a sense of priority. Our lives are filled with many good things. Our families, our work, our friends are all important. What God is saying to His people, however, is that of all the good things in life, He must be "before" them all. He must have the priority in our lives. Nothing we do or have must be more important than Him.

Idols

The second commandment for the people of Israel was that they were not to make idols in any form for the purpose of bowing down to them or worshipping them. This commandment is closely related to the first but speaks specifically of the practice of the people of that day to create gods they could see. How can we worship a God we cannot see? How can we speak to a God who does not answer back each time in a voice we can hear

with our ears? God's desire, however, is that we see and hear Him with the eyes of faith. God is much bigger than any human idol. His likeness cannot be created by human hands or even imagined by human minds. He is beyond description. The entire world is a small reflection of His power and majesty? What image or idol could communicate the depth of that greatness?

When a worshipper creates an idol they focus on it rather than on the one it represents. The piece of wood or stone becomes a god and ultimately takes the place of the person it represents. God's desire was that His people come directly to him. There were to be no substitutes for God. His people were to worship Him directly. Again this shows us the desire of God's heart for His people. The door was open for them to offer their sacrifices directly to Him. He would accept their gifts and praise.

We need to mention that an idol does not have to be made of stone or wood. We can be guilty of substituting other things for God. In our day our church building or traditions can replace God and become an idol. They can become our focus and take our attention away from God. I have myself been guilty at times of placing my ministry over God. Even our doctrines can become idols and ultimately take our focus away from God. Maybe you have been in churches where having the right doctrine was more important than anything else. While all these things are important in themselves, they can also become a substitute for God. When you begin to see that your faith is about a set of traditions, a ministry or a set of beliefs you need to ask yourself whether these things have actually become more important to you than God Himself. Even good things can become idols if they become more important than God.

Notice that connected with this second commandment is the reminder that God is a jealous God, “punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love and keep His commandments” (verses 5-6). It is quite easy to go way beyond what God intended to say here in this verse. While it is true that our sins do affect our children God’s great desire is to bless His people. While the curse of God only remains for four generations on those who hate Him, His blessing remains for a thousand generations. We should not get caught up in the numbers here. God is simply showing us that while there are consequences to putting other things before Him, the blessing of walking with Him in obedience is a thousand times greater.

I take great delight in knowing that the Lord God is jealous for me and my full attention. Why He should take such delight in me is beyond my understanding, but what a privilege it is to know that He loves me this much.

Respecting God’s Name

In verse 7 the Lord reminds His people that they were not to misuse His name. We need to remember here that when we speak of a name in Bible times we are not just speaking about a word by which we can identify a person. We are talking about God’s character and what His name represents. There are a number of ways we can misuse the name of the Lord and disrespect His character. One way the Lord’s name could be misused was by swearing falsely in His name. Consider Leviticus 19:12 in this regard:

Do not swear falsely by My name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

In the Old Testament people would swear in the name of the Lord God to do certain things. Some made these promises but did not keep them. In so doing they misrepresented the name of the Lord and associated Him with the breaking of their promise. This dishonoured the character of the Lord who is a God of truth and holiness.

Another way we see the name of the Lord being misused today is in profanity. The name of God is often used in our day as a swear word. Sometimes it is associated with many practices the Lord hates. We have all heard the name of the Lord used in this way. This use of the Lord's name again misrepresents Him and His character.

Finally, another way of misusing the name of the Lord is in our lifestyle as believers. As His children we represent Him and His name wherever we go and in all that we do. When people know that we are believers they watch what we do. What happens when we as believers do not walk in obedience to God? What is the response of the unbeliever toward the name we represent? Listen to what Paul wrote on this subject in Romans 2:21-24:

(21) You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? (22) You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (23) You who brag about the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? (24) As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Notice that because God's people were not living what they professed to believe, the name of God was being blasphemed among the Gentiles. As those who are

called by God's name, our lives are a reflection to others of the God we serve. It is our obligation to do all we can to uphold the honour of that name in our words and lives. Exodus 20:7 ends with a reminder that God will punish those who misuse His name.

The Sabbath

The fourth commandment of God for His people was with regard to keeping the seventh day holy. In reality this commandment is very closely related to the first three commandments. Notice that the particular restriction on this day was that His people were not to work. All work was to be done on the first six days. On the seventh day the people of God were to rest. God reminds them that this was what He had done. He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Verse 11 tells us that the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Why would the Lord God rest on the seventh day? It is certainly not because He was tired for He never needs any kind of rest. The psalmist tells us in Psalm 121:3-4 that the Lord does not slumber or sleep.

(3) He will not let your foot slip— He who watches over you will not slumber; (4) indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord “rested” on the seventh day to give us an example to follow. In six days the Lord created the physical universe but on the seventh day He created the principle of rest. This shows us something important. It shows us that we were not created for work alone. God designed us so that we also need time for rest and refreshment. The seventh day was that day of rest. In fact, this rest was so important that God set the day apart

as a holy day for His people. God's people were to respect this day as a holy day. They would do this by ceasing from work.

The concept of ceasing from work was important for God's people. How often, even in our day, do we get caught up in our work and have no time for anything else. Our families and our faith get put aside because of the pressures of work. Some people seem to live only for work. It is quite easy for us to allow our work to be all consuming. In fact, for many, work has become their god.

There is another thing that work does. It gives us a false sense of security. We begin to believe that we are our own providers. Work can give us a sense of worth. We feel important because we have a good position or because we are providing for the needs of our family. We find our value in what we do and not in how God sees us.

God saw these temptations and spoke directly to this. This one day in seven regularly broke the cycle of work and gave His people time to be refreshed physically but also to reflect on what is really important in life.

Notice also in these verses that the commandment tells us that this day was to be a day "to the Lord." In other words, this was a day to focus on God and His purposes. This day was given to the Lord for His people's good. It was a day set aside for rest and communion with their Lord and Creator. My wife and I have for some time now kept Saturday morning for each other. This is a time when we can have breakfast together and talk. God is doing the same thing here. He is setting aside a time to be with His people and to draw close. We often see this commandment as a law to be observed more than a

special time with someone we love. It was God's intention that this be a special day to reconnect with His people.

The commandment was not intended to restrict people but to refresh them. This is quite clear in the teaching of Jesus in Mark 2:27 when he said:

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

What Jesus is telling us is that the Sabbath was intended to be for the refreshment and blessing of His people. God knows our need for physical and emotional rest from the strain of work. He also knows that we need time with Him to reflect on His purpose and be renewed spiritually. This day was given to God's people for their good, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Honouring Father and Mother

The fifth commandment moves from Israel's obligation toward God to their responsibility toward each other. In verse 12 God reminded His children that they were to honour their father and mother. It is very important that things begin at this level. A child who learns to respect His father and mother when He is young will very likely respect others as well. God expected His people to train their children in this matter of respect for parents. We read in Exodus 21:15, 17 that the punishment for lack of respect for a parent was death:

Anyone who attacks His father or His mother must be put to death. (Exodus 21:15)

Anyone who curses His father or mother must be put to death (Exodus 21:17)

God took this matter very seriously. His desire was that the family unit be strong. When the family is strong so is the community. What is happening in our families is reflected in the community in which we live.

Respect for parents is reflected in a variety of ways. It is reflected first in the recognition of authority. To respect our parents implies accepting that God has placed them over us for our good. To respect their authority is to listen to what they have to say and value their opinion. This is true of young people or adults whose parents are still alive. Even parents in their old age need to know that we respect and value their advice and wisdom.

Respect for parents also has to do with concern for them. This is especially true as our parents are getting older. The child who respects His or her parent will do what they can to care for them in their time of need. They will show compassion and kindness.

Notice in verse 12 that a blessing is attached to this commandment. God told His people that they were to respect their parents so that they would live long in the land He was giving them. We need to see just how important honouring parents was to God. The quality of His people's lives would be affected by this commandment. If they wanted to live long in the land the Lord was giving them, they needed to honour their parents. What would happen if they did not keep this commandment? The land itself would suffer. Where there was no respect for parents that disrespect would spill out into the community. Soon all authority would be questioned. People would do what they wanted without any concern for

others. The society would break down and the presence of God would be removed. Soon the enemy would come in and take over the land. All this would begin at the family level.

Murder

Not only was there to be respect for parents but also for the lives of all human life. The sixth commandment says “you shall not murder.” Older translations of the Bible use the word “kill”. The word murder expresses more of the sense of what the Lord is telling His people. God certainly commanded the killing of animals for sacrifice. He also, on occasion, ordered the slaughter of foreign nations. Even Israelites who failed to keep His commandments were in certain cases to be killed. This commandment is not against killing so much as it is against murder. God’s intention in this commandment is to deal with those who deliberately and unjustly take another human life. Exodus 21:12-14 provides a way of escape for the individual who accidentally or unintentionally killed another human being.

(12) “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. (13) However, if He does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, He is to flee to a place I will designate. (14) But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.

This commandment forbids the intentional and deliberate taking of human life for unjust or personal reasons. The command is against the premeditated and intentional murder of another human being for personal gain. God’s intention is that human life be respected.

Adultery

In the seventh commandment God speaks about marriage and forbids the practice of adultery (verse 14). It was God's intention that a husband and a wife be faithful to each other. Sexual relationships outside of marriage were forbidden. Leviticus 20:10 makes it clear that those who committed adultery were to be put to death.

If a man commits adultery with another man's wife — with the wife of his neighbour — both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.

This shows us just how serious this matter of adultery was in the eyes of God. We have already examined the commandment about honouring parents. Here God speaks about honouring our husbands and wives. It is His desire that we grow and develop in intimacy with our marriage partners. God is calling us to be content with the partner He has given us. He is calling us to commit ourselves to that partner for life, resisting all others to give ourselves only to them.

Jesus would teach in Matthew 5:27-28 that this commandment about adultery not only referred to the act of sexual intercourse but to the thought life as well.

(27) "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (28) But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

To look lustfully at a woman, according to Jesus, is to commit adultery in our hearts. This means that all lustful thoughts must be dealt with immediately.

This commandment is not only for the good of each partner in the marriage but also for the family and society. Where marriage breaks down, so will society. If our society is to be healthy, we must have strong and faithful marriages where partners will stick with each other even when things are difficult.

Stealing

The eighth commandment in verse 15 forbids stealing. Stealing has to do with taking what does not belong to us. This commandment calls us to respect what belongs to someone else. This healthy respect for the possessions of our neighbour creates a loving and secure environment where relationships can thrive. Some time ago thieves broke into my office and stole my computer and printer. The result was that I put a lock on my office door and keep my windows closed. When someone steals from us we immediately put up barriers. We no longer trust each other and look at each other with suspicion. The whole society is affected by this. Where mistrust and suspicion flourishes, healthy relationships cannot thrive. People are violated and society as a whole suffers. God's desire is that we respect each other and live in harmony and loving trust.

False Witness

Not only are we to respect the possessions of our neighbour but we are also to respect his or her reputation. The ninth commandment forbids giving false testimonies against our neighbour. The commandment seems to speak directly to a court case where someone would stand up and give a false testimony before the judges examining his neighbour. What is true in a court setting, however, is also true in everyday life. In a society where

rumours and gossip abound, it is important that we examine this commandment. We are not to believe everything we hear nor are we to pass it on.

In many cases, lies are intended to hurt the reputation of a brother or sister or make them look bad. This is a reflection of the heart of the liar. How can a society flourish when its people are willing to hurt each other with their words? Words can do as much damage as inflicting physical pain. In some cases, they can do even more damage. God is calling us to deal with these evil intentions and the words that hurt and destroy our brothers and sisters. He is calling us to examine the motive of the heart that would so willingly destroy a brother or sister with evil and false words.

Coveting

The tenth and final commandment is about coveting. The word covet refers to desiring or lusting after something. Notice in verse 17 that Israel was not to covet their neighbour's house, his wife, his servants, his ox, his donkey or anything that belongs to him. It is possible not to steal from our neighbour but still want what he has. It is also possible not to ever commit adultery with the neighbour's wife but still lust after her. Coveting refers to the attitude of the heart. It goes beyond the physical act of stealing, committing adultery or bearing false witness. To covet is to long for something that does not belong to us.

There is a difference between admiring something our neighbour has and coveting it. When we covet our heart says, "I must have what my neighbour has." You may never act on this thought but your heart is not content. You want what he has so bad that you become jealous. You begin to have lustful thoughts about his wife. You

become envious of what he has and this begins to affect your relationship with him.

When we lust or sinfully desire what is not ours we become discontent with the provision of God. God's desire for us is that we learn to be happy with what He has given us. How easy it is to be constantly looking for bigger and better things. God's provision is sufficient. We need to learn to be happy with that provision.

What is important for us to notice is that the Lord was not only concerned about the outward act but also the inner attitude. He wanted His people to deal with any wrong attitudes they had in their hearts toward their brother or sister. This tenth commandment shows us that we may never actually act on our thoughts but simply to have the thoughts is in itself a sin that needs to be addressed.

As God gave these commandments to Moses the people stood at a distance. They saw the lightning and heard the thunder and the trumpet. The mountain was covered in smoke and they were afraid (verse 18). When Moses came down to meet them, they begged him not to let God speak to them lest they die. This shows us just how afraid they were of God and His voice. Moses reminded them that God revealed Himself to them in this way so that they would understand His holiness and be afraid of sinning against Him (verse 20).

Maybe one of the reasons we see so much sin in our churches and society is because we have lost our understanding of the holiness and justice of God. I have spoken different times to individuals who see God as only a God of love. They can't understand why a God of love would judge sin. This passage shows us another attribute

of God. To understand His holiness is to walk in holy reverence lest we offend His name.

As we conclude this chapter God reminded His people that He had spoken to them from heaven (verse 22). They were to respect Him and have no other gods. They were not to make idols to any god. They were instead to make an altar of plain earth to worship him. If they did make an altar it was to be made of ordinary stones. They were not permitted to use any dressed or decorated stones. No tool was to be used in the construction of any altar made to worship the Lord God (verse 25).

The reason for this is quite simple. It would be very easy for the people of God to begin to focus on the altar and not on Him. God did not want anything to distract them. The altars were nothing to look at. This is how God wanted it.

God is not impressed by our fancy buildings. In fact, often they can distract us. I have met believers who have been more focused on their church building than on building the kingdom of God. God is worshipped best in simplicity.

In verse 26 God makes one further statement. He reminded those who were offering sacrifices on the altar that they were not to go up to the altar on steps. This meant that the altars were to be small enough that the top could be reached standing beside it. There seems to be two reasons for this. First, it kept the people from putting too much emphasis on making large altars that would only draw attention away from God. Secondly, it would preserve modesty so that those going up the steps would not expose themselves to others looking up. God required simplicity and modesty in worship. Anything that would draw attention away from God was to be removed.

Sometime ago I went to a worship service dressed up in my best clothes. As I walked in to the building the first person who greeted me made a comment on how well I was dressed. Before I got to my seat another person met me and made the same comment. Before the service started I had three people comment on my suit. This disturbed me. I had not come to church to have people notice me. I felt I was being a distraction for people. Because I was only five minutes from my home, I left the worship service, went home, and changed into other clothes and returned. What I am saying is this. We must make every effort not to distract others in their worship of God. I felt that how I dressed drew attention to me and whatever drew attention to me removed attention from God. The priests walking up the stairs and exposing themselves would certainly remove attention from God. Anything that does so must be avoided. God alone must receive the glory.

For Consideration:

- Is it possible to make our traditions, our service of God or our doctrinal understanding of God an idol in our lives? Explain.
- How can we misuse the name of the Lord today?
- Why is it important for us to learn to rest from our work? How does rest give us time to reflect on what is important?
- How do the Ten Commandments protect our society and keep it healthy?

- What does it mean to covet? How does this commandment show us that God is not only concerned about our actions but also our thoughts and attitudes?
- How does a proper understanding of God's holiness keep us from sin?
- What do we learn in this passage about God's desire for us to worship Him in simplicity and modesty? How does simplicity and modesty help us to focus on God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have made other things more important in your life than Him.
- Ask God to help you to take regular times of rest from work to reflect on Him and His purposes. Ask Him to strengthen you spiritually in those times.
- Take a moment to pray for your society and the way it had disregarded the purpose of God as reflected here in the Ten Commandments. Ask God to move in your society to restore them to His purpose.
- Ask God to help you to love and serve Him from the heart.
- Ask God to reveal to you more of His holiness. Thank Him that He is a loving God but also a holy and just God.

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything in your worship service that is actually distracting people in their worship of God.

RESPECTING LIFE

Read Exodus 21:1-35

God gave to Moses a summary of His law in the Ten Commandments. How did the principles of these commandments regarding honouring God and fellow human beings apply to the different circumstances people faced each day? In Exodus 21 God shows His people in very practical terms how these principles applied to very particular circumstances.

HEBREW SERVANTS AND WOMEN

God begins in verse 2 by explaining how His people were to treat a Hebrew servant. If they bought a servant from among their own people, this servant was only to serve for six years. He was to be set free on the seventh year. In reality this is a practical application of the law of the Sabbath. Remember that the Lord commanded His people to work for six days and on the seventh they were to rest from their work. The same principle applied to taking servants from among their own people. The seventh year was to be a year of freedom for a Hebrew servant. This law kept the Hebrews from oppressing one another. No Hebrew was to be taken against their will as a slave for life. Remember that God's people had been

slaves in the land of Egypt. They were not to do to their fellow citizens what had been done to them.

Notice in verse 2 that a Hebrew servant was not to pay anything for his release on the seventh year. The temptation for the master would be to make the servant pay for his freedom. The law of God forbade that a master should make any of his Hebrew servants pay for release on the seventh year. Verse 3 tells us that if the servant came to his master with a wife, she also was to be set free with her husband on the seventh year.

The only exception to this rule was if the master gave his Hebrew servant a wife and she bore him sons and daughters. In this case the woman and the children belonged to the master and were not free to go. The couple would still be married but the wife and children would remain servants. The husband, however, was free from all obligations to the master.

If this arrangement was disagreeable to the male servant, and he chose to stay with his wife and children, then the master would take him to the judges of Israel and explain the situation. The servant would be taken to a doorpost and his ear pierced with an awl (verse 6). This mark on his ear would make him a servant for life to the master and he would be free to be with his wife and children.

Women, at this time, did not have the same freedom as men. Notice in verse 7 that if a man sold his daughter as a servant she was not to go free after seven years. She would become a servant for life. If she displeased her master, the master was to let her be bought back. He was not, however, to sell her to a foreigner. He was to remember that he had selected her personally. He was now the one breaking his arrangement with her. In the

breaking of this arrangement he was to show her respect. While it is true that the woman did not have the same right as a man at this time, this law protected her from being sold into slavery to those who cared nothing for her.

If the female servant pleased her master and he gave her in marriage to his son, he was then to treat her as a daughter. If the son married another woman, he was not to deprive his first one of her share of food, clothing and all the privileges she deserved as his wife. She was not to be looked down on because she had been a servant. If the son did not treat her with the respect she deserved as his wife, she would be free to go without any payment of money to her master (verse 11).

Notice again that the Lord protects the interests of the woman. She had a right to food, clothing and other rights of a wife. If these rights were not being met by her husband, she was free to leave. While it is not my intention to examine the law of divorce it is important that we see, that in God's eyes, the woman was free to leave in the case where she was being neglected and abused by her husband. It was the intention of God that this woman be protected, loved and respected. He provided a way of escape for her in the event that this was not the case.

We see from this that the law was merciful and compassionate. It was not designed to restrict or harm but to respect and honour servants.

PERSONAL INJURIES

Murder

In verse 12 God explains more fully His law about murder. Respect for human life is also seen in the requirements of God regarding personal injuries. We see from verse 12 that if a man struck another man and killed him he was to be put to death. This seems cruel and harsh but the reality of the matter is that it showed the value of human life. Anyone who intentionally took the life of another was to pay the greatest penalty possible for this action.

Notice, in verse 13, however, that there was provision for those who killed a person without intending to do so. God allowed them to flee to a place that He would set apart for this purpose. There they would be protected from anyone who wanted to seek revenge. If a person intentionally planned to kill another human being, however, that person was to be taken to the altar and put to death as punishment for his terrible deed (verse 14). The life of another human being was to be respected.

Honouring Father and Mother

The commandment about honouring father and mother is seen in verse 15. God imposes a very heavy punishment on any child who would attack his father or mother. The implication is that this individual approached his parents with the intention of harming them. The Law of God stated that a person who killed another was to be put to death. Those who approached their parents to harm them were to suffer the same punishment. Again this shows us just how important it was for God that children respect their parents. What kind of society would it be if children

did not even respect their parents who brought them up? There is probably no role in society as important as that of parent. God values this role and stands firmly behind those who take this role seriously, punishing any child by death if they even approached a parent with intent to harm. Notice also in verse 17 that a child who cursed his parents with his words was to be put to death. God expected that parents be shown the utmost respect.

Kidnapping

Another crime punishable by death was that of kidnapping. Anyone who forcibly took another person with intent to sell that individual was to be put to death. The physical life of the person kidnapped is not necessarily in danger but human life is seen as a way to make money. Notice from verse 16 that the intent to sell an individual was punishable by death. It is quite clear from this verse that a kidnapper did not have to sell a person to be guilty; all that was necessary was that they act on this intent.

Again we see the value of human life. When we see people as something to profit from, we are showing disrespect for human life. God took this seriously and demanded the greatest penalty for such disrespect. The life of another human being was to be valued for what it was, created in the image of God and valued by God.

Physical Injury from a Quarrel

God knew that there would be disagreements between His people. Sometimes those disagreements would erupt in physical violence. In verses 18-19 He shows His people what He required for injuries suffered because of a conflict between His people. In the example used in verse 18, we read of one man hitting another with a stone

or his fist. While the injured man did not die, he was confined to bed. In this case, the man who caused the injury was to pay the other for the loss of his time from work until he was completely healed. In this way, the injured man's family would not suffer because of what had happened to him.

Beating a Slave

In those days, slavery was a reality in the society. While slaves belonged to their masters, these masters did not have the right to take their lives. No master had the right to treat his slave like an object to be used and thrown away. God demanded that the master respect the life of his slaves. The law required that if a man beat his male or female slave so that they died, the master was to be punished.

If the slave did not die, the master would not be punished since the slave belonged to him. The master did have the right to discipline his slaves but he was to keep in mind that those he disciplined harshly would need to recover and this would mean a loss of profit. The fact that the master was harming his own business was, in part, punishment enough.

The fact that slavery existed and that God made laws regarding slavery does not mean that He approved of the practice. In fact, Paul lists slave trading along with adultery, murder of father and mother and lying in 1 Timothy 1:9-10:

(9) We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for mur-

derers, (10) for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

What we need to understand here is that God is a God of tremendous patience. Consider our own lives for example. God deals with us in grace and mercy. There are many things in our lives that are not as they should be. When I became a believer, there were still many issues that needed to be worked out in my life. God gives us only what we can handle for the moment. He works in us to make us more like Christ each day. The same was true for the people of Israel.

Injuries to a Pregnant Woman and her Child

Special mention is made in verse 22-25 of a pregnant woman and her child. The example used is of two men fighting and one of them accidentally hits a pregnant woman so that she gives birth prematurely. If there was no serious injury the man who hit the woman was to be fined whatever the woman's husband demanded and what was permitted by the court. Notice that the man who accidentally hit the woman, though fined for his actions, was protected by the courts so that his penalty was not unjust or excessive.

If the result of these injuries either to the mother or the child was serious, the man was to pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound and bruise for bruise. He was to suffer whatever the child or mother suffered. The law protected both the mother and the child.

This law protected both the woman and the child in her womb. Special care was to be taken in the presence of a

pregnant woman not only because of her but also because of the unborn child in her womb. To harm that child or to cause it to be born prematurely was a serious matter in the eyes of God. This tells us that even the unborn child in the womb was to be respected and protected by the Law of God. This verse speaks powerfully to the practice of abortion in our day.

Injuries Caused by Animals

The law of God also addressed the matter of personal injuries to human beings caused by animals. The example used is of a bull that gored a man or woman to death. In this case, the bull was to be stoned to death and could not be eaten (verse 28). The owner of the bull would not be responsible but he would obviously lose his bull.

If the bull, however, was known to be dangerous and the owner had been warned about it but did not keep it penned up, then the owner would be held responsible. He could be put to death because he had not restrained his bull. If the individuals who brought him to court preferred they could demand payment from the owner instead of his death (verse 30).

Notice in verse 32 that if the bull gored a male or female servant the owner was to pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave and the bull was to be stoned. The owner of the bull would not be put to death if the bull killed a slave. While, at this time in history, the slave did not have the same rights as the free person, he still had value. Notice that the bull was to be killed. This was not only for the protection of others who might be harmed by him but also out of respect for the life of the slave.

Injuries Caused to Animals

The personal property of God's people was protected by the Law of God. If an individual caused the death or injury to another man's animal, he was to pay for the loss. The illustration in verse 33 is of a man who dug a pit and his neighbour's ox or donkey fell into it and died. In this case, the owner of the pit was to pay for the dead animal and it would belong to him (verse 34).

In the event that the injury or death of a man's animal was caused by another animal, the one that caused the death was to be sold and the money divided equally among the two owners. If, however, the owner of the animal causing the death knew his animal had a tendency to be mean but he did not keep it penned up, then he was to provide his brother with a new animal and the dead one would be his to do with as he pleased (verse 36).

What is important for us to understand here is the value the Lord placed on life. From the slave, pregnant woman and unborn child to the master of a large household, all life was to be respected. Any injury caused to the life of another was to be paid for by the person causing the injury. This respect for the life and property of another was a foundation stone on which their society was to be built. Without this respect for each other, society would quickly fall apart. These laws promoted harmony between fellow human beings. They also showed God's people that if they wanted to honour Him in this world, they would need to learn to respect each other.

God shows His people in this chapter how they are to live as His children. The world would know that they belonged

to Him by the way they respected and valued each other. We need to be reminded of this once again in our day.

For Consideration:

- While slaves did not have the rights of free men in the Old Testament times, how did the law of God show that their lives were valuable in the eyes of God?
- How does this chapter show the value God placed on women? In your answer consider the provision in the law for the woman who was not receiving her rights as a wife and the laws regarding harming a pregnant woman.
- What does this passage teach us about the value God places on the life of the unborn child in the womb?
- What do we learn about the importance of acting responsibly so as to prevent injury to the life of another human being? How does this show respect for the life?
- How does the way we respect each other demonstrate our love for God? It is possible to truly love God and not respect our brothers and sisters?
- How does our lack of respect for each other affect our testimony for God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way He values you and your life?
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you did not respect your brother or sister in the things you said about them or did to them?
- Ask God to help you to be more sensitive to the needs and hurts of your brother or sister.
- Take a moment to pray for those you have difficulty loving. Ask God to give you grace and strength to honour and love them as He would have you to do.

21

RESPECTING THE PROPERTY OF ANOTHER

Read Exodus 22:1-15

In the last chapter God explained to His people their obligation to respect the life and property of their fellow human being. Chapter 22 begins by focusing on the matter of respect for the property of a brother or sister. Notice how God illustrates His requirements. While Jesus was on this earth, He did the same thing. He taught in parables so that people could understand what He was saying. God's intention is that His law be easy to understand. For this reason, He illustrated it with practical examples when He gave it to Moses.

We begin with the example of a man who steals an ox or a sheep, slaughters it and sells the meat. By slaughtering the animal, there would be no way of identifying it. This may be an attempt on the part of the thief to hide what he had done so he would not be discovered. When he was discovered, however, God required that he pay back five oxen for the one he stole or restore four sheep for any sheep he stole.

If an individual was caught in the act of breaking into the property of another for the purposes of stealing their belongings and was struck and died as a result, the person defending the property would not be guilty, unless it happened after sunrise. In other words, if the thief was killed in daylight the defender would be guilty of his death. If, however, it was dark when the death occurred the defender of the property would not be guilty. While this may seem strange, there is an important reason for this.

Most thieves break into a home at night when they cannot be identified. They will also resort to violence in order not to be identified, sometimes threatening the life of the person owning the home. If in a struggle to defend the property the thief was killed, the owner would not be held responsible because he did not know the identity of the thief. If the defender found a man in his home in the daylight, however, he would be able to identify him. In this case, he was to take him to court and have him tried for his crime. The thief would have a fair and just trial. If the owner of the home could identify the man and still killed him, he was guilty of murder.

When the thief was caught and tried, he was to pay for everything he took. If he did not have anything to pay, he was to be sold to pay for his theft. In other words, he was to work until he could pay back the owner in full.

In the event that the thief took an animal and it was found alive in his possession he was to pay back double for what he had taken, two sheep for each sheep stolen, two donkeys for every donkey stolen. It is important to notice the difference between the man who slaughtered a stolen animal to sell it in verse 1 and this law in verse 3. The man who slaughtered an animal to sell it was to restore

five times what he had taken. In this case, however, because the animal was still alive, the penalty was only to pay back double. Again the motive or intention is taken into consideration. The first thief was making a special effort to hide his deed and was likely making a profit from it.

Verses 5-6 show us that we are to take responsibility for our actions. In verse 5 we have the illustration of livestock grazing in a field that wanders onto the property of another man and eats from his field or vineyard. The law stated that the owner of the livestock was guilty of stealing. He was to pay back the owner for what his livestock ate.

The same principle applied if a man started a fire and it got out of control and burnt another man's field. The individual who started the fire was to pay for the damage he caused by the fire. Notice that there was no evil intent on the part of the man who started the fire. Even though it was beyond his control, he was responsible for his actions. This law taught God's people to consider the implications of everything they did.

In verse 7 we have the illustration of a man who is keeping his neighbour's goods for him. If these goods were stolen while they were in his possession and the thief was caught, the thief was to pay back double what he had stolen. If, on the other hand, the thief was not caught, the owner of the house, who had been keeping the belongings for safekeeping, was to appear before the judges of Israel (verse 8). The court would examine him to see if he had taken the belongings himself and to verify his claims of a theft. All doubt and suspicion were to be removed from the person holding his neighbour's belong-

ings. This judgement would go a long way in maintaining the relationship between the two men.

Respect for the property of another extended even to finding lost property. Verse 9 speaks of a case where someone found something belonging to his or her neighbour. In this case, when the object was discovered, both parties claimed it was theirs. This case was to go before the judges of Israel who would determine the rightful owner. The person who found his neighbour's possessions and did not restore them was to pay back double to his neighbour, two oxen for each ox found, two garments for each garment found. Notice that the intention of the person who found the object was not to restore it to its rightful owner but to claim it as his own. This was quite different from an individual who discovered a lost animal and not knowing who it belonged to, kept it safely until the owner could be found.

Notice in verse 10 that if, while the animal was in the care of another, it was stolen, injured or died when no one was looking, the man keeping his neighbour's animal was to take an oath before the Lord declaring that he did not harm the animal (verse 11). The owner was to accept this and no penalty was to be imposed.

If it was determined, however, that he did steal or harm the animal intentionally, he was to pay for it. In the event that the animal placed under his care was attacked by a wild animal, the man caring for it was to bring the remains to the owner as evidence of what had happened and he would not be required to pay.

Notice in verse 10 the phrase "while no one is looking." This is significant and shows us that what happened was an accident and not done intentionally. If the animal was

stolen or eaten by a wild animal while the person keeping the animal was watching, the matter would be judged quite differently. In this case, because the one keeping the animal did nothing about it he would be guilty.

While the owner of the animal expected his neighbour would do whatever he could to protect his belongings, there were some things that were out of his control. What happened while the animal was under his care could have happened to him as well.

Notice in verse 14 that there was a difference between holding an animal for safekeeping and borrowing an animal. If a man borrowed an animal and it was injured under his care while the owner was not present, he was to pay for the damages. If the owner was present, he would be responsible for his own animal and the borrower would not have to pay. If the borrower paid the owner for the use of the animal and it was injured, then the money paid was sufficient to cover any loss the owner of the animal would incur (verse 15).

These laws show us how we are to care for and respect what belongs to another. Those who took what did not belong to them were to pay back double or in some cases five times what they took. Those who were responsible for damage done to another person's property were to restore what was damaged from their own resources. Care was to be taken to return any lost property to its rightful owner. Any doubt regarding property matters was to be resolved by an impartial judge who would make a decision on behalf of the parties concerned.

God reminds us in this passage that if our society and relationships are to be healthy we need to respect what

belongs to our neighbour. Respect for what belongs to someone else is another important building block for a healthy society.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this section about our need to respect what belongs to someone else? How does the lack of respect for what belongs to our neighbour hinder the health to our society and relationships?
- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of motive? How does a person's motive change how we see what they have done?
- God shows us clearly in this passage that justice was not to be taken into the hand of the people. They were to seek judgement through their impartial judges? Why was this important and how did it protect those who had done wrong from being judged excessively?
- God expects us to take full responsibility for any damage done to the property of another. Have you ever been guilty of taking advantage of your brother or sister and their property?
- Can damage to property cause a division between brothers and sisters? God's law provided for these divisions to be repaired. How can you repair any division caused by damage you may have caused to your neighbour's property?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a greater respect for what belongs to your neighbour.
- Ask God to give you grace to accept any loss you may have had because of the carelessness of someone else. Ask God to help you to forgive those who have caused that loss.
- If you have been responsible for the damage or loss of your neighbour's property or possessions, ask the Lord to show you what you can do to restore what has been lost so that nothing stands between you and your neighbour.

22

SOCIAL AND

SPIRITUAL OBLIGATIONS

Read Exodus 22:16-31

God taught His people as they wandered in the wilderness. Some of the lessons God taught came through circumstances they faced. In these circumstances God showed Himself to be their provider and protector. Other lessons came through the laws given to Moses. These laws showed the people how He wanted them to live by revealing His character and requirements for them.

We have seen in the last two meditations how God commanded His people to live with respect for the life and property of their neighbours. In this final section of Exodus 22 God teaches His people about their social and spiritual responsibilities.

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Sexual Relations

Verse 16 begins with a word about the moral character of God's people. God wanted a people who would walk in

His plan for their lives. It is clear from Scripture that sexual relations were to be reserved for marriage. In verse 16 we have an example of a man who seduces and sleeps with a virgin who was not engaged to be married. If this happened, the man was to pay the bride-price required by her father and take the woman to be his wife. If, however, the father refused to give his daughter to the man, the man was to pay double the price.

Notice that the virgin who was seduced was not engaged to be married. This meant that she was free to be married to the man who seduced her if the father permitted. If the woman were engaged to be married the rules for adultery would normally apply.

By giving the father the final choice in this matter the woman was being protected from having to marry an evil man. We can only imagine what it would have been like if this provision was not in place. Imagine a young woman raped by a man who cared nothing for her. In this case, the father was able to discern if this man was fit to marry his daughter and provide her with a good life. If the woman became pregnant as a result of this act, and the man was a worthy man, the father could assure that his daughter's child had a father to provide and care for it.

Verse 19 makes it quite clear that sexual relations between human beings and animals were absolutely forbidden. Anyone engaged in this sort of activity was to be put to death. The religions of the day were filled with gods who were half human and half animal and this kind of evil was practiced in pagan cultures. God wanted His people to be separate and distinct from these cultures. Part of that separation was that they lived morally pure lives in tune with the purposes of God.

Obligations to the Foreigner, Widow and Orphan

In verses 21-27 God speaks to his people about their relationship with foreigners, widows, orphans and the needy in their midst. In verse 21 God reminded His people that they had been foreigners in the land of Egypt and therefore had an understanding of what it meant to be a stranger in a foreign land. God's people were not to mistreat a foreigner in their midst. There are a few points we need to mention about this law of God.

Notice specifically that the Lord commanded His people not to oppress the foreigner. That is to say, they were not to look down on or mistreat someone from another religion or culture. The foreigner was to be respected and treated with dignity.

While foreigners were to be treated with respect and dignity the people of God were clearly not to follow their ways. Repeated commands were given to God's people to be separate from the nations. Israelites were not to give their daughters in marriage to foreigners lest they turn from the Lord God to follow the gods of other nations.

The division between separation and respect is not always easy to maintain. We must learn to treat unbelievers with respect and dignity without following their ways or becoming like them.

This law protected foreigners who were living in the land of Israel. Remember that God had a purpose for the whole world. Part of that purpose was to raise up a people who would be a light to the nations. Through the nation of Israel, God would reach out to the entire world with the hope of salvation. For now, part of the unfolding

of that purpose was to teach His people to respect and treat those of different nationalities with dignity.

Foreigners were not the only ones needing special attention in their society. Among them also were the widows and orphans. The law of God demanded that these orphans and widows also be respected. Notice in verse 23 that they had a special place in the heart of God. The verse tells us that if these widows and orphans cried out to God because they were being taken advantage of, He would hear their cry and His anger would be aroused against their oppressors. God would kill these oppressors with the sword so that *their* wives would become widows and *their* children orphans.

In verse 25 provisions were made for the poor and needy. These individuals often needed to borrow money to pay their bills. The law of God stated that if an Israelite loaned money to a needy person he was not to charge interest on that money. If a cloak was taken as a pledge for some promise made, it was to be returned by sunset because it may be the only covering that person had against the cold. God taught the importance of compassion through this law and warned His people that if the needy cried out to Him because they were being oppressed, He would hear their prayer.

SPIRITUAL OBLIGATIONS

The second obligation of God's people was toward Him as their God. They were to make it their commitment to follow Him alone. The practices of the pagan nations were to be removed from their land so that in all things God alone would be worshipped.

Sorcery

The Lord God told His people in verse 18 that they were not to allow a sorceress to live in their midst. The King James Version of the Bible uses the word witch. That is to say, a person (male or female), who practiced magic arts and consulted demons. This practice of witchcraft was so evil in the eyes of the Lord that He commanded His people to kill anyone who engaged in it.

What we need to understand is that God was concerned about the welfare of His people. Satan and his demons stand against God and His ways. Those caught up in witchcraft summon the power of Satan and his demons to come to their aid. Satan is a liar and deceiver, intent on the destruction of all that is good and righteous. Those involved in witchcraft and sorcery would only mislead God's people, taking them down a path of destruction. God's concern here is not only for His glory but also for the good of His people.

Sacrifices to other gods

Closely connected to this was the command of verse 20. Anyone who sacrificed to any other god was to be destroyed. This law seemed harsh but it should be remembered that God had the best interest of His people in mind. What married man would be content to share his wife with another man? God wanted His people for Himself. He would not share them with anyone else. These foreign gods would lead His people astray and keep them from experiencing the fullness of God's wonderful love and purpose. His love for His people was such that He would not allow this to happen. He demanded their full and undivided attention.

Respect for God and His Servants

Not only did God demand that His people remove all who practiced sorcery or worshipped other gods from their land but He also demanded that they respect Him in what they said and did. They were not to blaspheme the Lord or curse the rulers He placed over them. Notice the connection in verse 28 between blasphemy and cursing their rulers. Blasphemy has to do with speaking or acting in a way that does not show respect for God.

Clearly in verse 28 one of the ways that God's people could show lack of respect for Him was to curse the rulers He placed over them. This happened frequently in Israel. As God's people wandered in the wilderness they were constantly complaining about how God led them or about the leaders He placed over them. They were blaspheming the name of God.

Instead of cursing God they were to learn to trust Him and His ways. They were to recognize that even when things were not going as they wanted or expected, God was in control and had their best interest at heart. The opposite of blasphemy is trust, respect and confidence. This is what God expected from His people. No relationship can flourish when there is mistrust, grumbling and complaining. If God's people were going to enjoy a full and satisfactory relationship with Him, they would need to learn to trust Him and His purposes for their lives.

Generosity

If any relationship is going to thrive each person in that relationship must learn to give. Maybe you have been part of relationship where the giving is only from one side. God blessed His people in wonderful ways. His desire

was to shower them with His riches. He expected, however, that they use what He had given them for His glory. In verse 29 God commanded His people not to hold back their offerings. They were to learn to give back in return. They were to generously give as they had received by returning to God from the grain of their fields and the firstborn of their sons, cattle and sheep. God encouraged His people to give generously. This is not only so that the needs of others in the community would be met but also as a demonstration of their love for Him.

Holiness

Israel was to be a holy nation. We often attribute holiness to something that happens inside us. While this is true, holiness is also reflected in our actions and behaviour. The law of God taught that God's people were to keep themselves holy by refusing to eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts (verse 31). This teaches us that God's people, out of love and respect for Him, were to keep themselves physically clean and pure.

God's concern in this section of Scripture was for His people. He shows them in these verses how they were to live in community and in relationship to Him. As believers, we must be concerned not only with our relationship with God but also with those around us.

For Consideration:

- We see from this chapter that God taught His people through the law and the circumstances they faced each day? What has God been teaching you through His word? What lessons has He been teaching you through what you are experiencing in life?
- What does this chapter teach us about our obligations toward the needy? Who are the needy in your community?
- God shows His people in this chapter that they were to respect the foreigner. We learn elsewhere that they were also to separate themselves from the foreigners' ways. How do we find the balance between respecting the unbeliever and not getting caught up in his or her ways?
- How does grumbling and complaining about God's purposes hinder our relationship with Him?
- How important is it to invest in our relationship with God and with those around us? How does investing ourselves and our resources refresh our relationships? How have you been investing in your relationship with God and with others?
- What does this passage teach us about the need to keep ourselves pure if we are to grow in intimacy with God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the lessons He has been teaching you recently.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the needs in your community. Ask Him if there is anything you can do about those needs.
- Ask God to help you to be pure before Him. Ask Him to help you to find a balance between respecting the unbelievers you work with and not being caught up in their ways and thoughts.
- Ask God to show you how you can invest more into your relationship with Him and those who are close to you.
- Thank the Lord that He truly desires to enter a deeper relationship with you.

23

JUSTICE, TRUTH AND FAIRNESS

Read Exodus 23:1-9

As we begin Exodus 23 God speaks to His people about their obligation toward their fellow citizen. In verse 1 He challenges them not to spread false reports or help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. To be malicious is to be cruel, mean or hateful. This kind of witness spreads stories with the intent to harm the reputation of someone else. He or she is not concerned about whether these stories are true. Maybe the person they are spreading false reports about is standing in the way of advancing a personal cause. Maybe it is a way of getting revenge for some personal harm. Maybe they speak out of jealousy. Whatever the reason, these false reports are harmful to the individuals concerned.

Proverbs 18:21 tells us that the tongue has the power of life and death.

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Great damage can come from our words. In verse 1 the commandment speaks about spreading false reports. These are reports that are not true or verified. How often have we heard a story about someone and shared that with a friend or loved one without taking the time to see if it was even true? This commandment cautions us against being too quick to share what we have heard without examining the situation thoroughly.

Notice also in verse 1 that the law speaks about helping a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Why would someone want to protect a wicked man? There may be various reasons for this. It may be that the wicked man is a friend and the witness does not want to see him be punished for his crime. In order to protect his friend, the witness lies to the judges.

Another reason to protect a wicked man is because of fear. Maybe the witness is fearful of what might happen to him if he told the truth. What would this man's friends say if he was responsible for his punishment? Maybe the witness fears for his own life or the life of his family if he were to tell the truth and have the wicked man punished for his crimes.

Verse 7 makes it clear that God's people were not to have anything to do with false charges. They were not to put an innocent person to death. God knew the guilty person and would not let him go unpunished. While they might hide the truth from other human beings, they could not hide it from God. Both the guilty person and the one who protected him would have to face the wrath of God for their deeds.

God's people were to be people of integrity. They were to stand up for truth and righteousness. They were not to

protect the wicked. Their love for righteousness and justice was to be greater than for their own life.

In verse 2 we see that another reason why someone might bear false witness was because of pressure from the crowd. Often we are afraid of standing alone for the truth. Sometimes we wonder what difference we can make if we alone stand up for the truth. God commands His people in verse 2 not to be influenced by the ungodly opinion of the majority. They were not to “pervert justice by siding with the crowd.” In other words, they were to be willing to be different. They were to do what was right even if everyone else stood against them. Their fear of God was to be stronger than their fear of people.

Showing favouritism was another way that people could pervert justice. Verse 3 speaks to the matter of showing too much compassion to a poor person who did wrong. Imagine a poor person that stole in order to feed his family. It might be possible for a judge to pardon him because of his circumstances. In doing this, however, the judge was allowing this man to commit a crime against his fellow citizen without having to pay for his deed. God’s laws were for every Israelite. The poor were not to be excused. They too would have to pay for their crimes.

While there were some who might want to excuse a poor person from their crimes there were others who would deny them justice (verse 6). These individuals did not see the poor to be worthy of justice. They treated the poor with contempt and denied them the rights that someone with more influence and money had. God’s law protected the right of the poor to a fair trial. No one was to be denied justice because they were poor or needy. God expected His people to treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserved. God did not look at the

outward appearance. He did not judge a person based on the type of home they lived in. He saw the heart and valued each one. God's people were to have respect for all human life. Each person in their society, regardless of how much money or influence they had, was to be treated with the same dignity and respect.

Another temptation in Israel was to accept bribes. The payment of money or other benefits to lie was a serious crime in the eyes of God. Those who accepted bribes were willing to turn their back on God for money or other earthly benefits. God expected His people to reject anything that would pervert truth. They were to value truth and righteousness to such an extent that no earthly reward could distract or cause them to twist that truth or pervert justice.

From these laws regarding justice and truth God moves on in verses 4-5 to speak about respect for the property of their neighbours. In previous chapters of this book we examined the laws of God against stealing or damaging a neighbour's property. Verses 4-5 go beyond this to speak about what was to happen in the event that a person discovered an enemy's ox or donkey that had wandered off. Notice that these verses refer to an enemy.

If God's people came across an enemy's ox or donkey who had wandered they were to take it back to their enemy. There was to be no favouritism shown here. They were not to treat their friend's donkey or ox better than their enemy's. They were to put aside their personal feelings and do what was right.

Verse 5 goes on to give yet another illustration about an enemy's donkey that had fallen down under a heavy load. God told His people that when they saw this, they were

not to pass by but to help their enemy get his donkey back on his feet or maybe even to relieve the burden of the donkey by taking some of the load themselves.

What we see from this is that God's people were not to allow personal feelings or past events to stand in the way of doing what was right. In other words, they were to treat their neighbours as they would treat their dearest friends. They were not to deny their help and support to someone just because they did not like them.

We read about foreigners in verse 9. This was another group that could be easily ignored or denied justice. These foreigners did not follow the ways of God. They may have dressed differently or had different customs. God reminded His people, however, of how they themselves had been foreigners in Egypt. They knew what it was to be oppressed and mistreated in Egypt. They were not to mistreat any foreigner in their land. They were to treat them with respect and dignity even though they were not like them.

What is clear from these verses is that God's people were to be a people of integrity who stood up for justice. They were not to show favouritism or allow themselves to be distracted from doing right because of public opinion, bribes or personal feelings. They were to be willing to stand for truth no matter the cost.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of the words we speak? What damage can our words cause?
- What does this passage say to us about spreading stories without verifying the truth of those stories? Have you ever been guilty of this?
- How important is justice in this passage? What price were God's people to be willing to pay for justice to be done in their society? What price are you willing to pay?
- What is favouritism? Are there people you favour over others? Are there people in your society who are being denied justice because of their social standing or race?
- What does this passage teach us about the practice of bribery? How does a bribe pervert justice?
- How are we to treat our enemy? What does this passage teach us about putting aside our personal feelings in order to do what is right?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to guard your tongue so that it does not harm those around you.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have spread stories about another person that were not verified.

- Ask God to keep you from showing favouritism. Ask Him to forgive you for times you treated people with less respect than they deserved.
- Do you have people who hate you or make your life difficult? Ask the Lord to help you to be able to put aside your feelings so that you can minister to them in their times of need.
- Ask God to give you greater courage to stand up for what is right and just. Ask Him to help you to see things more from His perspective.

24

SPECIAL DAYS AND OFFERINGS

Read Exodus 23:10-33

It was the desire of God that His people be thankful and remember His goodness toward them. Because of this, God required that certain days be set apart as days of reflection and gratitude.

The Sabbath

Notice that the law of the Sabbath allowed for the fields to be harvested for six years but on the seventh they were to lie unploughed and unused. On that seventh year, the poor among them and the wild animals could gather what they needed from these fields, vineyards and olive groves. Agriculturists tell us that letting the land lie untouched every seventh year gave it a rest and allowed it to build up again so that it would maintain its productivity.

The seventh day was also to be kept as a holy day. God's people were to do no work on that day. This was a

day of rest for their ox, their donkey and their slaves so that they could be refreshed (verse 12).

God has created us with a need for rest and refreshing. This principle of rest is very important. In our day, we have elevated work and service to a point of ignoring this Sabbath principle of rest. God created the world in six days and then set apart a seventh day where He could rest. He did this as an example for us to follow. We need a day each week to reflect and be renewed in our body, mind and spirit. In fact, God felt so strongly about this that He demanded the severest punishment for anyone who chose to ignore this law.

Resting for one day or letting the land rest for a whole year required that God's people learn to trust Him. How easy it is, when our work seems to be piling up, to feel that we need to keep working without getting the rest we need or taking the time to remember the Lord. To rest on that one day required that the Israelites trust God for the work that needed to be done. Imagine what it would be like not to plant their fields for a whole year. This was an exercise in faith. Every seven years, God required that His people learn to trust Him for provision as He had done in the wilderness.

Notice in verse 13 the connection between resting on the Sabbath and remembering that God alone was their God. God's people were not to call on any other god or let the names of these gods be heard on their lips. They were not even to give these gods consideration or thought. The fact that this command comes in connection with the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year shows us that the Sabbath law was given to help God's people remember Him and trust Him alone as their God and Provider. He

alone was worthy of their praise. He alone could provide all they needed.

ANNUAL FESTIVALS

In verse 14 God commanded His people to set apart three times in a year to remember Him and celebrate His goodness. He would explain His requirements for each of these days later but for now He introduces them to His people.

Feast of Unleavened Bread

The first of these celebrations was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was a remembrance of the time when God set them free from Egypt. On that day they had to leave with such haste that they did not have time to allow their bread to rise. A further description of this celebration is found in Exodus 12:17-20. This celebration would last for seven days in the month of Abib (mid-March to mid-April). It was during that time that the people of God came out of Egypt. God expected that in those days each person in Israel was to bring Him an offering of thanksgiving. No-one was to come before God empty-handed. God expected His people to demonstrate their thankfulness not only in their hearts but also in practical ways through their gifts and offerings.

Feast of Harvest (Pentecost)

The second annual celebration was the Feast of Harvest (or Pentecost). This was celebrated at a time when the crops were beginning to mature. On this occasion, Israel was to bring the first fruits of the crops they had sown in the field to God as an offering of thanksgiving. By bringing Him the first of their crops Israel was recognizing that

it was God who had given them their crops and it was He who would assure they came to full harvest.

Feast of Ingathering

The third celebration was called the Feast of Ingathering (verse 16). This occurred when the harvest had been brought in from the fields. This feast celebrated the goodness of God in giving them a bountiful harvest. In those days, God's people would bring their offerings of thanksgiving to Him.

These three great festivals were designed to remind God's people of His goodness to them. Verse 17 makes it clear that all the men of Israel were to be present during the celebration of these important festivals. By being at these celebrations they would be reminded that the harvest was not a result of their hard work but the provision of the Lord.

No offering brought during those festivals (or for any other offering brought during the year) could contain yeast (verse 18). The apostle Paul, writing to in 1 Corinthians 5:8 explains the spiritual significance of yeast.

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.

Yeast represented sin and wickedness. By removing all yeast from their sacrifices, Israel was recognizing that the offering they made toward God needed to be pure and free from sin.

God had another requirement for His offerings. The fat of these festival offerings was not to be kept until morning (verse 18). The fat would quickly go bad and attract all kinds of unclean insects. It would be unthinkable that an offering for God could be infested and crawling with unclean insects. All fat was to be burned as an offering to God.

Notice in verse 19 how God's law forbade the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk. It seems that this practice was quite common in the pagan nations of that day. They would boil a young goat in its mother's milk and sprinkle the water over their gardens to guarantee a bountiful harvest. Those who practised this trusted in their magic and superstitions for the harvest. God knew that His people were quite familiar with this practice and would be tempted to follow it. For this reason, He forbids it in the land of Israel. God's desire was that His people look to Him alone for the harvest and recognize that their abundant harvest came from Him.

It is quite easy for us to fall into this practice ourselves. How easy it is to begin to trust in other things for a harvest in ministry. We are guilty of this when we trust our education, our gifts, or our programmes more than God. Anything that takes away our focus from God and trusting Him completely for a spiritual harvest can fall under this category and is forbidden by Scripture.

In the closing verses of this chapter God reminds His people of His blessing on them if they follow Him and His ways. In verse 20 He promised that He would send an angel ahead of them to guard them on their way and bring them to the land He had promised. This verse shows us one of the responsibilities of angels. They are involved in protecting the people of God and helping

them as they advance in God's purposes. Moses and Joshua were not alone. Unseen to their eyes was the angel of God protecting and keeping His people as they travelled.

God made it clear that His people were to listen to and obey what that angel said. They were not to rebel against him because God's name was on him. In other words, the angel of God carried God's authority. It is unclear how they would hear this angel but we do know that he would clearly lead and guide the people through the wilderness. It may be that part of that leading was through the pillar of fire and cloud that moved ahead of them. God warned His people that this angel would not forgive their rebellion. Looking ahead in the story of God's people in the wilderness we see how many would die because of their grumbling and failure to follow God's leading through this angel.

God promised His people in verse 22 that if they listened to this angel then He would be an enemy to their enemies. The angel of the Lord would travel before them, bringing them through the lands of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites. None of these nations would be able to stand against Israel. God would wipe them out (verse 23).

God commanded His people in verse 24 not to bow down to the gods of the people they would conquer or follow their practices. They were to demolish the sacred stones these nations worshipped. Israel was to worship the Lord God alone (verse 25). If they were faithful to Him, His blessing would be on their water and food. He would remove sickness from their midst and no woman would miscarry or be barren in their land. They would also live long and full lives (verse 26).

As Israel walked in obedience and faithfulness to their God, their enemies would fear them. In verse 27 God told them that He would send His terror ahead of them to cast their enemies into confusion. He would drive these enemies out of their way. Notice that the secret of Israel's success was not in superior strength and wisdom but in obedience to the Lord God.

It is important that we remember this in our day as well. God is looking for a people who will walk in obedience to Him and His Word. He delights to pour out His blessings on those who will walk in faithfulness. His blessing came not because His people worked hard but because they were living in harmony with His purpose and walking in obedience to His Word. More than anything else we need people who will commit themselves to walking in absolute obedience to the Lord God and His leading. This requires time with Him and time in His Word. It requires discipline and dying to ourselves and our plans. God's richest blessings, however, fall on those who walk in His purpose.

Notice in verse 29 that God would not drive out all their enemies in a single year. He would, however, give them victory little by little. The reason for this is given in these verses. God tells His people that if He drove the enemy out completely the land would become desolate and the wild animals would take over. God chose instead to give His people only the land they could care for themselves. As they grew in number He would drive more enemies out and give them more land.

God has not yet given me complete victory in my life over every stronghold. I am finding, however, that as I grow in Him, He shows me more areas He wants to conquer. Over the years I have seen the Lord move in wonderful

ways giving me more and more victories in my life. He has dealt with attitudes and habits. He has been showing me the obstacles that hinder my relationship with Him. The battle to overcome and walk in victory has not always been easy. Sometimes it has been a lonely journey. At other times, it has caused tremendous pain in my life. One thing is sure, however, I know that I could not possibly have handled all this at once. I needed to grow and mature before I was ready and willing to deal with the other areas in my life God wanted to address. I know that there is much more God wants to do in me. Little by little God is changing me and forming me into His image. Not one of us comes to spiritual maturity in an instant. Maturity is a lifelong process as God works in us to shape us into His character. This is what God was doing with His people as they went through the wilderness.

God had a plan for His people. He told them that He would give them the land from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines and from the desert to the River (Euphrates). He would hand over the people who lived in these lands to them. When they arrived, however, they were not to be influenced by the nations that lived in the land. They were not to worship their gods or follow their ways. They were to keep the land God had given them pure and free from sin and pagan practices. This is what God expects of us today as well.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the importance of rest? Do you take regular times of rest

to reflect and be renewed in your body, mind and soul?

- What kind of gods do we have in our day?
- The festivals and special days of the Old Testament celebrated God's goodness. How do we remember and celebrate God's goodness in our day?
- The law of the Old Testament forbade the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk. This was a superstitious practice among the pagans of the day. God did not want His people to practice this because it took their attention away from Him as their provider. What kind of things can we trust in today that take our eyes from God as our provider and strength?
- What is the connection between obedience and blessing in this section of Scripture? How important is obedience?
- Does God promise to bring complete victory in our spiritual lives all at once? What encouragement do you find in the fact that God would give His people the land "little by little?"

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to take time to rest and be renewed in body, mind and soul. Ask Him to show you how to do this.

- Take some time now to remember the goodness of God in your life. Thank Him for His faithfulness and provision.
- Ask God to show you if you are trusting in anything other than Him to be your strength and provision.
- Thank the Lord that He is giving you more and more victory in your walk with Him. Ask Him to help you to be sensitive to His leading and the areas of your life He wants to work on.

25

ENTERING GOD'S PRESENCE

Read Exodus 24:1-18

Over the last few chapters we have been examining the laws of God and His requirements. God has been showing His laws to Moses. Moses, in turn, has been sharing these requirements with His people. In Exodus 24:1-2 God spoke again to Moses and told him to “come up to the Lord.” At this time, the presence of the Lord was being revealed on the top of Mount Sinai. God was asking Moses to come up the mountain into His presence.

Notice from verse 1 that Moses was to invite Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu along with seventy elders of Israel to join him. They were not permitted, however, to go into the presence of the Lord on the top of the mountain. Verse 1 tells us that Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders were to “worship at a distance.” Only Moses was to enter the presence of the Lord. The people of Israel were not permitted even to approach the mountain.

There are two points we should make here. First, notice that there is a separation between God and His people. God was leading His people through the wilderness to

the Promised Land. He was providing for their needs and protecting them from harm. He was giving them victory over their enemies. While God had been showing compassion and kindness to His people they were not allowed to approach Him or come into His presence. To do so was to die. It is one thing to experience God working in our lives and quite another to know true intimacy with Him.

While Aaron, his sons and the seventy elders were permitted to be on the mountain, only Moses was permitted to enter the presence of God. We need to understand that it was not because Moses was better than his brother Aaron or the seventy elders. God did not call him into His presence because he lived a better life. God simply chose him to be His representative. Moses was just like everyone else with his faults and failures but he was chosen to be God's special representative. Sometimes we wonder why God chooses to use certain people. We can even become jealous and envious of their position or relationship with God. We may never understand the choice of God or why He chooses to use one person over another. It is important for us, however, to accept His choice and respect His decision.

Before going up into the presence of the Lord, Moses went to His people and explained to them the laws God had given him to this point. Verse 3 tells us that the people agreed to follow all the Lord had told them through His servant Moses. Moses wrote all these laws down so they would not be forgotten (verse 4).

Early the next morning Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing each of the tribes of Israel. He chose some young Israelite men to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice young

bulls as a fellowship offering to the Lord. When the sacrifices were completed, Moses gathered the blood from the offerings, put half of the blood in a bowl and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Moses then took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. The Book of the Covenant was likely what Moses wrote down in verse 4. It contained the laws of God and His requirements for His people given to that point. After listening to the reading of the Book of the Covenant, Moses had the people publicly declare their willingness to obey everything the Lord had commanded.

When the people had declared their willingness to obey the words of the Book of the Covenant Moses took the remainder of the blood and sprinkled it on the people saying: "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (verse 8). The sprinkling of the blood on the people sealed that agreement between them and the Lord. They were now legally bound to follow the instructions of the Lord as found in the Book of the Covenant.

After this important ceremony, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders went up the mountain. Notice in verse 10 that they saw the God of Israel. It is interesting to note the description of what they saw. Verse 10 tells us that they saw "something like pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself." Just to see the path God walked on was overwhelming for these men. Verse 11 tells us that God did not raise His hand against them and they lived to eat and drink. This shows us something of the glory of God. How awesome is He that even the path He walks on would cause the elders of Israel to fear for their lives?

In verse 12 God called Moses to come even closer. There He would give him instructions on tablets of stone. God's intention was to have His law written down so it would be remembered.

Moses left the presence of the elders with Joshua by his side and went up the mountain to meet with God. He told the elders to remain where they were until he came back. He left Aaron and Hur in charge (verse 14). Verse 15 makes it quite clear that while Joshua set out with Moses for the top of the mountain, only Moses went up into the cloud that covered the top. The glory of God settled on Mount Sinai and for six days it was engulfed in a great cloud. It was only on the seventh day that the Lord called out to Moses (verse 16).

As the Israelites looked up to the mountain, it appeared to be on fire. The glory of the Lord on that mountain looked like a consuming fire. Moses entered into that glory and remained there for forty days and forty nights (verse 18).

What is particularly interesting in this chapter is how God met with each character. The people of God met Him in the ritual and the Word. For them God was distant. Their experience of Him was in His provision of manna, the sacrifices and the law that had been read to them. As a community they agreed to follow the Lord and walk in His way.

The elders also experienced God as the people did but they were called to the mountain to experience Him in a deeper way. On the mountain they saw where God walked. They found themselves in the midst of what God was doing. They were privileged to experience something of God's presence as He walked in their midst and

revealed more of Himself to them. What these elders experienced was more than ritual and law. They understood the reality of God and saw clear evidence of His presence.

Moses, however, was called into the presence of God. He walked up into the consuming fire and spoke with God. God revealed His heart to Moses and showed him His purpose.

The depth of intimacy Moses experienced with God was not something he deserved or even sought. If anything, Moses feared this presence. Approaching a consuming fire was not something to be taken lightly. Moses likely feared for his life just as the elders did when they saw where God walked. Sometimes we have lost the sense of God's glory and holiness. All too many people feel that they can just walk up to God and enter the consuming fire. The reality of the matter is that those who have experienced God's glory and majesty find it more than their human bodies and minds can bear.

Isaiah saw the glory of God and cried out in Isaiah 6:5:

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Lest we think that things have changed in the New Testament, listen to the response of the apostle John when he saw the Lord in his vision in Revelation 1:17:

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.

Our God still is an awesome and glorious God. His presence is not to be taken lightly. We dare not diminish His glory. Moses understood the awesome privilege that was his to be invited into the presence of such a holy God. He also knew the wonderful protection of God that spared his life after seeing that glory.

This passage teaches us about the glory, majesty and holiness of God. Beyond this, however, it shows us that God is willing to reveal Himself more fully to us. He is willing to take us beyond the ritual and law to an experience of His person. This is not something we can take lightly. It is an awesome thing to enter more fully into a relationship with our Creator and Sovereign God. God called Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders into His presence. Will you be ready when He calls you into a deeper experience of His presence? Will you obey and take the risk to step up into the mountain?

For Consideration:

- The people of Israel experienced their God in this chapter through the rituals and the words of the Book of the Covenant. How do the Word of God and our spiritual celebrations and traditions reveal God to us?
- Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the people to seal their agreement with God to follow the words of the Book of the Covenant. What does this tell us about how important it is for us to be true to the Word of God?

- How did God reveal His presence to the elders of Israel? Have you been where God has walked? Have you ever seen God move in powerful ways?
- Why is entering the presence of God not to be taken lightly? What do we learn in this chapter about the presence of God?
- Consider the various characters in this account. Where are you in your walk with God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the Scriptures He has given. Thank Him for what they reveal to us about His character and purposes.
- Ask the Lord to help you to study the Scriptures more to know Him and His purpose for your life.
- Take a moment to ask God to move in your presence and in your church. Ask Him to reveal anything that would stand in the way of you experiencing Him in an even greater way.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy and glorious God. Thank Him that He has accepted you as His child and longs to enter a relationship with you. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him in all that you do.

26

THE TABERNACLE FURNISHINGS

Read Exodus 25:1-38

At this point in Israel's history the people had no central place of worship. The tabernacle had not yet been built. For the most part, Israel's worship of God took place in their homes and with their immediate or extended family. The Passover, for example was celebrated by painting their doorposts with the blood of a lamb and eating that lamb with their family in their homes. There were also times when the whole nation would gather to celebrate, usually at the beginning or end of a great festival.

As God spoke to Moses on the mountain, He revealed His desire for a place of worship. In verses 1-7 God told Moses that he was to accept from the people offerings of gold, silver, and bronze. They could also give blue, purple or scarlet yarn and fine linen, goat hair, or ram skins that had been dyed red. God also asked His people to bring the hides of sea cows, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, incense, onyx stones and other gems. All these articles were to be used to build a tabernacle where God would dwell among His people (verse 8).

There are several points we need to make here about these verses. Notice first in verse 2 that the tabernacle was to be made from the gifts of those whose hearts prompted them to give. In other words, the tabernacle was to be a construction of love and devotion to God. God's people were to give toward its construction as an expression of their gratitude and thanksgiving to Him.

The second point we need to notice is that God told His people that He would dwell in this tabernacle (verse 8). While no earthly dwelling could ever contain God, it was His desire to make His presence known in their midst. He chose to reveal His presence in the tabernacle. This would be a holy place set aside for God.

Notice, thirdly, that the Lord required offerings of the best products that people of Israel had. He asked them to put aside their gold, silver and bronze. He wanted their fine linen, dyed yarns and gems. All these fine products were to be used in the construction of the tabernacle. This is in direct contrast to His requirements for the construction of an altar in Exodus 20:24-25:

(24) "Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause My name to be honoured, I will come to you and bless you. (25) If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.

When Israel built an altar they were to build it from ordinary stones that had not been touched by human tools. In contrast, the Lord's command to Moses here is to build a tabernacle of the finest materials available. On the one hand we see the simplicity of the altar made with

field stones. On the other, we see the beauty and luxury of the tabernacle with its gems, gold and fine linen. What are we to understand by this? How does God want us to worship Him?

These verses show us that we can worship God both in simplicity and in the beauty of great wealth. In Luke 21:1-3 Jesus stood at the entrance to the temple watching the people put their offerings into the box. Seeing a poor widow put in two small coins He said:

(3) "I tell you the truth," He said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. (4) All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Jesus did not see the amount that was given as being of any significance. He saw the attitude of this widow's heart.

When Mary poured her expensive perfume on Jesus feet, Judas objected, saying that it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus replied in John 12:7-8:

(7) "Leave her alone," "[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. (8) You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have Me."

He accepted Mary's extravagant offering not only because it was from her heart but because it was the purpose of the Father to anoint Him in such a way.

God can be worshipped in the simplicity of our homes or in the luxury of great buildings. He is deserving of the greatest this world has to offer but accepts the seemingly insignificant gifts of the poor with great delight. The simplicity of the altar and the beauty of the tabernacle show us that God is worshipped in both. What is important is the attitude of the heart.

Notice in verse 9 that God commanded Moses to be careful to follow His instructions for the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle. Everything was to be done exactly as the Lord commanded and according to the pattern He would show him. There was no room for variety here. Everything had its proper place and procedure. The worship that took place in the tabernacle was strictly controlled.

In the previous chapter God told Moses that Israel was to have three festivals every year. Here in this chapter He instructs him about three main pieces of furniture He was to place in the tabernacle.

The Ark of the Covenant

The first piece of furniture that was to be placed in the tabernacle was a chest made of acacia wood. This chest was to be two and a half cubits long (3 $\frac{3}{4}$ feet or 1.1 metres), and a cubit and a half wide and high (2 $\frac{1}{4}$ feet or 0.7 metres). The chest was to be covered with pure gold inside and out with a gold moulding around it (verse 11). Two rings (also made of gold) were to be fastened to each side of the chest into which two acacia poles overlaid with gold were to be inserted to carry it (verses 13-14). These poles were never to be removed from the chest. This kept people from actually touching the chest itself. God told Moses that he was to put the Testimony

He would give him inside this chest. The “Testimony” is likely the commandments that God would give to Moses on the mountain.



Verse 17 tells us that this chest was to have a cover of pure gold. Two cherubim (angels) were to be made from hammered gold and attached to the cover at both ends. These cherubim were to be facing each other with their wings spread upward, shadowing the centre of the cover. The cover was then placed on the chest. It was between the outstretched wings of the cherubim that God would reveal His presence to His people and give them His commands (verse 22).

Let us examine this command of God to make the cherubim for the cover of the chest, in light of His commandment in Exodus 20:4-5:

(4) “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth

beneath or in the waters below. (5) You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me”

Exodus 20:4-5 strictly forbids making an idol in any form for the purpose of bowing down to worship it. It was never God's intention that His people worship these cherubim. Nor was it His intention that the people focus more on the tabernacle with all its beauty than on Him. Something becomes an idol when we make it so in our heart. Many things are not evil in themselves but can become idols when we chose to honour them above God. Our work can become an idol when we love it more than God. I have met individuals who seemed to love their church building more than they love God. The commandment to not make an idol for the purposes of worship remains. These cherubim were not idols nor were they intended to be worshipped. God encouraged the use of art and creativity but these things were never to distract from the worship of His name.

The Table

The second piece of furniture was a table. This table was to be two and a half cubits long (3 feet or 0.9 metres), a cubit wide (1 ½ feet or 0.5 metres), and a cubit and a half high (2 ¼ feet or 0.7 metres). As with the chest, it was also to be overlaid with pure gold with a moulding and a rim measuring a handbreadth (3 inches or 8 centimetres) around the top. A gold ring was attached to each of the four corners (verse 26) and poles made of acacia wood overlaid with gold were placed in the rings to carry the table (verse 28). God commanded Moses also to make plates, dishes, pitchers and bowls of pure gold for the

offerings (verse 29). This table was to have bread (called the “bread of the Presence”) on it at all times.

The Lampstand

The third piece of furniture in the tabernacle was a lamp stand. It was also to be made of pure gold with a base, centre shaft and six branches extending out from the shaft, three on each side (verse 31). The branches and centre shaft were to be decorated with flower-like cups, buds and blossoms. In verses 33-36 God explains exactly how the centre shaft and the six to be decorated.



Each of the six branches coming out of the centre shaft was to have three cups shaped like flowers and three buds (verse 33). On the centre shaft of the lamp stand there was to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with their blossoms (verse 34). The artist was to sculpt the shape of a bud under each of the pairs of branches

extending from the centre shaft (verse 35). The whole lamp stand was to be made from one piece of gold weighing a talent (75 pounds or 34 kilograms).

The centre shaft and the six branches made room for seven lamps to be placed. These lamps were to be put on the lamp stand so that it would provide light for the tabernacle. All the accessories for the lamp stand were to be made of pure gold.

It is interesting to note the creativity of God in this lamp stand. The flowers and buds made it quite decorative. We see in this passage something of the creative side of God. He never intended that worship be dry and lifeless. The objects He placed in the tabernacle were beautiful and filled with symbolism and meaning.

For Consideration:

- How is giving the Lord our gifts a means to express our love and devotion to Him. How does the Lord want us to give?
- What role does creativity and beauty have in our worship of God? How does God express His creativity and beauty in the commands He gave for making the temple furnishings?
- Do we need rich and beautiful things to worship God? Are these things wrong in themselves? When does something become an idol?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a creative God who delights in beauty.
- Thank the Lord that He desires that we should delight in worship. Thank Him that He wants us to give extravagantly in our worship of Him.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have allowed other things to take His place in your life and worship.
- Ask God to increase your desire to worship Him. Ask Him to enable you to be more creative in your worship.

27

THE TABERNACLE

Read Exodus 26:1-37

In the last chapter we examined three pieces of furniture found in the tabernacle. Now we will examine the plans of God for the tabernacle itself.

The Inner Roof of the Tabernacle

The inner roof of the tabernacle was made from ten curtains of finely twisted linen with blue, purple and scarlet yarn. Notice in verse 1 that the Lord asked Moses to have images of cherubim worked into the curtains by a skilled craftsman (verse 1). These images were not meant to be worshipped but were a visual way of showing God's people that His angels were watching over what was happening in that tabernacle.

Each of the ten curtains were to be twenty-eight cubits long (42 feet or 12.5 metres) and four cubits wide (6 feet or 1.8 metres) with cherubim embroidered or woven into them. These ten linen strips were to be joined together into two larger pieces of five strips each (verse 3). Fifty loops of blue material were fixed to one end of each of these two larger curtains and both pieces were joined together by means of gold clasps (verses 5-6). This

would form part of the roof of the tabernacle. If you were to enter the tabernacle and look up to the roof you would see these embroidered linen curtains.



The Outer Roof and Sides of the Tabernacle

The next set of curtains God commanded Moses to make was made from goat hair. He was to make eleven curtains of goat hair all measuring thirty cubits long (45 feet or 13.5 metres) and four cubits wide (6 feet or 1.8 metres). Again these were in the shape of the linen curtains for the roof but made of weather resistant goat hide. Notice that there were eleven strips of goat hair curtains compared to the ten linen strips. As with the linen curtains these goat hair curtains were made of long strips and joined together in two larger pieces. One piece was to have five strips and the other six. The sixth strip was to be folded in two (verse 9). These two goat hair curtains

were to be joined together like the linen curtains by fifty loops and bronze clasps forming one large piece. Because this goat hair curtain was longer than the linen curtain, the additional length was to hang down at the rear of tabernacle (verse 12). Moses was also to have two additional coverings made for the tabernacle roof. The first was a covering of ram skins dyed red and the second was a covering of the hide of sea cow (verse 14). The roof and sides of the tabernacle made it completely water proof inside.

The Frames to Support the Tabernacle

We can only imagine the weight of the roof of the tabernacle with the layers of material. This weight was to be supported by frames made of acacia wood. The upright posts were to be ten cubits long (15 feet or 4.5 metres) and a cubit and a half wide (2 ½ feet or 0.7 metres). They were all to have two “projections” or “pegs” (NLT) in each of them (likely for the purpose of attaching one to the other). These poles were joined to each other forming a solid wooden wall from end to end. Altogether they were to make 50 posts from acacia wood 15 feet (4.5 metres) high and 2 ½ feet or 0.7 metres wide. This would form the sides of the tabernacle. Twenty posts were used for each side and six posts for the back of the tabernacle with two double posts in the corners (verses 23-24). These posts sat in silver bases on the ground.

The large posts which formed the walls of the tabernacle were held in place by fifteen crossbars of acacia wood that ran the length and the width of the tent. Twelve of these crossbars were held in place by gold rings fixed on the outside of the frame. These long pieces of acacia wood would be inserted from end to end through the gold rings. A hole was drilled through the middle of each post

so that the last three crossbars could be inserted through these holes from one end of the tabernacle to the other. Because it ran through the middle of the posts it was not visible. These crossbars as with the posts were overlaid with gold (verse 29).

The Curtain for the Holy of Holies

The inside of the tabernacle was a curtain made from blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen (verse 31). Gold hooks were to be attached to this curtain and it hung by means of clasps from four more posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold standing on silver bases (verses 31-32). These curtains were to separate the tabernacle into two sections, the Most Holy Place which contained the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Place with the table and the lamp stand (verses 33-35).

The Curtain for the Entrance

A final curtain was to be made for the entrance of the tent. This curtain was made of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. Notice in verse 36 that it was to be the work of an embroiderer. It hung from five more posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold by means of bronze clasps and loops (verse 37).

The tabernacle was a very solid structure designed to be moved from place to place. Though quite portable, it was very beautiful. Wherever they went, the tabernacle went with them. It would have required a significant amount of work to set this tabernacle up but it was a physical reminder to God's people that He was in their midst.

For Consideration:

- The inner roof of the tabernacle had angels embroidered on it. Why do you suppose God had the image of angels embroidered on the roof?
- God's plans for the tabernacle were very specific. Does God still have very specific plans for our lives? How important is it that we seek Him about what He wants to do in us and through us?
- The tabernacle was finely embroidered and overlaid with gold. Does God still want us to worship Him in big and expensive buildings today? Is it wrong for us to build such buildings to worship God in today?
- Why do you suppose God wanted His people to worship Him in this specific location? How would having a central location for worship help to keep God's people from wandering into error?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has a specific plan for our lives. Ask Him to show you that plan.
- Thank the Lord that we can worship Him wherever we are and that He is with us wherever we go, just as He was for the people of Israel as they wandered in the desert.
- Thank the Lord that He has given you other believers who can encourage and support you in your walk with God.

28

THE TABERNACLE

COURTYARD

Read Exodus 27:1-21

In the last chapter we learned about the construction of the tabernacle with its two rooms. There was a courtyard outside the tabernacle itself where the people of God could gather to make their sacrifices to the Lord God. These sacrifices were made on an altar located in this courtyard. Chapter 27 begins with a description of this altar.

The Altar in the Courtyard

The altar was to be made of acacia wood. According to verse 1 it was to be three cubits high (4 ½ feet or 1.3 metres) and five and a half cubits long and wide (7 ½ feet or 2.3 metres). Each corner was to have a horn attached to it. The whole altar, with its horns, was overlaid with bronze (verse 2).

Utensils were needed for the sacrifices made on this altar. God instructed Moses to make bronze pots and shovels to remove the ashes. He was also to make bowls

used for sprinkling, meat forks and fire pans. These fire pans may have been used to carry live coals.

A bronze grating with a ring on each corner was attached to the altar about half way up (verses 4-5). This grating would hold the sacrifice that was being made.

Poles made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze were inserted through rings on both sides. The altar could be carried from one place to another by means of these poles.

The Courtyard

The tabernacle was to have a courtyard that was 100 cubits long (150 feet or 46 metres) and 50 cubits wide (75 feet or 23 metres). It was enclosed by curtains made of finely twisted linen. The linen curtains hung from sixty posts by means of a system of hooks and bands. The posts themselves were set in bronze bases and kept in place by cords attached to bronze tent pegs (verse 19).

The front of the tabernacle was to face east where the sun rose (verse 13). The entrance was to have a curtain twenty cubits long (30 feet or 9 metres). This curtain was to be made from blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen embroidered by a skilled artist. While people could come into the courtyard, the tabernacle itself would be out of bounds for the ordinary believer.

In verses 20-21 God commanded Moses to have His people bring clear olive oil for the lampstand. Verse 20 tells us that the light of this lampstand was to be kept burning at all times. Aaron and his sons were given the responsibility to make sure that this light never went out.

This responsibility was to be passed on from generation to generation (verse 21).

There are several important details we need to understand from this chapter. First, by creating a courtyard God was inviting all His people to come to Him. This courtyard was open to all Israelites who sought God and desired to worship Him.

Notice, however, that in this courtyard was an altar, on which animals would be sacrificed for the sins of God's people. When God's people entered the courtyard they had to face that altar, which reminded them of their sin. While God expected that they recognize that they had sinned, He also provided a means by which those sins could be forgiven. The altar showed the Israelites that the Lord God had not given up on them. They could know the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifices made on this altar.

The third point of significance is that the average person was not allowed to enter the tabernacle itself. This was holy ground and no one but the priests were permitted to enter. The tabernacle, as we have seen, was divided into two sections. The Most Holy Place, at the back, was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. God chose to reveal His presence from that Ark. God's presence, however, was separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a curtain. Outside that curtain was a lampstand that lit the way into the presence of God. It was this lamp that was to be kept burning.

Have you ever expected someone at your home late at night? What do you do when you expect someone to come? Don't you leave a light on for them so that they can see their way to the door? By leaving the light on you

let them know you are expecting them and that they are welcome at your home. The Lord also left a light on outside of the Holy of Holies where His presence was being revealed. The light offered hope to God's people. God was expecting that the day would come when they could enter His presence. He was expecting them. The light was to shine day and night in anticipation of the day when the curtain would be opened and God's people could enter into His presence. By keeping the lamp lit day and night, Aaron and his descendants were keeping that hope alive.

Both the altar and the lampstand represent the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf. He was both a sacrifice and a light to us. As a sacrifice He brings forgiveness of sin. As a light He shows us into the presence of the Father. For many years, God's people would worship Him in a building that was rich with symbols that showed how God would provide for them and their salvation.

For Consideration:

- What did the altar show God's people about themselves? Why was this altar needed?
- What does the altar teach us about the requirements of those who enter into God's presence?
- While God's people could come into the courtyard, the tabernacle was off limits. What does this tell us about the separation that existed between God and His people?

- What was the light on the lampstand to be always lit? What hope did this give to God's people?
- How is the ministry of Jesus symbolized in the altar and the lamp?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to recognize your sin and deal with it. Thank Him that He has provided a way by which our sins can be forgiven.
- Thank the Lord Jesus that His desire is that we enter the presence of the Father. Thank Him that He is the light that shines waiting for us to come into His Father's presence.
- Thank the Lord that He desires that we come to Him and that He provided all that is necessary so that we could enter His presence.

29

THE PRIEST'S CLOTHES

Read Exodus 28:1-43

Moses has been on the mountaintop listening to the Lord God. There the Lord revealed to him the requirements for worship. To this point, we have seen God's requirements with regards to the construction of a tabernacle. Here in chapter 28 God tells Moses what the priests were to wear as they served Him in the tabernacle.

In verse 1 God told Moses that Aaron and his sons were to serve Him as priests. Aaron and his sons would become the first official priests. Moses was to have special clothes made for Aaron. Verse 2 tells us that the reason for this was to give the priests dignity and honour. God's concern is that the people recognize and honour those He had chosen to be His representatives. The clothes were to remind the people of the position that Aaron and his sons occupied. This did not make Aaron more important but it did remind the people of the call of God on his life.

What we need to understand is that God sets aside certain people for His purpose. When He sets them apart He expects that we will honour them for their calling and

anointing. To disrespect those whom God has called is to disrespect the God who called them.

Verse 3 tells us that the priestly clothing was to be made by skilled men who had received wisdom and gifting from God (verse 3). While Aaron and his sons had been called to a role of spiritual leadership, they were not the only type of people God had been anointing and gifting for His purpose. Skilled artists were also receiving a special anointing from God to do the practical work of making the garments the priests would wear. While these artists were not always in front of the people like Aaron and his sons, they still had an important ministry. God calls some people to a very public ministry and others to a more private one. Both ministries are essential for the expansion of His kingdom.

The priestly garments consisted of a breastplate, ephod, robe, tunic, turban and sash made from blue, purple and scarlet linen (verses 4-5). The remainder of the chapter describes these individual pieces.

The Ephod

The ephod seems to be an apron-like, sleeveless robe made of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and twisted linen. Notice in verse 6 that it was the work of a skilled craftsman. No mention is made in this passage of the name of that craftsman. His work was of utmost importance but his name is not mentioned. There are times when we will have to be content to be nameless in the work of ministry. We need to be willing to be hidden from sight so that the Lord might receive the glory.

The ephod had two shoulder straps which fastened to keep it in place. It also had a woven waistband made with

gold and blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen (verse 8). Of particular note were two onyx stones attached to the shoulders straps. These stones were engraved with the names of the sons of Israel. As Israel had twelve sons, six names were engraved on each stone and mounted in gold settings of braided chain that looked like a rope, on each shoulder (verse 13). The priest would wear the names of the children of Israel on his shoulders.

We have seen that the priest's garment was to give him dignity and respect. The garment also served another purpose, however. It reminded him of his obligation toward the people. These onyx stones on his shoulders showed him that he had a responsibility before God to care for His people and bear their burdens. There are Christian workers in our day who forget that with the honour of their calling comes a tremendous responsibility. Some leaders get caught up in the honour of position and fail to remember their responsibility to serve those to whom God has called them. These stones on the priest's ephod were a constant reminder to the priest of his obligation.

The Breastplate

The second piece of clothing was the breastplate. Notice in verse 15 that it is described as a breastplate for making decisions. This was because of two stones it contained which were used for determining the will of the Lord. We will consider this further in a moment.

The breastplate was to be made by a skilled craftsman from gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen (verse 15). It was to be square in shape, a span long and wide (9 inches or 23 centimetres). God required

that it be folded double to give it thickness. Of particular note was that the breastplate was to have twelve precious stones mounted on it. These were arranged in four rows of three stones each. The first row was to have a ruby, a topaz and a beryl stone (verse 17). The second row contained a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald (verse 18). The third row had a jacinth, and agate and an amethyst. A chrysolite, and onyx and a jasper stone were mounted on the fourth and final row (verse 20). Each of these stones was to be mounted on the breastplate in gold settings and engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel (verses 20-21).

The breastplate was held in place by means of gold rings and braided chains of gold fastened to the four corners. These were and attached to the shoulders and waistband of the ephod (verses 22-28). This way the breastplate was firmly attached to the ephod so that it would not swing out (verse 28).

Inside the breastplate were two stones called the Urim and Thummim. While not a lot is known about these stones, they were used in seeking the Lord's will. When a decision needed to be made the priests would use these stones to help him make that decision. God chose to reveal His will to His people through these stones. While He spoke to certain individuals like Moses he did not always reveal Himself in this way to all His people. God spoke in a variety of ways. The priest needed a way to hear from God in matters that could not always be clearly resolved by the written law. Sometimes the law did not show them God's specific will in a given matter. Should a king go to war? Was the person who came before them telling the truth? These questions needed a specific revelation from God. God gave His priests the means to

hear from Him in these specific matters through the Urim and the Thummim.

Even in our day we need the clear direction of the Lord in specific matters. God has given us His Holy Spirit to be our guide today. Not only does He help us to understand God's written word but He also leads us specifically in what to say or where the Lord wants us to minister. He gives us wisdom in how to deal with the specific situations we encounter on a daily basis. What is particularly encouraging here is that the Lord God has provided a way for us to know His clear and specific direction. Verse 30 tells us that it was by means of these stones that Aaron would have a "means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart."

There is always a temptation for Christian leaders to depend on their experience and training for the decisions they make. God wants His servants to listen to Him and seek Him for the various situations they encounter in ministry.

The Robe

The priest's robe was to be made of blue cloth. It had an opening for the head with a woven collar strong enough so that it would not tear (verse 32). On the bottom of the robe was a decoration of pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and gold bells. Notice in verse 35 that Aaron was to wear this robe when he entered the Holy Place so that he would not die. The sound of the bells would be heard in the courtyard where the people of God had gathered.

It should be remembered that the Holy Place was forbidden to the Israelites. Only the priest could enter to offer

his sacrifice to the Lord on behalf of the people. While the people could not see him inside the Holy Place, they had a way of tracking his movement by means of these bells. The sound of the bells in the Holy Place was a reminder to the people that the Priest was ministering before the Lord on their behalf.

God expected that as the priest went into the Holy Place he would be pure and dressed in the robes He had given him to wear. To enter in any other way was to show a lack of respect toward the Lord God and to bring about a sudden death (verse 35). The priests needed to remember that though they had the privilege of entering the Holy Place they were entering the presence of a holy and awesome God. This was not to be taken lightly.

The Turban

Verses 36-37 tells us about the turban the priest was to wear. A gold plaque engraved with the words: "Holy to the Lord" was fastened to the front of the turban by means of a blue cord. Notice from verse 38 that he was to wear this when he bore the guilt involved in the sacred gifts so that they would be acceptable to the Lord. Aaron was a sinner just like every other Israelite. He stood before a holy God to offer sacrifices for sins he himself was guilty of committing. How could a sinful priest stand before a holy God? This was possible because God had chosen him and provided a way of forgiveness. The inscription he wore on his forehead was a reminder of his calling and privilege. God accepted his offerings and heard his prayers.

Aaron, though as sinful as the other Israelites in nature and deed, was chosen by God to be His representative. He was called, anointed and gifted to minister on behalf

of His people. God would accept his offerings and forgive His people. This was an act of grace on God's part. God chose a man to be the representative between Him and His people. He did this because He had a purpose for His people. Every time Aaron put on that turban with the gold plate he was reminded of God's incredible grace to allow him this privilege. It also reminded him of the tremendous obligation he had to live in tune with the purposes of the one who had called him to minister on behalf of His people. Those whom God has called have a special obligation to live lives holy unto the Lord.

The Priest's Underwear

The Lord commanded Moses to provide underwear for the priests as well. Their underwear was to be made of linen and cover them from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons were to be sure to wear this underwear when they approached the tabernacle. Refusal to do so would be disrespectful of God and they could die at His hands.

God was not only interested in what they wore on the outside but also what was hidden from everyone else. This shows us that nothing can be hidden from God. There are many Christian workers who appear well on the outside but whose inner lives lack true holiness. God is not only interested in what other people see, He is also interested in us being true to Him even in those areas of our lives that others cannot see.

For Consideration:

- The clothes that the priest was to wear shows us that God wanted His people to respect those He had called and placed as spiritual leaders in their midst. Do we treat our spiritual leaders with the respect they deserve? Why do they deserve our respect?
- Exodus 28 speaks about the craftsmen involved in the making of the priest's clothing. We don't read much about these craftsmen and, for the most part, they seem to have a hidden role. Do you know people whose ministry is unseen by others? How important is what they do? How can you recognize them from their role?
- The ephod had two stones with the names of the children of Israel engraved on them. These were worn on the shoulders of the priest. What does this tell us about the obligation of the priest toward His people?
- What were the Urim and the Thummim? What do they teach us about our need of special leading and direction from the Lord in specific matters? How does the Lord lead and direct His people in these matters today?
- The turban worn by the priest was a reminder that God called and forgave ordinary people. What does this teach us about His grace and mercy?
- The fact that the Lord gave Moses special commands regarding the underwear of the priests shows us that He is concerned even about those

things others do not see. What are the hidden things in your life that Lord wants to deal with today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for any time you have failed to honour those He has called and gifted for ministry.
- Take a moment to consider those who serve unnoticed by others in your community. Thank the Lord for them and pray that He would bless them in their ministry.
- Ask the Lord to give wisdom and guidance to your spiritual leaders as they carry the burden of their people on their shoulders.
- Thank the Lord that He leads and directs us by means of His Holy Spirit. Ask Him to help you to be more sensitive to His leading in your life.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any hidden sin in your life He wants to address. Confess that sin and give Him permission to deal with it completely.

THE ORDINATION SERVICE FOR THE PRIESTS

Read Exodus 29:1-46

In the last chapter we examined the requirements of God concerning how Aaron and his sons were to dress as priests. Before they could serve as priests, however, the Lord required that they be ordained or set apart in a special way. In Exodus 29 God explained to Moses what He required for this ordination service.

Notice in verse 1 that these men were to be consecrated or set apart so that they could serve God as priests. This ordination service was important. Not just anyone could serve as priests. God set aside a special family for this purpose. Beyond this, however, every member of that family who served as priests needed to go through this ordination service if he was to function as priest.

In preparation for this special ordination service, Moses was to find a young bull and two rams without any physical defect. He was also to make some bread from fine flour without any yeast, cakes mixed with oil and wafers that had been spread out with oil (verse 2). These

food articles were to be placed in a basket and taken to the tabernacle along with the bull and rams.

Aaron and his sons were also to be prepared for this special ordination service. Moses was to bring them to the tabernacle and have them wash with water. Aaron was then to put on the tunic, robe, ephod, breastplate, turban and gold plate inscribed with "Holy to the Lord." Moses was then to pour oil on his head to anoint him (verse 7). This oil represented the special anointing God had given to Aaron to be the spiritual leader of His people.

Aaron's sons were to dress in tunics with their headbands. Sashes were tied on both Aaron and his sons in preparation for the service of ordination.

When all the preparations had been made, the bull was brought to the front of the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons were to lay their hands on its head and it was to be slaughtered in the presence of the Lord before the entrance of the tabernacle. The act of placing their hands on the bull's head identified Aaron and his sons with the sacrifice. In reality they were saying that they deserved to die because of their sins but the bull was taking their punishment so that justice could be served.

Though they had been particularly called by God, these priests needed His forgiveness as much as the average believer. The people who watched this ceremony were aware of what the priests were saying by laying their hands on the bull. It was a public statement of unworthiness. The best leaders are those who are aware of their humanness and shortcomings. Before they began their ministry, these priests were to make this public confes-

sion of their sinful nature and the need of God's forgiveness.

When the bull had been slaughtered, Moses put its blood on the horns of the altar and poured the rest at the base. The fat and the inner parts were burned on the altar but the flesh, the hide and the dung were burned outside the camp. This was a sin offering for Aaron and his sons. The bull died in their place and was burned on the altar. Its aroma rose up to God and He forgave His servants for their sin.

After the sin offering, Moses took the first ram. As in the case of the bull, Aaron and his sons placed their hands on its head to identify with its death. The ram was slaughtered and the blood sprinkled against the sides of the altar. It was then cut into pieces and the inner parts and legs washed. The entire ram was burnt on the altar as a burnt offering to the Lord. While the sin offering was intended to remind God's people of their need of forgiveness, this burnt offering was a reminder of their need for total surrender and consecration to God. The entire animal was burnt before the Lord. Nothing was kept back.

This second offering reminded Aaron and his sons that they were to offer themselves completely to the Lord and His service. All they had was His to do with as He pleased. There are those who want to serve the Lord for personal gain. God is looking for men and women who will lay everything on the altar and sacrifice all they have to Him. This second offering was a powerful reminder of their obligation toward God.

The second ram was also to be slaughtered before the Lord while Aaron and his sons laid hands on its head. Moses was to put some of the blood on their right ear

lobes, right thumbs and big toe of their right foot (verses 19-20). It is interesting to note that law of God regarding a servant who wanted to remain with his master after serving him for six years. In Exodus 21:5-6 we read:

(5) "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,' (6) then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

The mark on the servant's ear showed everyone that he had chosen to be a willing servant for life to this master. It is possible that the priest was making a similar declaration here when the blood was placed on his right ear lobe. He was declaring to God that he was a willing servant for life. By placing the blood on the hand and feet he was declaring that wherever his feet took him or whatever his hands did he would do so in light of his calling as a servant of God. Again this reminded him of the total consecration that God required of him. By accepting the symbol of this blood on his ear, thumb and toe, the priest was dedicating himself to the service of the Lord. God expects total dedication from those He calls into service.

After the blood had been applied to the ear, thumb and big toe of the priests, Moses then took some blood from the altar and mixed it with anointing oil. This was then sprinkled on the priest's garments as a sign that they were set apart for God and His service (verse 21).

Moses took the fat of the ram, the kidneys and the right thigh, along with the basket of bread, cakes and wafers he had brought and gave them to Aaron and his sons

(verses 22-24). They took these offerings and waved them before the Lord in a symbolic gesture of giving them to him. The offerings were then taken from them and placed on the altar, where they were burned before the Lord. Parts of the second ram would belong to the priests as a portion for their service. By this means the priests would be provided for through the offerings God's people brought to the temple.

The priests were never to take the provision of God in their ministry for granted. A portion of the ram went back to God in thankfulness. Even the portion that was theirs by right was to be offered symbolically to God in recognition of His gracious kindness toward them. This act of waving the offering before God in a gesture of giving it back to Him was a constant reminder to the priests that what they had come from Him and belonged to Him. How different this is from those who feel that what they have is theirs because they earned it and deserve it. Everything the priest had, even his wages, belonged to God, and as such he was required to be faithful in how he used what had been given to him.

In verse 29 God told Moses that the garments that he was to make for Aaron were to be passed on to the next generation. In other words, Aaron's son would succeed him as priest and wear the holy garments (verse 30). The reference here to Aaron's son wearing the priestly garments for seven days refers to the days required to ordain a priest. This is quite clear from verse 35:

"Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them.

The meat that was given to the priests as their portion was to be cooked in a special place. The implication of this is that this place was ceremonially pure so that the priests would not be defiled by anything unholy. The meal was to be eaten at the entrance to the tabernacle with the bread that had been brought for their ordination. No one else could eat this meal because it had been set apart for the priests alone. Nothing was to remain until morning; they were to eat everything that had been set apart for them.

The ordination of Aaron and his sons took a total of seven days. Each day a bull was sacrificed as a sin offering. Over those days the altar was to be purified through the sprinkling of blood on it. Only then would the altar be considered holy. Whoever touched that altar after that would be considered holy (verse 37).

This concept of touching an object and being made holy is quite foreign to our understanding. It should be remembered, however, that this altar was a temporary measure, rich in symbolism. It was on this altar that sacrifices were made for the sins of God's people. It looked forward to a time when an even greater sacrifice was to be made for sin. The Messiah (the Lord Jesus) would lay down His life for the sins of the world. Those who touch and receive His sacrifice are forgiven of their sins and become a holy people.

Until the Lord Jesus came, regular offerings were made on this altar. God told Moses on the mountain that every day two lambs, a year old were to be offered there (one in the morning and the other in the evening). The first lamb was to be an offering with a mixture of flour, oil and wine which was poured out before the Lord. This was known as a drink offering. The second lamb was offered

with the same drink offering mixture of flour, oil and wine but would also be accompanied by an offering of grain and burnt before the Lord on the altar. Notice from verse 41 that this offering was accepted by the Lord and its fragrance rose up as a pleasing aroma to Him. This practice of offering two lambs each day at the tabernacle entrance was to be passed on from generation to generation. In return God promised to reveal His glory in that place and meet with His people to speak to them (verse 43). He would set apart the tabernacle and Aaron and his sons to be His priests. He would live among His people bringing them His blessing. They would know that He was God and that He was in their midst (verse 44-46).

What we need to see in this passage is that God was making provision for His people to meet with Him and know His presence. This was purely an act of grace and compassion on His part. God's people were an ordinary and sinful people. They often grumbled and complained about His will. They fell into sins and disobeyed His commandments. They often lacked faith and trust in the Lord their God. He made provision for this in His wonderful mercy. Disobedience to the Lord God was punishable by death. Justice demanded a punishment for sin and rebellion. God made provision for a lamb to be offered morning and evening of each day in the place of those who had sinned. The aroma of that offering rose up as a pleasing aroma to God for justice had been served. The next day, however, brought new sins and required more sacrifices so that justice could be accomplished.

We can only stand in awe of the wonderful patience of God who, day after day, accepted the offerings of His people for sin and rebellion. How many times would you forgive a person before giving up on them? God patiently endured the shortcomings, failures and rebellion of His

people day after day. Countless lambs and bulls were sacrificed so that justice could be served. There would ultimately be a greater solution in the person of the Lord Jesus whose sacrifice would cover all sin for all time (past, present and future).

For Consideration:

- When the priests were ordained, a bull was brought into the courtyard of the tabernacle and they laid their hands on its head as it was slaughtered. What did this act symbolize?
- While the priests were sinners, the Lord still chose to use them in His service. They were not perfect but they were covered by the blood of the sacrifices. What does this teach us about the first requirement of those who serve the Lord?
- When the ram was sacrificed it was burnt entirely as a symbol of total submission and surrender. To what extent are you willing to surrender to the Lord today?
- Blood was placed on the earlobe of the priest as a symbol of his willing dedication to the service of the Lord. Are you a willing servant of the Lord today? If not, what holds you back?
- What does the altar and its daily sacrifices teach us about the patience of the Lord God toward His people?

- How was the altar a symbol of the Lord Jesus and His ministry toward us? How is His sacrifice better than the sacrifices offered on the altar in the tabernacle?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even though we are sinners He is willing to forgive and use us to advance His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to show you if you are holding back any area of your life from Him. Ask Him to help you to be totally surrendered to Him.
- Thank the Lord for His great patience toward you.
- Thank the Lord Jesus for sacrificing His life so that you could know complete and total forgiveness from sin. Thank Him that your hope is in being covered by His blood and the forgiveness it brings.

31

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRIESTS

Read Exodus 30:1-38

In the last chapter we saw the requirements of the Lord for the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the ministry of the priesthood. As priests of God, they had many responsibilities. Here in Exodus 30 we catch a glimpse of some of their duties as God's representatives before the people.

The Incense Altar

In verse 1 God commanded Moses to make an altar for burning incense. This altar was to be made of acacia wood one cubit square (1 ½ feet or 0.5 metres) and two cubits high (3 feet or 0.9 metres). It was overlaid in gold with golden horns on the corners and a moulding around the top (verses 2-3). Two rings were mounted on each side below and poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were inserted through them in order to carry the altar as they travelled through the wilderness. This altar was to be placed in front of the curtain to the Most Holy Place before the Ark of the Covenant (verse 5).

It was on this altar that Aaron was to burn incense every morning and evening (verses 7-8). Nothing other than incense was to be offered on this altar as it was to be set apart for this one purpose. God told Moses in verse 10 that the priests were to make atonement once a year on the horns of this altar. Leviticus 16:18-19 gives us a better understanding of this procedure:

(18) "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. (19) He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

The purpose of this "atonement" service was to ceremonially cleanse the altar of the impurities of the Israelites. It was done by sprinkling the blood of an animal sacrificed for sin on the horns of the altar.

There are several points we need to make here about this incense altar. There is a picture of an angel of the Lord standing before the altar of incense in Revelation 8:3-4:

(3) Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. (4) The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

In this verse the incense rose from the altar with the prayers of the saints to God. Revelation 5:8 has a very similar picture:

(8) And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Here in Revelation 5:8 the angel held a bowl full of incense which was described as the prayers of the saints. From these two verses we can clearly see the significance of this altar. Notice that it was placed outside the curtain of the Most Holy Place before the Ark of the Covenant. God revealed His presence on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The picture here is of prayers of the saints rising up before the very presence of God. Notice, in this picture however, that the altar and the Ark of the Covenant where God dwelt were separated by a curtain.

The incense was to be offered in the morning and the evening. In other words, God's people were to begin and end their day with this symbol of prayer. What a privilege is ours to be able to commit each day to the Lord for His direction and guidance and end it with thanksgiving. God wanted His people to be in communion with Him and so He provided this symbolic picture of the prayers of His people.

There is one more important point we need to see. Each year the altar had to be purified with the blood of the sin offering. This shows us first that the prayers offered on this altar came from those who were sinful. God still heard the cries of His sinful people. He allowed them to come and speak to Him. How often have we felt unworthy

to come to the Lord with our prayers and petitions? Sometimes we fall into the same sin and feel like we cannot come to Him once again with the same cry for forgiveness and help. The picture before us is significant. The fact that the altar had to be purified each year from the “uncleanness of the Israelites” (Leviticus 16:19) shows us that the Lord made provision for sinners to come to Him on a regular basis. We can come to Him just as we are with our sins and shortcomings. He expects us to do so.

The priests of the Old Testament were to be involved in a ministry of offering incense which symbolized the prayers of the saints to the Lord God. In a similar way God expects that those who serve as His servants regularly bring the petitions and cries of those they serve to Him in prayer. The spiritual leader must bring his people and their needs to the Lord God in prayer on a regular basis. The focus must not be on what the spiritual leader can do for His people, but on what God can do for His people as the spiritual leaders bring them before Him in prayer.

Atonement Money

From time to time God would call for a census to be done. At that time all the Israelites would be counted. When the census was taken each person twenty years of age and over (see verse 14) was to pay half shekel as a “ransom for his life.” The Lord took this matter so seriously that He told Moses that the people risked a plague if they did not pay this money when the census was taken. Such a plague broke out when David took a census of his fighting men in 2 Samuel 24:15. At that time seventy thousand people perished in the plague that broke out against Israel.

Notice that each person was to pay the same amount. Verse 15 tells us that the rich person was not to give more nor was the poor person to give less. Verse 15 also makes it quite clear that this money was considered to be an offering to the Lord to atone for their lives. The priests were to receive this money from the people and use it for the service at the tabernacle.

Again we need to see some important applications here. First, God expects that we give of our money for the work of His kingdom. He told Moses that if His people were not giving to the work of the kingdom then He would cause a plague to come among them. His work should never suffer for lack of giving from His people.

Notice also here that there was no excuse when it came to giving. God would hold the rich and the poor accountable. Admittedly giving half a shekel may have been more difficult for the poor, but God required that they give anyway. Sometimes our giving will be very sacrificial. We may have to trust the Lord for our own needs because we give so sacrificially. The people of God were to give to the work of His kingdom. The priests were to use that money faithfully and wisely for the work of God's kingdom.

The Bronze Basin

In verse 17 the Lord commanded Moses to make a bronze basin with a stand for washing. This basin was to be put between the altar and the tabernacle entrance in the courtyard. This basin was to contain water. The priests were to wash their hands and feet with the water in the basin before entering the tabernacle to present an offering to the Lord God. Notice in verse 19 and in verse 21 that the repetition of the phrase "so that they will not

die.” This shows us how important this was to God. He would strike the priest dead who came into the tabernacle without first washing himself.

This seems to be very harsh but we need to understand the significance of the basin and what it represented. In Hebrew 10:22 the writer challenges believers of the New Testament by saying:

(22) Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Notice the reference to “pure water.” Using the illustration of the basin of water in the courtyard, the writer to the Hebrews calls the believer to wash himself in pure water so that his guilty conscience would be cleansed. The only way that our guilty conscience can be cleansed is by the forgiveness offered through the work of the Lord Jesus. Writing in Ephesians 5:27-20, the apostle Paul challenged husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the church:

(25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (26) to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, (27) and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Notice in these verses what the Lord Jesus did for the church He loved. He cleansed her by the washing of water to present her blameless and holy. In other words,

the washing of water was symbolic of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross for our forgiveness.

Understanding this symbolism should help us to understand why it was so important that the priests wash themselves before entering the presence of the Lord to offer a sacrifice on the altar. The basin represented the forgiveness of the Lord and His cleansing. Those who served Him needed to know this forgiveness and cleansing. How would you feel if your pastor did not even know the Lord? Could you have confidence in a spiritual leader who was living in sin? God wants those who serve Him to love Him and walk in His truth.

The priest was to walk in truth and live in obedience to the will of God for his life. This is not to say that the priest was perfect. The fact that he had to constantly wash in the basin shows us that he needed cleansing on a regular basis.

Maybe you are a servant of God who has fallen. The basin of water shows us that there is ongoing forgiveness and cleansing. These priests were not perfect but they came regularly for cleansing. Those who serve the Lord must walk in this ongoing forgiveness. This will mean regularly coming to Him to confess our sins and make things right.

Anointing Oil

Special anointing oil was to be used in the service of the tabernacle. In verses 22-33 the Lord told Moses how he was to make this oil and His requirements for it. God gave Moses the ingredients for this anointing oil in verses 22-23. It was to contain 500 shekels of liquid myrrh (12 ½ pounds or 6 kilograms), 250 shekels of cinnamon (6 ¼

pounds or 3 kilograms), 250 shekels of fragrant cane, 500 shekels of cassia and a hin of olive oil (4 US quarts or 4 litres). All these ingredients were to be blended by a perfumer gifted in this practice. It was to be a sacred oil used to anoint the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the table, lampstand, altars, basin and all their accessories. Those things this oil touched were holy (verse 29).

Aaron and his sons were also anointed with this oil to set them apart as priests. The oil was only to be made for the use of the tabernacle. No one was to make it themselves. If anyone made this oil for any other purpose they were to be cut off from the people of God (verse 32-33).

It is interesting to note what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 about the believers in Corinth:

(21) Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, (22) set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Notice what Paul says happened to the Corinthians when they came to the Lord Jesus. God anointed them by putting His seal of ownership on them and putting His Spirit in their hearts. This shows us something about what this anointing symbolized. The anointing was a symbol of ownership and the presence of the Holy Spirit to empower and enable. God sets us apart by anointing us with His Holy Spirit who gives us the gifts, authority and wisdom to do His will. The priests of the Old Testament were set apart by means of this anointing oil representing the ministry of God's Spirit in their lives and His calling on them.

It is important that we note that the priests were set apart not because of skill or ability but because the Lord had chosen them and put His Spirit on them. It is easy for us to trust our own wisdom and experience. Those who serve the Lord, however, need to be reminded that it is not by means of their own ability that the work of God is accomplished but by means of the Spirit of God that has been given to them.

Incense

Finally, in this chapter, God told Moses how he was to make the incense used on the incense altar that stood before the Ark of the Covenant. The incense was to be made from fragrant spices, gum resin, onycha, galbanum and pure frankincense in equal amounts. These were all ingredients known to the people of Israel. Notice that these ingredients were to be mixed by a perfumer skilled in the trade (verse 34). This incense was also to contain salt. As with the anointing oil, this mixture was to be considered sacred and never mixed in the same proportions by anyone in Israel or they would be cut off from their people (verse 38). The incense mixture was ground to powder and burned in front of Most Holy Place. The priest was to oversee the production and use of this incense.

For Consideration:

- What does the Altar of Incense represent? What does it tell us about the responsibility of those whom God has called as pastors and spiritual leaders today?

- God required that when a census was taken each person over twenty was to give money to the work of the tabernacle. What does this tell us about God's requirement in regards to how we use our money? What was the punishment for not giving financially to the work of the tabernacle?
- How is the bronze basin a symbol of the work of the Lord Jesus?
- The priests of the Old Testament had to regularly wash in the basin before the tabernacle. What does this tell us about the kind of people God is willing to use for the work of His kingdom?
- In what way is the anointing oil used by the priests a symbol of the Holy Spirit? Why is it important that those who serve the Lord see their need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while we do not see Him with our eyes, He has given us a means by which we can regularly speak with Him.
- Ask God to show you how you can give of your resources to the work of His kingdom.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive and cleanse you of your sins. Thank Him that He made provision for our failures and shortcomings.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the work of His Holy Spirit in you. Ask God to give you grace

to surrender more fully to what He wants to do in you and through you by means of His Holy Spirit.

- Ask the Lord to help you to trust more in the leading and work of His Spirit than in your own efforts to advance His kingdom.

FINAL WORDS

ON THE MOUNTAIN

Read Exodus 31:1-18

Moses had been on the top of Mount Sinai in the presence of the Lord. On this mountain the Lord explained to him His requirements for the people and how they were to worship Him. The Lord has two more important details to share with Moses before sending him down the mountain to return to His people.

God's Call on Bezalel and Oholiab

The first of these matters related to the people God had chosen to make the furnishings for the tabernacle. God chose two men to do this work. The first was a man by the name of Bezalel the son of Uri, and grandson of Hur from the tribe of Judah. Notice in verses 3-5 that God had filled him with the Spirit, skill, ability and knowledge to make artistic designs in gold, silver and bronze. He was also gifted by the Lord to cut stones and work with wood.

The second man was a man by the name of Oholiab son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan. He was to help

Bezalel. He, too, had been given skills by God as a craftsman (verse 6).

These two men would have the responsibility of constructing and supervising the work on the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and the furnishings which included the table, lampstand altars, and basin, with all their accessories. They were also given the responsibility of weaving cloth for the garments the priests would wear. Verse 11 tells us that they also prepared the anointing oil and the incense used in the tabernacle worship. This was a huge and awesome undertaking.

There are several important points I would like to make on these verses. Notice first that God called Bezalel and Oholiab to the work of crafting the furnishings for the tabernacle. Neither of these men were priests, nor would they ever function as priests, but they were still called of God. God not only calls us to preach, teach, evangelize or pastor, He also calls us to the ordinary everyday work we do. Here we have a case of two men being called of God to be craftsmen and artists. This was how they were to serve the Lord. We must never underestimate the importance of any work God calls us to do.

Second, notice that the gifts God gave these men were gifts to work with gold, silver, bronze, stone and cloth. Their gifts were very practical in nature. We don't always recognize these gifts in the church of our day. I believe that God still gifts His people today in this way. I have friends who are gifted songwriters. Others seem to have mechanical skills. These individuals have been gifted of the Lord for these important tasks. We do not always recognize these gifts in the body of Christ. Many times those who have the gifts like Bezalel and Oholiab downplay them and don't even see them as gifts from the Lord.

Let me make one final point here. Bezalel and Oholiab were gifted by God to be labourers and craftsmen. God expected them not only to accept this gifting but to use it for His glory. He expects the same from us today as well. Not all of us are going to be gifted preachers, teachers or evangelists. God has also set apart a people who are gifted in very practical ways. Their work often goes unnoticed and unappreciated but it is vital for the health of the church as a whole.

The Sabbath

The Lord concluded His time with Moses with some words regarding the Sabbath. Notice in verse 13 that the word “Sabbath” is plural. It should be remembered that there was more than one Sabbath. There was a Sabbath day (see verse 14) but there was also a Sabbath year (see Exodus 223:10-12) and the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55) which occurred on the seventh Sabbatical Year or every 50 years. God expected His people to keep all of His Sabbaths as a sign of their faith in Him (verse 13).

While the term “Sabbaths” seems to indicate that God wanted His people to observe all His Sabbath laws, He focuses in verses 14-17 on the Sabbath day. It is interesting to note that this reminder comes in the context of God calling Bezalel and Oholiab to make the furnishings for the tabernacle. While what they were doing was a spiritual ministry, God still expected that they cease their work on the Sabbath and take time to reflect on Him and His purposes.

God reminded Moses that they were to observe the Sabbath day. Anyone who disobeyed this law was to be put to death (verses 14). They were to do all their work

for the construction of the tabernacle in six days but they were to rest on the seventh. What applied to the work of the tabernacle applied to all of Israel on that day. No work was to be done at all on the seventh day. It was to be a day of rest. This was to be observed by all Israelites for generations to come.

Notice in verse 17 that this day was to be a sign between God and the Israelites. The reason God gives for the observation of this day was that He created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. The Sabbath law looked back to the creation of the earth in six days. By observing a seven-day week, the Israelites were remembering the creative work of God. They were remembering that everything they had and enjoyed in life was created by God in six days. This was a reminder of His grace, power and extravagant mercy toward them. He was their creator and the creator of the world they enjoyed. They celebrated the seventh day—the day creation was completed, in remembrance of their God and His wonderful gift of life. This was to be a day of thanksgiving and worship for the grace and kindness of their Creator.

In verse 18 we see that when God finished speaking to Moses about His requirements, He gave him two tablets of stone containing His commandments. Notice that these stone tablets were inscribed by the finger of God. In other words, God wrote these commandments on stone tablets and intended that they be observed for generations to come. He wanted a permanent record for His people of their obligations toward Him as their God.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this passage about the kind of gifts God gives to His people?
- What gifts and talents did God give Bezalel and Oholiab? Are there people in your church who have similar gifts? Why are these gifts important?
- Are these practical gifts ignored or overlooked in your church? How can those who are gifted in the ways Bezalel and Oholiab were gifted be used more for the expansion of His kingdom?
- What was the purpose of the Sabbath? What did it celebrate?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you the gifts He has given you. Ask Him to show you how you can use these gifts for His glory.
- Take a moment to consider the people in your church who have gifts similar to those of Bezalel and Oholiab. Thank the Lord for those people and ask God to give you an opportunity to thank them for their contribution to the work of the church.
- Thank the Lord for the creation around you. Thank Him that everything you have comes from Him. Ask Him to make you more aware of the beauty of His creation and the richness of His blessings toward you.

33

THE GOLDEN CALF

Read Exodus 32:1-35

Moses had been on Mount Sinai for forty days. The people saw the glory of God on the top of the mountain and, as time went by, wondered if Moses was ever going to come down. They gathered around Aaron to ask him what to do. Very likely they believed Moses to be dead. They did not know how anyone could enter the presence of such a God and live. They had seen His glory from afar and it terrified them. How could anyone remain for so long in the presence of such an awesome God?

Aaron suggested that the people take off their gold earrings and bring them to him. It is quite likely that the people of Israel received these earrings as part of the gifts the Egyptians gave them as they left Egypt (see Exodus 12:35-36). The people listened to Aaron and brought him their gold earrings. Aaron took what they gave him and made an idol in the shape of a calf. Notice particularly that this calf was made using a tool. An effort went into making this calf.

When the people saw the calf god they said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." They were quick to turn from the Lord. Remember that

the Lord God had revealed His presence in many powerful ways to this people. He had destroyed the land of Egypt which was filled with such idols. He had separated the sea so His people could walk across on dry land. He revealed His glorious presence to them on the mountain. In fact, it was quite likely that even as they were making this idol the glory of the Lord was still being revealed on the top of the mountain where Moses was speaking with God. Under the shadow of the mountain and the glory that was being revealed, the people openly turn their back on God.

The God they saw on the mountain was an awesome and holy God. He was unapproachable and demanded that they live holy and pure lives. The people were not sure they wanted such a God. The demands of living in obedience to Him were too high. They chose instead to make their own god, one that was not as big and would allow them more freedom to do as they pleased.

When Aaron saw the attitude of the people and their desire he built an altar in front of the calf, he told them that there would be a festival to the Lord the next day. Notice that Aaron still speaks of the Lord. While speaking of the Lord the festival that occurred the next day had nothing to do with the Lord God. The people sacrificed burnt offerings and brought their fellowship offerings but they did so in front of the calf idol. When these offerings were completed they sat down to eat and drink and "indulge in revelry." In other words, they had a wild party.

There was likely much rejoicing and laughter that day as the people drank and partied. This was the kind of god they wanted, one that would not demand a holy life. It is interesting to note that the people felt the need to have a god. There is a need in us for something spiritual. This

clearly distinguishes us from animals. The problem, however, is that we also have a sinful nature that draws us to evil. This is evident here. The people want a god but they are also compelled to follow their evil hearts.

When God saw what was happening, He told Moses that he needed to go down to His people because they had become corrupt. He told Moses how they had made an idol in the shape of a calf and were bowing down to it claiming that it was this god who had brought them out of Egypt (verses 7-8).

Notice in verses 9-10 that the Lord told Moses to leave Him so that He could destroy the nation. He told Moses in verse 10 that while He would destroy the people who were at the foot of the mountain, He would raise up a nation from his descendants to carry on His purpose.

When Moses heard that God was going to destroy the entire nation, he pleaded with Him on their behalf. He told God that if He destroyed the people then the Egyptians would believe that He brought them into the desert to kill them. They would not understand His compassion and love. Moses pleaded with God to remember His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to make their descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. Verse 14 tells us that God listened to Moses, granted his request and did not destroy them.

Before moving on in this story it is important that we notice two details. First, God was ready to destroy His people and may likely have done so were it not for the intercession of Moses on their behalf. Moses literally saved the lives of the people as he pleaded with God. This shows us that God is not hard and indifferent to our cries and desires. He could have accomplished His

purpose by destroying Israel and making Moses' descendants into a great nation. God saw the desire of Moses' heart and let His people live. These verses ought to influence how we see God. Moses was quite free to come to Him with his desires. God was more than willing to listen to what Moses had to say. God can accomplish His plan in any number of ways. He is interested, however, in the desires of our hearts as well.

The second point we need to see is that God did not need these particular people to accomplish His purposes or fulfil His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He made it quite clear to Moses that He could have raised up a whole generation from his family that would have carried on His purpose. If we are unfaithful, God can find someone else to do the job. This is the lesson Jesus taught in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. When the man, who had been given one talent did not invest it, it was taken from him and given to someone else (see Matthew 25:28-30). God's will not allow His purposes to be hindered by our disobedience. He will be true to His word and accomplish what He has promised. If we are not faithful, He will give the responsibility to those who will be faithful. If we do not use the gifts He has given us, what hinders Him from taking them from us and giving them to someone who will?

In verse 15 Moses left the presence of God on the mountain with the two tablets of stone in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides by the finger of God with His commandments (verse 16).

Notice in verse 17 the reference to Joshua. It appears that Joshua had remained on the mountain during this time waiting for Moses. When Joshua saw Moses and they heard the sound of shouting he thought that the

camp had been attacked by an enemy. Moses told him, however, that the sound he heard was not the sound of victory or defeat but the sound of singing (verse 18).

As they approached the camp, Moses saw the calf idol and the people dancing. When he saw this, he was furious. He threw the tablets down, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain (verse 19). He took the calf idol, burned it in the fire and ground it to powder. He then sprinkled the powder in the water and made the Israelites drink it (verse 20). It is interesting to compare what Moses does here with the command of God regarding a woman suspected of being unfaithful to her husband in Numbers 5:16-22:

(16) “The priest shall bring her and have her stand before the LORD. (17) Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water. (18) After the priest has had the woman stand before the LORD, he shall loosen her hair and place in her hands the reminder offering, the grain offering for jealousy, while he himself holds the bitter water that brings a curse. (19) Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, “If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you. (20) But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have defiled yourself by sleeping with a man other than your husband”— (21) here the priest is to put the woman under this curse of the oath— “may the LORD cause your people to curse and denounce you when He causes your thigh to waste away and your abdomen to swell. (22) May this water

that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells and your thigh wastes away.”
“Then the woman is to say, “Amen. So be it.”

A woman suspected to have been unfaithful was to drink water mixed with dust from the tabernacle floor. If the woman had been true to her husband nothing would happen to her but if she had been unfaithful than the water she drank would make her sick. It may be that Moses is doing a similar thing here. He is placing the people of God under the judgement of God by causing them to drink this bitter water. Those who were guilty would suffer the consequences of their actions but those who had remained faithful would be safe.

After making the people drink the bitter water, Moses spoke to Aaron and asked him why he had led the people into such sin (verse 21). Notice Aaron's response in verses 22-24:

(22) “Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. (23) They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.’ (24) So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Aaron does not accept responsibility for his actions. He blames the people for being so prone to evil and asking him to make a god for them. He blames Moses for taking so long to return. Notice that he lies to Moses about how the golden calf was made. He told Moses that he threw the gold into the fire “and out came this calf” (verse 24).

Verse 4 makes it quite clear that tools were actually used to fashion this idol into the shape of a calf. These verses show us several things about Aaron as a spiritual leader. First, it shows us that Aaron was quite influenced by the people to turn from God. He did not have courage to stand up for truth and righteousness. Second, Aaron was unwilling to take personal responsibility for his actions. He blames others for what has happened. He was proud and unwilling to admit he was wrong. Third, Aaron was willing to lie to protect himself and his reputation before Moses. His word could not be trusted.

Again it is important to note that this same Aaron would soon be ordained as priest over His people. He had failed miserably on this occasion. He had not proven to be worthy of the task God had called him to undertake. Despite this, however, God chose to use him. He had his shortcomings and failures. If he were to apply to a mission organization today he may not have been accepted, but God was willing to use him to accomplish great and wonderful things for the expansion of His kingdom.

As Moses looked around him that day he saw that the people were running wild and out of control. Notice from verse 25 that the testimony of God's people was at stake. They had become "a laughingstock to their enemies." That day Moses stood at the entrance of the camp and called out: "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." All the Levites came to him (verse 26).

Moses then commanded them to strap a sword to their side and go throughout the camp killing their brothers and neighbours who refused to turn from their sinful behaviour. The Levites did as Moses commanded and three thousand people died at their hands. Moses blessed the

Levites because they were willing to stand for the Lord even when it meant turning their back on their brothers and sisters (verse 29). God is still looking for a people like this in our day. He is looking for those who will stand firm for Him regardless of what others think.

The next day Moses told the people that he would go up again into the presence of the Lord to see if they could be forgiven for their terrible sin (verse 30). That day Moses cried out to the Lord on behalf of the people. He told God that if He would not forgive their sin He was to blot his name out of the book He had written. This book likely refers to the practice of registering the birth of a child by writing their name in a book. By asking God to remove his name from the book, Moses was asking God to take his life. In reality, what Moses is saying is something like this: "Lord, I will offer my own life to you if you will pardon these people." Moses was willing to lay everything down for those under his care. He loved them more than his own life and was more than willing to give his life for them if that could bring them forgiveness.

Moses stands in sharp contrast to Aaron who was willing to bend to the wishes of the people. While Aaron refused to take responsibility for his actions, Moses, on the other hand, was willing to give up his own life if that would bring forgiveness to the people of Israel.

God refused to take Moses life for the sake of His people. In verse 33 He told him that the person who sinned would die. God had another purpose for Moses. He told him to take His people from the mountain and lead them to the land He had promised. God reminded him, however, that He would punish the people for their actions. Verse 35 tells us that the Lord did punish the people by sending a plague among them.

Notice that despite Moses' pleading on behalf of the people, God still chose to punish them. While God does listen to the desires of our heart and is moved by them, in this case, even though Moses offered his own life, God still struck the people with a plague. God has the right to answer our prayers in any way He chooses.

For Consideration:

- Notice in this chapter how the people were quick to turn from the Lord God. What temptations do you have in your life that causes you to turn your back on God?
- God's people had problems accepting the true God. What was it about God that the people had problems with?
- Why is it so hard to accept a God who demands obedience? Do you know people who are hindered in coming to Christ because of their view of God? Explain.
- We see, in this passage, how God listened to the desire of Moses when he cried out for His people. What does this tell us about God and His willingness to acknowledge our desires? Does God always do what we want Him to do or give us what we want? How is this illustrated in this chapter?
- Are God's promises threatened by our unfaithfulness? What do we learn about God's willingness to strip those who have been unfaithful of their

privileges and give them to those who will be faithful?

- What does this chapter teach us about Aaron and his leadership? How does Aaron's leadership compare with the leadership of Moses?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a heart that is true to Him and willing to stand for Him no matter the cost.
- Ask God to show you anything in your life that would keep you from being faithful to Him and His purpose for your life.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to consider your desires and interests. Ask Him to give you the freedom to tell Him what you want but the willingness to accept His purpose when those desires are not in agreement with His plan.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use us even when we have not proven faithful to Him. Thank Him for how this is demonstrated in the life of Aaron.
- Ask God to give you a heart like Moses for those you serve.

34

GOD'S PRESENCE

Read Exodus 33:1-23

God's people had been unfaithful. They had made an idol in the form of a golden calf and worshipped it. God was angry with them and many were destroyed. Because of Moses' prayers, however, God resisted destroying them all.

Despite their terrible unfaithfulness the Lord told Moses in verse 1 that he and the people were to leave the foot of the mountain to go to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Though they had been unfaithful to Him, God would remain true to His word and give them the land He had promised their ancestors. This tells us something important about God. This lesson is expressed best in the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:13 when he said:

"If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown himself."

Our unfaithfulness to God does not diminish His commitment to us. We may fall, but He will still be true to us. The people of God proved that they did not deserve this mercy. God still commits Himself to bringing them to the

Promised Land. While God does discipline His children, He does not abandon them. In Isaiah 49:16 God told His people that He had engraved them on the palm of His hand:

(16) See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

We engrave something so that it will last. What God is saying to His people in Isaiah 49:16 is that He will never forget them. We have this wonderful confidence that those who belong to God will be kept by Him. Though we fall and are unfaithful to Him, He will be faithful to bring us to the Promised Land.

Notice something else about the promise of God in verse 2. God told Moses that He would send His angel before them to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. This was a wonderful promise for God's people. Though they had been unfaithful, God promised to send His angel before them to prepare the way for them. This angel would drive out their enemies. He would protect His people from harm until they arrived at their destination.

What is true for the people of God is also true for us. God's hand is on His people to protect and keep them from the enemy. It is true that we will have to face many difficult times in this life but that does not mean that God is not protecting us. We can only imagine what would happen to us if God's protection did not surround us. His angels, though unseen to our eyes, are ever-present watching out for us as we journey toward the land He has promised.

Notice next in verse 3 that the Lord was going to lead His people to a land flowing with milk and honey. This reference to “milk and honey” refers to a land of plenty. God was leading them to a land where all their needs would be fulfilled. They would be satisfied in the richness of His blessings.

God makes one further statement in verse 3. He told Moses that while He would send his angel ahead of them and they would inherit the land of plenty, He Himself would not go with them. God made it quite clear to Moses that the reason for this was that His people were stubborn and sinful. God told Moses that if His presence went with them He might destroy them on the way.

Consider what we have seen so far. God promised forgiveness to His people for their rebellion. He promised that He would give them His angel to protect them as they travelled. He promised that He would give them a land of plenty. He also promised that He would keep His distance from them so that He would not be forced to destroy them on the way. What more could the people of God have wanted? Here was forgiveness, protection and the promise of wonderful blessing. Notice the response of the people in verse 4.

Verse 4 tells us that the people were distressed by these words and began to mourn. They did this because God had told them they were a stiff-necked people (stubborn and sinful) and that He would not go with them personally lest He destroy them (verse 5). As a sign of mourning the people stripped off all their jewellery and waited on the Lord (verse 6).

How much does the presence of God mean to you? Would you recognize that God's presence was not with

you? Are we so content with knowing that we are going to heaven that we have lost sight of what it means to fellowship with God right now? Are you content to walk through this life with God at a distance? Are you happy with the traditions, the rituals and the doctrines? What is the Christian life to you? Is it about church and service and lifestyle or is it about fellowship and intimacy with God?

The fact that Israel mourned when God told them that His personal presence would not go with them shows us that they understood something very important. They understood that their spiritual life was more than offerings and sacrifices; it was about fellowship with God and walking with Him. Many people have lost sight of this. They are content with a faith that knows little intimacy with God.

Verses 7-10 show us something of the personal relationship God had with Moses. Verse 7 tells us that Moses would pitch a tent outside the camp some distance away from the people. He called this the "tent of meeting." He would go into that tent to spend time with the Lord. If anyone needed to seek the will of the Lord, they would go to the tent of meeting and Moses would seek the Lord on their behalf.

Notice in verse 8 that whenever Moses went to the tent of meeting the people would rise to their feet and stand at the entrances of their own tents until he had entered the Lord's presence. This was likely a sign of respect for Moses and what he was doing. When Moses entered the tent of meeting a pillar of cloud would descend and stay at the entrance of the tent. The people, seeing this, would fall down in worship when they saw this demonstration of the Lord's presence (verse 10). There in that tent the Lord would speak to Moses "face to face, as a man

speaks with his friend" (verse 11). When his time with the Lord was over, Moses would return to the camp. Joshua, his aide, however, stayed to guard the tent.

On this particular occasion, Moses entered the tent of meeting with some deep concerns. First, he knew that he could not lead the people to the Promised Land alone. He needed help. The Lord had not revealed to him who his helper would be. Second, while Moses had found special favour with God, he would need that presence even more now that he was going to lead the people on from Mount Sinai. He pleaded with God to teach him His ways and to continue showing him favour by meeting with him and giving him wisdom (verse 13). He reminded God that these were His people. Moses was simply God's instrument chosen to lead them. Moses did not take this lightly. He knew how much he needed God's strength and wisdom to be faithful to the task to which he had been called.

This tells us something important about Moses. He did not trust his own wisdom or strength. He trusted in the Lord and His leading to carry him through. Here was a man who had spent forty days in the presence of God. Those forty days taught him more than any Bible school or seminary could have taught. Those forty days were worth more than a lifetime of experience and Bible training. Moses' confidence, however, was not in that experience. He knew that for every new problem he would need fresh wisdom and strength from God. For each new problem he needed a fresh experience of God. In an age where we trust more and more in education and experience, we would do well to remember that victory is not for the educated and experienced but for those who trust in the Lord.

In verse 14 the Lord told Moses that He would be with him and give him rest. This is an interesting statement. Notice that not only would God's presence go with Moses, but God would also give him rest. Consider how Moses was feeling right now. He was overwhelmed with the responsibility that God was giving him. He was wondering if he would be able to handle these people. He had just seen how they had been wildly out of control in the worshipping of the golden calf. He had also been reminded of the weakness of Aaron's leadership, allowing Israel to wander into idol worship. Who would be his helper? How could he keep this nation faithful to God? How would he handle the mountain of problems brought to him each day? We can sense the unrest Moses was feeling. God reminded him, however, that in the midst of all these pressures, He would be with him and He would quiet his heart and give him inner peace and rest. What a comfort this must have been for Moses.

Verses 15-16 are very important verses. On hearing that God's presence would go with him, Moses responds by saying:

(15) "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. (16) How will anyone know that You are pleased with me and with Your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and Your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

This is a very bold statement on Moses part, but one that clearly reflects his heart. Let's take a moment to consider what he is saying.

First, Moses tells God that if His presence did not go with them, he did not want to go to the Promised Land. What

is Moses saying? He is telling God that the only way he could successfully accomplish the task he had been called to do was if God Himself went with him. He could not imagine trying to lead the people without God's presence. He could not do this work himself. He did not want to go if God was not going with them.

Is this your heart? There are times when we catch a vision for something that is not necessarily from God. I have been in churches where the presence of God seemed to be removed but people were quite content to continue without His presence. At times we are guilty of trying to advance what God has chosen to abandon. We need more people like Moses who will say, "Lord, if you are not in my ministry than I don't want it. I want only what you want."

Notice something else about this statement of Moses in verse 16. Moses makes it quite clear that the key distinguishing mark of the people of God is His presence. What is the difference between a believer and an unbeliever? Is it not the presence of God and His power in the life of the believer? When unbelievers look at believers they ought to see the presence of God. There ought to be clear evidence that God is doing something in our lives. The unbeliever ought to see the difference the presence of God makes in our lives. They ought to see in us a clear reflection of God, His character and His power. There is something different about the child of God. That difference is God Himself. If the presence of God is not evident in our lives, how do we differ from the unbeliever? How will people know we belong to Him?

Moses was concerned about two things here. First, that God's presence be his source of power, wisdom and ability. He did not depend on his own wisdom or strength,

but relied totally on God to do what He had called him to do. Second, he was concerned that His people demonstrate that they belonged to God by His presence in their daily lives. This ought to be the heart cry of every Christian leader, that God would be with them to empower them so that His people would know His presence and show the world that they belong to Him.

God was pleased with Moses request. In verse 17 He promised that He would do what Moses asked. As if to confirm this promise, Moses, then boldly asked God to show him His glory. It seems that Moses would not be content until God had confirmed this promise with a sign.

God agreed to show Moses something of His glory. Notice in verse 19 that He told him that His goodness would pass in front of him and He would proclaim His name in his presence. In Bible times a name represented the character of an individual. By telling Moses that He would proclaim His name in his presence He was telling him that He would show him something of His character. In particular, God would reveal His goodness, mercy and compassion (verses 19-20). God told Moses, however, that He would not show him His face because no human could see His face and live. Instead, God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock and told him that He would cover him with His hand until His presence had passed. When He removed His hand, Moses would see His back (verse 23).

Moses would see something of the glory of God but he would particularly be aware of God's mercy, compassion and goodness. As his ministry unfolded, Moses would have many opportunities to draw from this revelation of God's mercy, compassion and goodness. As he worked

with the rebellious nation of Israel, Moses would particularly need to be reminded of these characteristics of God.

In conclusion, there is one more detail I would like to touch on. We can only imagine what Moses learned about the mercy and compassion of God on that day. No book could ever have taught Moses such powerful lessons. God showed Moses one aspect of His person and then revealed this more fully in the experiences He would give him with the people over the rest of his life. No human being spent so much time in the presence of God as Moses. No individual ever spoke with God as Moses did. Yet even Moses did not fully know God. God would not show him His face. It never ceases to surprise me how we can think that we can reduce God to a set of doctrines. It is true that God's general character is revealed to us in the Bible but studying about God is vastly different from knowing Him personally. I suspect that we will spend all of eternity getting to know our great and awesome God. There are things about God and His ways that we may never fully understand. He is too big for our theology books to define. As God said to Isaiah:

- (8) "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.
- (9) "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

For Consideration:

- Does God abandon us when we are unfaithful to Him? What does this passage teach us about His faithfulness toward us?
- What do we learn in this passage about the role of angels? What role did God's angel have in the lives of His people?
- What is it that distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever according to Moses?
- Why did Moses want God's presence to go with him to the Promised Land?
- Have you been content to serve God without knowing His real presence? Explain.
- What evidence is there of the presence of God in your life, your church or your ministry?
- Can we ever fully understand God and His ways? What has God been revealing to you about His character and purpose?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even when we are unfaithful to Him He remains faithful to us. Thank Him for His forgiveness and mercy.
- Thank the Lord that He sends His angels to protect and keep us.

- Ask the Lord to reveal His presence in you and your ministry in a deeper way. Ask Him to show you if there is anything that hinders Him from revealing His presence in a deeper way.
- Thank the Lord that He is bigger than our minds can ever understand.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to reveal Himself to us in a personal way. Ask Him to give you a deeper burden to know Him personally.

35

GOD PROCLAIMS HIS NAME

Read Exodus 34:1-9

While Moses was on the mountaintop, God gave him two tablets of stone which He Himself had carved. Those two tablets contained, in summary form, the commandments of God for His people. The fact that they were carved in stone indicated that they were meant to be a permanent reminder to His people of what God required. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw how the people had so quickly abandoned their God to worship the golden calf, he threw the stone tablets to the ground, breaking them to pieces (Exodus 32:19).

We have no record of God ever condemning Moses for this action. These stones were sacred stones in that they had been carved by the finger of God (Exodus 32:16). He had given these tablets to Moses for safekeeping and as a reminder forever of His requirements, but now they lay in pieces at the foot of the mountain. In many ways the breaking of these tablets written by God was very symbolic of what was happening in the camp. God's people had broken His commandments at the foot of the mountain.

In Exodus 34 God called Moses up to the mountain top once again. Notice that he was to chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and bring them into the presence of God. God told Moses that He would write the words that were on the first tablets that had been broken. No one was to come with Moses to the mountain. In fact, no animal or human being was to be seen near the mountain while Moses was there in the presence of God (verse 3). This was a tremendous privilege for Moses. God would meet with him and no one else.

God was going to replace what Moses had lost at the foot of that mountain. There are times when we, too, lose things because of our own actions. Perhaps it was a ministry or a reputation. We should take courage here. God replaced what Moses shattered at the foot of the mountain. God does not abandon us in these times. We can only imagine how Moses must have felt to have broken those tablets in his anger.

Moses chiselled out two stone tablets like the ones that had been broken and went up into the presence of God on the top of Mount Sinai (verse 4). Verse 5 tells us that the Lord came down in a cloud and stood with Moses, "proclaiming His name." The phrase "proclaiming His name" is much more than simply telling Moses who He was. As we have already seen in this commentary, names in Bible times represented the character of the individual. When God stood in Moses' presence proclaiming His name, He was in reality revealing His character. Notice from verse 6 what God was revealing to Moses about Himself.

He revealed Himself to Moses first as the Lord. This word is the word Jehovah (YHWH). It was used when speaking

of God alone. No one else was worthy of this name. He was over all gods. There was no one greater than Him.

Second, God reveals Himself to Moses as a compassionate and gracious God. What comfort we can take from the fact that the great and awesome God of this universe is a gracious and compassionate God. This compassion was evident in the fact that He had seen the misery of His people in their bondage in Egypt and was moved to set them free. It was compassion for them that moved the heart of God. What is it that would cause the great and awesome God of this universe to look down at me in my situation? Why would He even be concerned about me? The only explanation is that He is a God of grace (unmerited favour) and compassion. He has a tender heart toward His people. His heart is moved by our condition and the situations we encounter. How we need to praise Him that He is a God of compassion and mercy.

Third, God revealed himself to Moses as one who was slow to anger. We have evidence of this in the way He was patient with His people as they travelled through the wilderness. The people grumbled and complained all the way. God was patient with them, continuing to provide for them every day and delivering them from their enemies. When they complained about not having water, God provided it for them. When they complained about not having meat to eat, God sent quail for them to eat. His patience toward His people was very great. How many times have I also failed in my walk with the Lord God? How often has God been patient with me? This great and awesome God is patient with us even when we fall.

Fourth, God told Moses that He was the God who abounded in love and faithfulness. The phrase “abound-

ing in love” is significant. It shows us that God overflows with love toward His people. That is to say, His love for us is beyond what we need or even deserve. Notice the connection between love and faithfulness. God’s love is not conditional. In other words, it does not depend on our deserving it. God will be faithful to us whether we are worthy of that faithfulness or not. Even when we are unfaithful to Him, He will remain true to us. He will not leave us or abandon us. There is absolute security in this for those who belong to God. Maybe you have fallen in your walk with Him today. God’s love for you remains as strong as it ever was.

Finally, God told Moses that day that He was also a God of justice. He would not let the guilty go unpunished. Notice in verse 7 that God told Moses that He would punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations. We need to be careful about reading too much into this verse. We should not assume from this that God will punish innocent children for the sins of their parents. This is quite clear from Ezekiel 18:18-20:

(18) But his father will die for his own sin, because he practised extortion, robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. (19) “Yet you ask, ‘Why does the son not share the guilt of his father?’ Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all My decrees, he will surely live. (20) The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

It is quite clear from this passage in Ezekiel that the soul that sinned would be guilty before God. The children would not be held accountable to God for the sins of their parents.

What does the Lord mean when he says that He would punish the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation? The King James Version of the Bible translates this verse by the phrase “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.” This translation can be quite helpful in our understanding of God’s intention in this verse. While God would not punish those who were innocent, the sins of the fathers would “visit” the children for generations to come. Consider for a moment a child who has been abused by an alcoholic father. What impact does this have on the life of that child? How would this impact how that child raised their own children? What is true individually is also true for whole generations. What happens when a whole generation turns from God? They do not teach their children to love and honour the Lord God. They practice sin and unfaithfulness to God. As a result, their whole society is influenced. Entire generations grow up not knowing the Lord. Our children suffer the consequences of our actions for generations to come. They grow up in a corrupt society and suffer for what we have done as parents.

God is telling Moses that what one generation leaves behind will have a direct influence on the generations to come. While God was gracious and forgiving, His people would have to live with the consequences of their actions. God would not necessarily erase the negative impact that their actions had on the generations to come.

How important it is for us to realize what God is saying here in this verse. What heritage are we leaving for the

generations to come? We are all products of the generations that have preceded us. Our society's spiritual and moral character has been shaped by this generation and the generations before us. What impact will this generation have for good or bad on our society?

Notice the response of Moses as he considered the words of the Lord. In verse 8 his first response was to bow down and worship the Lord. What else could he do? God had revealed Himself to Moses as an awesome, loving, forgiving and just God. Moses fell to the ground in worship and praise.

Notice, secondly, that Moses pleaded with this merciful and compassionate God to come with them as they journeyed to the land He had promised to them. Moses pleads with God on the basis of His love. He wants this God to be forever at his side, blessing and favouring His people. He is drawn to God's grace and mercy. He longs for the presence of such a God.

While he longed for God's presence among His people, Moses also recognized that the Israelites were a stubborn and sinful people. In verse 9 he calls on God to forgive the wickedness and sin of His people and take them as His inheritance. This was a bold request for a people who had been worshipping a golden calf. They had turned their backs on God. They longed to be back in Egypt. They grumbled and complained constantly against God and His purpose. They had even wanted to kill Moses (see Exodus 17:4). As evil as these people were, God's forgiveness, patience and mercy were greater. Moses cries out to God to take these rebellious children and adopt them as His own, giving them an inheritance as children of God.

The grace of God is still the same today. No matter how far we have wandered, the grace and forgiveness of God is there for us to receive. Many refuse to come to the Lord because they do not feel they deserve His mercy and compassion. They fail to see the heart of God that is willing and longing to forgive. Don't let your unworthiness keep you from receiving your inheritance.

For Consideration:

- Moses broke the tablets of stone the Lord had given him, and God replaced them. Have you ever lost anything by your careless actions? What encouragement do you take from the fact that God was willing to replace what Moses had broken?
- What did God reveal to Moses about Himself? What do we learn about God in this chapter?
- How do our actions affect those around us and the generations to come? What impact will your generation have for good and for bad on future generations?
- Should we allow our unworthiness to keep us from coming to the Lord? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even when we fail He is willing to minister to us. Thank Him that He does not

abandon us when we have been unfaithful. Thank Him for His forgiveness.

- Take a moment to consider the various characteristics of God revealed here in this chapter. Spend a moment of quiet thanksgiving and praise to God for these various characteristics.
- Ask God to forgive you and your generation for the negative impact you have had on the younger generation. Ask Him to enable you to leave behind a spiritual and godly heritage for your children.
- Thank the Lord that while we are not worthy, His arms are open wide to receive us and forgive us for our sin.

36

NEW TABLETS AND A RENEWED COVENANT

Read Exodus 34:10-35

God had called Moses into His presence on the top of Mount Sinai to replace the tablets of stone he had broken. As on the previous occasion, the Lord descended on the mountain and spoke to Moses. As we begin this next section of Exodus 34 God is explaining to Moses that He was going to make a covenant agreement with His people.

A covenant is a commitment between two parties with a common goal. In our day, the best example of a covenant agreement is a marriage. A covenant requires a commitment from each person involved. God begins in verse 10 by stating His commitment to His people.

God's Promise

God tells Moses in verse 10 that He was going to do wonders never before done in any nation. His people would experience these wonders. The unbelievers around them would see the awesome works of God and

know what He was willing to do for His people. It was the desire of God to empower and bless His people. He wanted the world to know that the nation of Israel belonged to Him. The nations would see the special favour of God on His people. They would see what He was willing to do for them.

We cannot take this commitment of God lightly. He wanted to show the world what He was willing to do for His people. A quick look at the Old Testament shows us something of the incredible things that God did. Already the people of God had seen Him bring the entire Egyptian nation to its knees so that they could be free from bondage. They had seen God provide food from heaven in the form of manna. He had split the sea to let them cross on dry land. He descended on the mountain and revealed His glory to them all. This was just the beginning of what God would do throughout their history. Powerful works, wonderful provision and daily victories were the portion of God's people.

I believe that this is still the desire of God for His people today. I believe He still wants the world to know what He is willing to do for His people. He wants the world to know that He is not ashamed to call us His children. The question in my mind, however, is why are we not experiencing the fullness of what God wants to do in us and through us? The answer lies not in God's desire but in our willingness to keep our side of the covenant.

Israel's Obligation

In verse 11 God made it clear that He would drive out the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. God's people would conquer these nations and take their land. Notice, however, in verse 11, that

God expected that His people obey Him. As they walked in obedience they would see God move before them and give them victory. Obedience to the commands of God was vital if they wanted to see the power of God at work on their behalf. God would not bless their sin and their sinful lifestyles.

In verse 12 God makes it clear that His people were not to make treaties with those who lived in the land He was giving them. These nations would be a snare to them and draw them away. God demanded that His people break down the pagan altars, smash the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles used to worship other gods. His people were not to worship any other god. God reminded Moses in verse 14 that He was a jealous God. He would not share His people with other gods. He demanded their full and undivided attention.

The practices of the unbelievers in the land God was going to give them were an abomination in God's eyes. God warned His people in verse 15 that the foreign nations prostituted themselves with other gods and sacrificed to them. These nations would invite His people to follow them in their evil practices. The men of these evil nations would seek to marry their daughters and lead them astray. God told His people they were to resist this temptation. They were not to allow their children to marry the unbelievers of the land.

God wanted the world to see what He would do for His people, but they also had an obligation toward God. He expected that they would walk in obedience and resist any other god. If there was anything that would hinder the blessing of God, it would be His people's refusal to walk in obedience and faithfulness to Him. Could it be that the reason we are not experiencing more of God's power and

wonders today is because we are not walking in obedience?

In verses 17-28 God reminded Moses of what He expected of His people. Notice first, that God required faithfulness. His people were to worship Him alone. They were not to make any idols (verse 17). An idol in this context was made with human hands but should not be limited to those things made of wood, metal or stone. There are idols made in our hearts as well. Anything that takes the place of God and obedience to Him and His commands is an idol and must be smashed.

Second, God expected His people to remember with thankfulness what He had done for them. They were to do this through the sacred festivals He had given. They were to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt (verse 18). Part of remembering what God did for them when they left Egypt was to redeem from Him the first offspring of every womb. This was because God had killed the firstborn child in every Egyptian home (verses 19-20). Notice in verse 20 that no one was to appear before God empty-handed. Everyone was to bring his or her offering to God in thankfulness for His goodness.

Another way they could remember what God had done for them was by keeping the Sabbath (verse 21). They were not to work on the seventh day because God had created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. This seventh day was a day of rest and reflection on God and His creation. This was a day set aside for Him in thankfulness and praise.

In verses 22-23 God reminded His people that they were also to appear before Him to celebrate the Feast of

Weeks with the first fruits of their harvest. At the end of the harvest they were to celebrate the Feast of Ingathering. The people of God were to celebrate the goodness of God in setting them free from Egypt (Feast of Unleavened Bread), the beginning of the harvest (Feast of Weeks) and the end of the harvest (Feast of Ingathering).

God expected His people to be a thankful people. He wants us to recognize that everything we have comes from Him. Sometimes we begin to think that God owes us what He gives us. This is not the case. God gives as an expression of His love and devotion to us even though we do not deserve what He gives. In return, He asks us to recognize His gifts and be thankful to Him.

Notice the connection in verse 24 between the celebration of God's goodness and His driving the nations out before them. God promises, in this context, that He would enlarge their territory and no one would covet or take it from them. He would enlarge their territory "when" they went up three times a year before their God.

I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God.

The connection between God's people celebrating His goodness and God's enlarging their territory is quite clear. God delights to display His wonders through those who are thankful. Are we a thankful people or have we assumed that what God gives us is our right and His obligation? Could it be that part of the reason we are not seeing His wonders in an even greater way is because we are not a thankful people?

As a thankful people, Israel was to bring their sacrifices to the Lord God. These sacrifices were to be pure and undefiled sacrifices, the best of what they had. Verse 25 tells us that none of the sacrifices were to contain yeast (often a symbol of sin). They were not to allow any Passover sacrifice to remain until morning. To allow it to remain overnight would cause it to go bad. It would not be right to allow anything offered to the Lord to go bad. Verse 26 makes it quite clear that the people of God were to bring the best of the fruits of their harvest. They were not to offer Him anything that was inferior in quality. He deserved the best they had.

In verse 26 the Lord told Moses that the Israelites were not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk. At first glance this statement seems out of place. How does this command fit into the context of what God is telling His people regarding the covenant He was making with them? It appears that the pagans in the land God was giving His people had a practice of cooking a young goat in its mother's milk. This was done as part of their pagan belief system to make the land fertile. What God is telling His people is that they are not to do what the pagans did. They were not to seek the favour of other gods on their harvest. They were to trust God alone to bring them their harvest and thank Him for it when it came.

The Lord God made it clear to Moses that it was "in accordance with these words" that He would make a covenant with the people of Israel. In other words, this was the agreement between God and His people. He would show the world what He was willing to do for His people. His people would obey Him faithfully, remembering with thankfulness what He had done. Moses wrote down what God told him over the forty days he spent with Him on the mountain. The Ten Commandments were the

result of that conversation with God and summarized the requirements of God for His people. Verse 28 tells us that during those forty days, Moses did not eat or drink. Obviously, God sustained him during this time in His presence.

The time spent with God on Mount Sinai had a physical effect on Moses. Verse 29 tells us that when he came down from the mountain his face was radiant. Moses was not aware of this, but when Aaron and the people saw him they were afraid to come near (verse 30). Moses shared what God had told him with the leaders. He then called all of Israel to him to hear the commands God had given him on Mount Sinai (verses 31-32).

When he finished speaking to the people, Moses put a veil over his face. Whenever he went to speak with God he would remove the veil. When he returned, the people saw how his face glowed with the radiance of the Lord (verse 35). By this means the Lord reminded His people that Moses was truly His servant and they were to listen to him.

For Consideration:

- God promised to do wonders never before seen for His people. Is this still the desire of God for His people today? What wonders has God done in your life?
- What did God expect of His people in return for the things He would do for them?

- What is the connection between obedience to God and the blessings He is willing to pour out?
- How were God's people to express their thankfulness to Him for His goodness toward them? How thankful are you for what God has done in your life? How do you express this thankfulness to God?
- What evidence was there that Moses had been in the presence of God? What evidence is there in your life that you have been in God's presence and that He lives in you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that, while you do not deserve it, He wants to do great and wonderful things for you. Take a moment to consider some of the things He has already done.
- Ask God to show you anything in your life that has been hindering His blessing.
- Ask God to make you more thankful for what He has done for you.
- Ask God to make His presence more real in your life so that people will know that He is with you.

37

AN OFFERING FOR THE TABERNACLE

Read Exodus 35:1-35

As we begin Exodus 35 Moses reminds His people of the importance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. They were to do all their work in six days but to rest on the Sabbath. Notice in verse 2 that this day was not a day of rest for themselves but a “rest to the Lord.” The phrase “to the Lord” is significant and shows us that the focus of the day was to be the Lord.

Notice in verse 2 that anyone found doing any work on the Sabbath was to be put to death. In order to know if a person was disobeying the Sabbath commandment the word “work” had to be defined. This would become a problem for the teachers of the law. Notice, however, in verse 3 that Moses told the people that lighting a fire in their homes on the Sabbath would be considered work and was punishable by death. The term work seems to be defined in the strictest sense.

From this statement on the Sabbath, Moses then told His people to bring an offering to the Lord. We see from

verse 4 that this offering was not the idea of Moses but a command from the Lord. Notice two things about this offering in verse 5.

First, the offering was to come from what they had. The Lord does not call us to give what we do not have. This may seem somewhat ridiculous to state but the reality is that we can see the needs around us and feel guilty because we are not giving more to meet those needs. The enemy delights in shaming us and causing us to be overcome by guilt. This is not from God. God does not ask us to give what we do not have to give. He only expects us to be faithful with what He has already given us.

Second, God expects that we give willingly. In verse 5 everyone who was willing was to bring their offerings to the Lord. It is not the amount we give that is important but the attitude of the heart. God delights more in a small voluntary gift than in a large gift given with a bitter attitude. The offerings God's people were to bring to Him were to come from their heart with joy and thanksgiving.

Notice the types of offerings God wanted from His people in verse 5-9. He was looking for offerings of gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen. He also wanted goat hair, ram skins dyed red and the hides of seal-like animals called sea cows. Further to this He requested acacia wood, olive oil, spices, incense, onyx stones and other gems. All these articles would be used to make the tabernacle and the articles needed for the worship of God as He had commanded Moses.

These articles were not the only things people could give. The Lord also asked those who were skilled to give of their time and effort. These skilled workers were to be

involved in making the tabernacle and its furnishings and accessories (verses 11-19).

When the people left Moses presence that day, all who were willing and whose heart the Lord had moved returned with offerings for the work on the Tabernacle. Notice two things about those who gave (verse 21).

First their hearts were willing. This means that they were ready to give. They had a heart for the Lord and His work. They wanted to see His purposes fulfilled. They wanted to be part of God's purpose and were ready to sacrifice what they had to see His will be done in their midst.

Second, their willing hearts were moved by the Lord. What would have happened if their hearts were hardened? Would God have moved in the same way? Here were hearts that were tender and ready to listen to God. God spoke to those hearts and they responded. If you have a willing heart, God will move in it. He will use you for the work of His kingdom.

The Tabernacle was constructed from the willing gifts of God's people (verse 22). The word "willing" is used four times in verse 20-29. The Israelites came with their jewellery, yarn, and hides. They brought their silver, bronze and acacia wood. All these gifts were brought with a joyful heart.

Those who were skilled workers offered their skills to the Lord. The women spun the yarn and goat hair with their hands, making the cloth for the Tabernacle covering (verses 25-26). The leaders brought precious stones to be mounted on the priest's ephod and breastplate as well as spices, and olive oil for the anointing oil and incense.

God was moving among His people. Not too long before these events, the people of God had given their gold to make a golden calf. God judged those people and many lost their lives. It appears that among those who remained were a people whose hearts were willing to hear from God and obey His commands. We can only imagine the excitement of those days as God's people were being moved by Him to give and serve.

It is interesting to note, however, that the repetition of the phrase "those who were willing" implies that there were also those who were not willing. While the passage does not speak of them, we can assume that there were some in the community who were not as excited about what was happening as those in whose hearts God was moving.

While many people were involved in the work of building the Tabernacle, its furnishings and accessories, God had particularly put His hand on two men. The first man was Bezalel. God had filled Bezalel with His Spirit. He filled him to give him ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts (verse 31). This would enable him to make artistic designs in gold, silver and bronze. God's Spirit would enable him to cut stones, work with wood and do all kinds of artistic crafts (verses 32-33). The second man was Oholiab son of Ahisamach from the tribe of Dan. He too was gifted by God's Spirit as a craftsman.

God not only gifted these men as craftsmen but also gave them ability to teach others (verse 34). These two gifted and Spirit filled men would be used of God to teach practical skills such as metal work, wood work, weaving, embroidery and sewing. God would use these practical skills in the construction of the Tabernacle.

The Spirit of God filled these men for the purpose of enabling them to be simple labourers and craftsmen. The work of God needs more than pastors and evangelists. God also needs men and women who can do the hands-on practical everyday work. He is willing to fill you with His Spirit to do this practical work if you have a willing heart. God does not ask us to give what we do not have. Nor does He ask us to be what He has not called us to be. Not everyone is going to be called to preach. God needs people to work behind the scenes as well. He will fill you for these roles as well. Sometimes these positions are unnoticed by anyone but God. If your heart is willing, God will move in it and lead you for the glory of His name.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt guilty because you did not have something to give to a particular need? Does this kind of guilt come from God? Does God ask us to give what we do not have to give?
- How important is willingness in our service of the Lord?
- What is the connection in this chapter between willing hearts and God moving in those hearts? Do you have a willing heart toward God?
- Why does God fill us with His Spirit? What were the results of being filled with the Spirit of God in the lives of Bezalel and Oholiab?

- What skills has the Lord given you? How can you use those skills for the work of the Kingdom of God?
- What is God calling you to give for the sake of His kingdom?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to remove false guilt from your life.
- Ask God to give you a heart that is more willing to serve and give.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to fill you with His Spirit to enable you to serve Him. Ask Him to help you to see how you can use the gifts He has given you for His sake.

38

WORK ON THE TABERNACLE BEGINS

Read Exodus 36:1-37:29

Moses had been receiving gifts from the people for the work on the Tabernacle. As we begin chapter 36 he called Bezalel and Oholiab and other skilled people to begin the work as the Lord had commanded him. Notice in Exodus 36:2 that there were two qualifications for those who were involved in this work.

First, the Lord had given them ability. God had particularly gifted these individuals in a variety of crafts. He had done so for a reason. He wanted to use them for the expansion of His kingdom. Those who were involved in the construction of the tabernacle had been specially equipped by God for that purpose.

Second, they were willing. As we saw in the last chapter, willingness is an important characteristic. God was not interested in using people who were not willing to be used. These individuals were all gifted and willing to place their gifts at His disposal. There are many people who have gifts from the Lord but who are not ready to

step out and use them. God's part is to equip His people—ours is to be willing.

There are many reasons why we are not willing to be used of God. Sometimes we are unwilling to make the sacrifice. God's work requires sacrifice. There are things we will have to leave behind if we are going to serve the Lord. God will require our time and our effort. This will mean putting our own interests aside. Those who served the Lord on the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings gave of their time and energy freely. We should not take this willingness on the part of the workers lightly. These were individuals who were ready to make the sacrifices required. They believed in what God was doing and were willing to give of their time, effort and resources to see it happen. God is pleased with such people. He delights to use them in the expansion of His kingdom.

Sometimes we are unwilling because we do not have the faith to believe that God can really use our gifts in greater ways or because we are looking for something bigger than what God is asking us to do. Those who are willing will allow God to determine how He wants to use their gifts. He may choose to use them in big ways, requiring that we step out boldly in faith. He may choose to use them in small ways requiring that we humble ourselves and be content with not being noticed. Those who are willing to be used will be happy to listen to God and do what He asks them to do, whether that be in big or small ways.

Many of the Israelites willingly brought offerings to be used for the tabernacle, and these were passed on to the workers. The people came morning after morning with their gifts (Exodus 36:3). In fact, verse 4 tells us that when the workers saw the gifts that had been brought

they told Moses that they had more than enough for the work. Moses sent an order throughout the land telling the people to stop bringing their offerings (Exodus 36:6-7).

These were exciting days for Israel. God had moved in their midst and given them a willing spirit. Men and women were dedicating themselves and their skills to the work of the tabernacle. Others were being moved of God to give generously so that there were more than enough resources to complete the task. God was showing Himself in a very powerful way.

The Walls and Roof

The Tabernacle was made with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn embroidered with images of cherubim. Each of the ten curtains was twenty-eight cubits long (42 feet or 12.5 metres) by four cubits wide (6 feet or 1.8 metres). These curtains were joined together in two pieces of five curtains each (Exodus 36:10). They were joined together by loops of blue material and gold clasps (Exodus 36:11-13). This would form the inside roof and walls of the tabernacle.

A second curtain of goat hair was also made. Eleven smaller goat hair curtains were joined together in a similar way and joined in the middle by loops and clasps. This would cover the inner wall of the tabernacle protecting it from the weather.

The final covering for the tabernacle, which was on the outside and exposed to the weather, was made of the hide of sea cows. The tabernacle had three separate coverings, which would assure that its furnishings were well protected.

The Frames

To support the weight of these three layers, a frame of acacia wood was constructed. Each frame or post was ten cubits long (15 feet or 4.5 metres) and a cubit and a half wide ($2\frac{1}{4}$ feet or 0.7 metres). The south and the north sides of the tabernacle each had twenty posts. Two silver bases supported each post. Six frame posts were to be made for the west end of the tabernacle. The frame was doubled at the corner for extra strength. These eight posts were supported by sixteen silver bases, two under each frame post (Exodus 36:27-30).

Crossbars

The frame posts were tied together by means of crossbars made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. There were five crossbars for each side and five more for the end wall. These crossbars were inserted through rings made on the outside of the frame passing from one end to the other (Exodus 36:33). The fifth crossbar was inserted into a hole drilled through the centre of the posts. This piece went through the centre of each post from one end of the tabernacle to the other keeping. These crossbars could be easily removed but would keep the temple walls in place.

The Curtain for the Holy of Holies

The curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was made of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. Cherubim were embroidered on this curtain. It was attached to four posts by means of gold hooks. These four posts sat in four silver bases (Exodus 36:35-36).

The Tabernacle Entrance

The entrance to the tabernacle had a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. The curtain was attached with hooks to five posts set in bases of bronze (Exodus 36:37-38).

The Ark of the Covenant

It was Bezalel who made the Ark of the Covenant. It was made from acacia wood and was two and a half cubits long ($3 \frac{3}{4}$ feet or 1.1 metres) and a cubit and a half wide and high ($2 \frac{1}{4}$ feet or 0.7 metres). The acacia wood was overlaid with gold on the inside and the outside with a gold moulding around the top. Two gold rings were fastened to each side of the ark. Poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were inserted into these rings to carry it from place to place (Exodus 37:1-5).

The cover of the ark, known as the atonement cover, was made of pure gold. This cover had two cherubim of gold sculpted on the top on each end of the cover. These two cherubim faced each other with their wings spread upward overshadowing the cover (Exodus 37:6-9).

The Table and its Furnishings

The table was two cubits long (3 feet or 0.9 metres), a cubit wide ($1 \frac{1}{2}$ feet or 0.5 metres) and a cubit and a half high ($2 \frac{1}{4}$ feet or 0.7 metres). It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It had a rim around the outer edge. Two gold rings were attached to each side of the table and the table was carried from place to place by means of acacia wood poles overlaid with gold inserted through these rings. The craftsmen also made gold

plates, dishes, bowls and pitchers for the table (Exodus 37:13-16).

The Lampstand

The lampstand was made from one piece of pure gold hammered and shaped by the craftsman. It had a base and shaft with three branches extending from each side of the base. These branches and shaft were decorated with flower-like cups, buds and blossoms under each pair of branches (Exodus 37:17-22). The total weight of this lampstand was one talent (75 pounds or 34 kilograms).

The Altar of Incense

Like the other tabernacle furnishings, the altar of incense was also made of acacia wood. It was one cubit square (1 ½ feet or 0.5 metres) and two cubits high (3 feet or 0.9 metres). It had horns on the corners with a moulding around the edge. Poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were inserted through gold rings on each side of the altar to carry it from place to place. Perfumers made the incense and anointing oil for use with this altar (Exodus 37:25-29).

God's people gave of themselves for the work of this tabernacle. As they gave and served, the work advanced. Not everyone had the same skills, but everyone had a role to play. Some gave, others served. It is amazing to see here how the purposes of God were being fulfilled through simple human beings like you and me. God wants to use us in practical ways to advance His kingdom. Are you willing to be used?

For Consideration:

- Notice how God gifted individuals in different ways. Not all of these gifts were in preaching, teaching or evangelism. God also gifted some with artistic abilities or skills. What gifts has God given you? How important are these practical skills in the work of ministry today? Do we recognize those who have such gifts from God in our day?
- Is it enough just to have gifts? What do we learn here about the importance of willingness? What does it mean to be willing to be used of God?
- What keeps us from being willing to be used of God?
- God's work progressed through human hands. To what extent does the work of God depend on our willingness to be used of God in our day? Can the work of God suffer because His people are not ready and willing to be used?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider how the gifts of God are being used in your fellowship group today. Are those gifts being used effectively for the sake of the kingdom of God?
- Thank the Lord for the gifts He has given you. Ask Him to help you to be more willing to use those gifts for the sake of His kingdom.

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use you to advance His kingdom on this earth.
- Ask God to stir up His church to be willing to sacrifice whatever it takes for the work of His kingdom.

39

THE TABERNACLE IS COMPLETED

Read Exodus 38:1-39:43

Exodus 36-37 describes the construction of the tabernacle with all its interior furniture and accessories. Chapters 38-39 describe the articles in the outer court and the priest's garments.

The Altar for Burnt Offerings

Exodus 38 opens with the building of the altar for burnt offerings. It was made of acacia wood three cubits high (4 ½ feet or 1.3 metres) and five cubits long and wide (7 ½ feet or 2.3 metres). It had four horns, one on each corner and was overlaid with bronze. A bronze grating was inserted on a ledge made about halfway up the inside of the altar (verse 4). It was carried from place to place by means of poles of acacia wood inserted through rings on the side of the altar. All its utensils (pots, shovels, bowls, forks and fire pans) were also made of bronze. This bronze altar was situated outside the tabernacle in the courtyard.

The Basin

The other piece of furniture located in the outer court of the tabernacle was a basin. This basin was filled with water and used by the priests for washing prior to serving the Lord. Notice from Exodus 38:8 that this basin was made from the bronze mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle. These women were likely door-keepers. It is interesting to note here that women played a role in the service of the tabernacle.

The North and South Side Walls

The outer courtyard that surrounded the tabernacle was where the people would gather. The side walls of the courtyard were 100 cubits long (150 feet or 46 metres). They were made of finely twisted linen hung by means of silver hooks and bands on twenty bronze posts set in bases of bronze (38:8-11). The tabernacle was positioned so that the sides were facing north and south.

The West End Wall

The end wall, facing west, was fifty cubits wide (75 feet or 23 metres). It had a curtain hung by means of silver hooks and bands from ten posts sitting in bases.

The East Front Wall

The front wall of the courtyard always faced east, toward the sunrise. It was fifty cubits wide (75 feet or 23 metres wide). It consisted of two sets of curtains 15 cubits long (22 ½ feet or 6.9 metres) hanging on each side with a central opening of 20 cubits (30 feet or 9 metres) for a doorway. The curtains were made of finely twisted linen

and were attached by means of hooks and bands to three posts on each side of the central doorway.

The Doorway

A curtain was made for the doorway into the outer courtyard. It was made of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. Exodus 38:18 mentions that it was the work of an embroiderer. The curtain was twenty cubits long (30 feet or 9 metres) and five cubits high (7 ½ feet or 2.3 metres) and covered the entire doorway. It was attached to four bronze posts sitting in bronze bases by means of hooks and bands of silver (38:19).

All the tent pegs were made of bronze (38:20). They would give the walls of the courtyard additional support and assure their stability.

Notice in Exodus 38:21-31 that a record was kept at the command of Moses of the material used in the construction of the tabernacle. This record was kept by the Levites under the supervision of Ithamar, Aaron's son (38:21).

Below is a list of the amount of gold, silver and bronze used in the construction of the tabernacle:

- 29 talents 730 shekels of gold (about 1 ton)
- 100 talents 1,175 shekels of silver (about 3 ¾ tons)
- 70 talents 2,400 shekels of bronze (about 2 ½ tons)

With this amount of gold, silver and bronze used in the construction of the tabernacle we can only imagine what it would be worth today. Notice the combination of quality and simplicity in the construction of the tabernacle. The quality is seen in the fact that the tabernacle was built to very strict specifications with the finest materials. God expected that no expense be spared. He demanded that His people give the best they had for the construction of this tabernacle.

Notice that there is also simplicity in the construction of the tabernacle. This simplicity is seen in the fact that there was no wastefulness. Everything in the tabernacle had a function. Everything had a place. Nothing sat in the tabernacle without a purpose.

There are some important principles we should take from these facts. First, God deserves the best we have. Not only does He deserve it but He demands that we give Him our best. The tabernacle was constructed of precious materials lovingly given to God. God gives us His best. He offered His son on the cross for our sin. He is working in us to make us the best we can be for Him. He spares nothing to make us into His image. Like this tabernacle, we are to reflect His beauty and glory to the world. In return, He expects that we give Him our best.

Having said this, we also need to realize that God also expects us to use what He has given us. How often have we cluttered our lives with articles we will never use? How often are there gifts and talents lying unused? Every article in the tabernacle was used, nothing sat unused. Our bodies today are tabernacles. The Spirit of God lives in our lives. As tabernacles of God, He expects that we remove the unused clutter and clean up our lives. Our bodies are to reflect His glory. The simplicity of the

tabernacle is found in the fact that it was not cluttered with useless articles. Everything had a purpose, that was, to glorify God. Could it be that we are not becoming everything that God calls us to be because there are too many things in our lives demanding our attention. God calls us, to simplify our lives by removing this clutter. Sometimes we have become so busy that we no longer have the time to hear God or spend time with Him. Maybe there are other things in our lives that take our attention from God. Maybe it is time for us to consider our lives as the tabernacles of God and clean out anything that does not have a particular purpose in our lives for His glory.

In Exodus 38:22-23 credit is given to Bezalel and Oholiab for making sure that everything was made according to the specifications God had given Moses. Bezalel and Oholiab had much help but they were responsible before God to see that everything was made according to His specifications. They are commended here for a job well done.

The focus of Exodus 39 is the priest's garments. These garments were made from blue, purple and scarlet yarn that had been woven for this purpose (39:1). Let's briefly examine once more the various pieces of the priest's garment.

The Ephod

The ephod or apron Aaron wore was made of gold and blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. Thin sheets of gold were cut into strands and worked into the fabric. Notice that this was the work of a skilled craftsman (39:3). In other words, it was a piece of art. The ephod remained in place by means of two shoulder pieces. It

also had a “skilfully woven” waistband, also made of blue, purple and scarlet with gold strands woven into it. Onyx stones were placed in settings of gold on the shoulder pieces. These stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them (six names on each stone). Aaron carried the names of God’s people on his shoulders as he went into the presence of the Lord.

The Breastplate

Aaron’s breastplate was also skilfully made by a gifted craftsman from blue purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen with strands of gold woven into it. It was square in shape and folded double for thickness. Mounted on this breastplate were four rows of three precious stones. The first row contained a ruby, topaz and beryl. A turquoise, sapphire and an emerald were mounted in the second row. The third row had a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst. Finally, a chrysolite, and onyx and a jasper stone were mounted in the fourth row. Each of these stones had the name of one of the tribes of Israel engraved on it (39:14). This breastplate was held in place by chains of pure braided gold that looked like a rope. The gold chain was attached to a ring on the top corner of breastplate and the shoulder piece of the ephod worn by the priest. Gold chains were also attached to rings mounted on the sides of the breastplate and the front of the ephod just above the priest’s waistband. Being attached at the top and bottom kept the breastplate securely fixed in place so that it would not swing out when the priest performed his duties (Exodus 39:21).

The Robe

The priest’s robe was made of blue, woven cloth (39:22). It had an opening in the centre with a collar and a band

around it for the head. It was sewn in such a way that it would not tear when the priest put his head through it (39:23). Blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates, made from yarn and finely twisted linen, were sewn on the hem of the priest's garment. Beside each pomegranate was a golden bell. This way, wherever the priest went the bells on the hem of his garment would ring.

Exodus 39:27-29 tell us that the priests also had tunics, turbans, headbands, a sash and special underwear all made of fine linen. These pieces of clothing were specially made for the priests by weavers and embroiderers. These clothes were to be worn by the priests whenever they came into the presence of the Lord to minister. As a reminder of their special obligation toward God, they wore a plate made out of pure gold on the front of their turban with the words, "Holy to the Lord," engraved on it. They could not wear this without reflecting seriously on their role as the spiritual leaders of God's people. They were to set an example for God's people in holiness and purity.

In Exodus 39:32-43 we read that when everything was completed, they brought the pieces of the tabernacle and all its furnishings to Moses. Nothing was missing. Moses inspected the work and found everything to be exactly as God had instructed. He blessed the people for a job well done.

How about our lives? The day will come when we will stand before God to have our work inspected. Will He find that we have done what He has asked us to do? Will He find that we have been obedient to His purpose? Imagine what would have happened had the people of God in that day decided they didn't like God's plan for the tabernacle and added a few modifications? Would God

have been pleased? What would have happened had they decided to cut down on the cost by replacing some of the gold with bronze? Would they have received the blessing of Moses? God was pleased with the effort of His people because they did it His way. May He give us the grace to do the same today.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the value of the tabernacle? What does the value of the tabernacle teach us about how God calls us to give Him the best we have? Have you been giving God the best you have?
- How does the tabernacle also reflect simplicity? What things clutter your lives and distract from your relationship with God?
- As believers, we are tabernacles of God, where His presence lives. How do we reflect His glory today? How could you reflect His glory more?
- The people who constructed the tabernacle made it exactly as God had specified. Have you been absolutely obedient to the Lord in your life? Have you been doing what He has asked you to do?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to give the very best you have to Him. Ask His forgiveness for the times

you have not given Him what He demands and deserves.

- Ask God to help you to remove any clutter from your life. Ask Him to show you the things in your life that only distract you from His purpose and plan.
- Ask God to help you to seek His will in everything. Ask Him to show you His purpose more clearly and give you grace and strength to walk in obedience.

SETTING UP**THE TABERNACLE**

Read Exodus 40:1-38

All the articles for the tabernacle were made to the exact specifications God had given Moses. In this final chapter of the book of Exodus, the Lord commanded Moses to set up the tabernacle. Notice in verse 2 that the tabernacle was also called the Tent of Meeting. This was where the Lord God would meet His people. Notice also that the tabernacle was to be set up on the first day of the first month.

In verses 3-8 we see how the furniture was to be arranged in the tabernacle. The only piece of furniture found in the Holy of Holies (the Most Holy Place) was the Ark of the Covenant (or the Ark of the Testimony). It was shielded from sight behind the curtain (verse 3).

Outside the Holy of Holies was the second room called the Holy Place. Here the table, lampstand and altar of incense were kept (verses 4-5). The altar of incense was placed in front of the curtain leading into the Holy of Holies.

Surrounding the tabernacle was a great courtyard. Here in the courtyard God commanded Moses to put the altar of burnt offerings and the basin used by the priests for washing. God told Moses to put water in this basin (verse 6-8).

Moses obeyed the Lord, set up the various rooms of the tabernacle and placed the furniture in each of the rooms as the Lord God commanded. When everything was setup, God then told Moses to consecrate all the furnishings with the special anointing oil he had made. Moses obeyed and set apart all the articles for God and His glory (verses 9-10).

Aaron and his sons were then brought into the tabernacle. They washed themselves with water and dressed in their sacred garments. When they were done, Moses anointed them as priests using the sacred anointing oil. Notice in verse 15 that their anointing to the priesthood would be one that would last for generations to come. In other words, their sons would follow them in this role as priests. The role of priest would be passed down from father to son.

The setting up of the tabernacle would have taken some time. All the bases had to be put in place. The frames which were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold would have weighed a significant amount. Each was put in its base and the cross bars holding them upright were inserted along the outside and one through the centre of all the frames. The three layers of curtains (themselves very heavy) were spread over the top of the tabernacle to form its roof (verses 17-19). We can be sure that this required the effort of a good number of people and a significant amount of time.

In verse 20 Moses placed the Testimony (the stone tables that contained the Ten Commandments) inside the Ark of the Covenant. Poles were inserted into the rings and the cover with the cherubim was placed on the top. The ark with the stone tablets was then placed inside the Holy of Holies behind the curtain (verse 21).

In the Holy Place Moses put bread on the table. The lampstand was placed on the south side of the tabernacle where the lamps would burn before the Lord. Moses then burnt incense on the altar of incense that stood in front of the curtain that led into the Holy of Holies (verses 26-27). When these articles were put in place Moses then put up the curtain at the front of the Holy Place (verse 28).

Moses then sacrificed an offering on the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. He also brought a grain offering (verse 29). The basin where the priests would wash their hands and feet was placed between the altar of burnt offerings and the entrance to the Holy Place of the tabernacle. This was so that the priests could wash just before entering the tabernacle for their service. Verse 32 tells us that the priests would also have to wash before approaching the altar to make a sacrifice.

When all these things were completed, Moses then setup the curtain that surrounded the courtyard. Everything was done as the Lord had commanded.

Notice that when the task was finished, a cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord came and filled it. Moses could not enter the tabernacle because of the intensity of the glory of God that fell that day. Remember, that the Lord had invited Moses twice into His presence on the top of the mountain. There on the mountaintop Moses saw something of the glory of God. He lingered in

that glory for forty days. Here however, the intensity of God's glory was such that not even Moses could enter the tabernacle.

God was pleased with the obedience of His people. He delights to reveal His presence to those who walk faithfully with Him. The Lord was pleased with the work of the skilled artisans. He saw their labours as they struggled to put the heavy frames and curtains in place. He saw the attitude of their heart and was pleased.

The glory of God was more intense than Israel had previously experienced. The God who had revealed Himself from a distance in the clouds of the mountains, now descended from those mountains to dwell with His people. This powerful presence on the tabernacle shows us just how much the Lord God wants to reveal His glory to us. How much of that glory have we seen in the church today?

Verses 36-38 show us that the presence of God was visible to the people of God in those days. The cloud of God's glory would remain over the tabernacle during the day and a fiery cloud was over it by night. As long as the glory of God was over the tabernacle they remained where they were but when the glory of God lifted and moved elsewhere the people of God would pack everything up and follow the Lord God. Verse 38 makes it quite clear that the cloud of God's glory was "in the sight of all the house of Israel during their travels."

As you minister and serve the Lord, do you see His glory before you? Are you aware of His power and His leading? Are you seeing evidence of His presence? This chapter tells us that the people of God always had this glory in their sight. They were aware of God, His awe-

some deeds and leading. How we need to see this again in our day. How we need churches where that awesome glory of God is consistently revealed. I believe it is the desire of the Lord to do this for us. He wants to reveal His presence. He wants to draw near. His presence is revealed in the context of obedience to His commands. God saw that the people had done as He had required and was pleased with their obedience. Will we walk in obedience so His glory can be revealed in us?

For Consideration:

- How much effort would have gone into setting up the tabernacle?
- What does the powerful presence of God coming down on the tabernacle teach us about God's desire to reveal His presence to us?
- What is the connection between the obedience of God's people to His commands and the glory of God coming into their midst?
- God's people moved whenever the glory of God lifted and went somewhere else? What should we do when we no longer see evidence of the presence of God in our ministries?
- What evidence is there in your ministry of the glory and presence of God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to walk in obedience to His purpose for your life.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way He has been revealing His presence and His glory in your life and service.
- Ask God to show you what hinders a deeper manifestation of His glory in your life and ministry.
- Ask God to make you more sensitive to Him and His leading in your life and more willing to live in obedience.

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