

EXODUS

Introduction

God had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and in the book of Exodus we can see to beginning of God's promise coming to fulfillment. The Israelites had moved to Egypt during a time of famine under the invitation of Joseph, the twelfth son of Jacob. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers and through the providence of God had become second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. Now at the Israelite's were enslaved by the Egyptians because of their vast number and the fear of the present Pharaoh that they might rebel against Egyptian rule.

The book of Exodus, which means a mass departure of people, is the story of how God miraculously delivered them from Egyptian bondage to freedom. After the Israelites escape from the Egyptians, God established a theocratic nation under His covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai.

In this book of the bible the ten plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the fearsome majesty of God's presence at Mount Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the building of the tabernacle, these events from Exodus are foundational to the Jewish faith.

The importance of the book of Exodus is that it provides crucial background to help readers understand the entire bible message of redemption. Future biblical writers frequently reference verses in Exodus and even Jesus' own words testify to its importance.

Exodus is the second book of the bible to be written by Moses. Moses received his education by being a member of Pharaoh's family in his early years. (Acts 7:22) There is also internal evidence found within the book to support the fact that Moses is the author. Many conversations, events, and geographical details could be known only by an eyewitness or participant. For example, the text reads: "Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said," (Exodus 24:4). Other books in the bible refer to "the Law of Moses" (Joshua 1:7 1 Kings 2:3) Jesus introduced verses from Exodus stating, "For Moses said" (Exodus 20:12 Exodus 21:17 Mark 7:10)

Exodus begins in the Egyptian region called Goshen. The people then traveled out of Egypt and, it is traditionally believed, moved toward the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. They camped at Mount Sinai, where Moses received God's commandments. The book covers a period of approximately eighty years, from shortly before Moses' birth (c. 1526 BC) to the events that occurred at Mount Sinai in 1446 BC.

The theme of Exodus is redemption, how God delivered His people from Egyptian slavery and made them His chosen people. God then provided them with Law and how to become a consecrated people. Under the Mosaic Covenant, people annually sacrificed unblemished animals according to specific regulations in order to have their sins covered, or borne, by that animal.

The author of Hebrews tells us, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:3-4) Jesus' sacrifice on the cross fulfilled the Law. As the perfect Lamb of God, He took away our sin permanently when He sacrificed Himself on our behalf. "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)

Moses

Moshe Rabbenu, which translates in Hebrew Moses our teacher, is one of Judaism's greatest prophets. The first five books of the bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, were written by Moses. Moses was the man whom God spoke through to the Israelite people. Through Moses God gave the Israelite people a basic charter for living as God's chosen people.

Moses was born 2368 years after creation and about 1400 years before the birth of Christ. His father was named Amram and was a member of the Israelite tribe of Levi. Amram married Yocheved, and she conceived, and she gave birth. The only unusual thing about his birth is Yocheved's advanced age: Yocheved was born while Jacob and his family were entering Egypt, so she was 130 when Moses was born. His father named him Chaver, and his grandfather called him Avigdor, but he is known to history as Moses, a name given to him by Pharaoh's daughter.

Little is known about Moses' youth. The biblical narrative skips from his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter to his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster some 40 years later. One traditional story tells that when he was a child, sitting on Pharaoh's knee, Moses took the crown off of Pharaoh's head and put it on. The court magicians took this as a bad sign and demanded that he be tested: they put a brazier full of gold and a brazier full of hot coals before him to see which he would take. If Moses took the gold, he would have to be killed. An angel guided Moses' hand to the coal, and he put it into his mouth, leaving him with a life-long speech impediment.

Moses died just before the people crossed over into the Promised Land (Deut. 32:51). He completed writing the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) before he died. There is some dispute as to who physically wrote the last few verses of Deuteronomy: according to some, Moses wrote these last few verses

from a vision of the future, but according to others, the last few verses were added by Joshua after Moses' death. In any case, these verses, like everything else in the Torah, were written by God, and the actual identity of the transcriber is not important.

Key Verses

Acts 7:22, Joshua 1:7, 1 Kings 2:3, Mark 7:7, Hebrews 10:3-4, Hebrews 10:10

Preparations That Point the Way

Exodus 1:1 to 2:25

For the Israel nation, history was never just a record of events. Neither is it just the retelling of the experiences which they thought were significant. History was important to the Israelites because of how God had worked through it. This is clearly seen in the first section of Exodus. God is not often mentioned but they understood His involvement and His control can be clearly seen. The recorded events were human events, but they were under God's divine control. The events recorded set the stage for the entire drama of redemption. The shadow of these events can be seen throughout the rest of Exodus, throughout the entire history of Israel, and even to the end of the New Testament.

Chapter 1

Verses 1-7

The book of Exodus opens with the rounded number of Jacob's descendants that came to Egypt as seventy. The purpose of the writer was to show the contrast between this small number to the vast number of Israelites that departed Egypt which numbered approximately two million. (Num 1:45-47) It is quite easy to prove mathematically that Jacob's family of 70 that moved into Egypt could have grown into a nation of two million or more individuals in 430 years. The fruitfulness of the Israelites in Goshen was due to God's blessing as He fulfilled His promises to the patriarchs.

We are reminded at the beginning of this chapter of the concluding events which led to the arrival of the Israelites into Egypt. They had come down from Canaan because famine had come to the land. Joseph because of God's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream had filled storehouses with grain and food to see the Egyptian people through the seven years of famine. At Joseph's request Pharaoh had invited Jacob and his descendants to come and settle in Goshen during the time of famine. (Gen 47:1-6)

It is important that it was a famine that brought Jacob and his family to Egypt. They came in order to preserve their lives during the famine. It should have been a temporary visit and when the famine was over they should have returned to their home in Canaan. But

they remained in Goshen. Joseph and his generation had died and three hundred sixty years had now passed from the time of their entry into Egypt. By doing so the promise of God for a Promised Land remained unfulfilled.

In verse seven is the account of the extreme fruitfulness of Jacob's descendants in the land of Goshen and they enjoyed great prosperity. A point to be made here is that in the theology of the people of the Old Testament, is prosperity is always assumed to be evidence of God's blessing.

The Israelite people would have naturally thought their prosperity was a testimony of God's blessing. The trouble with this belief is that Goshen is not where Israel was supposed to be. Their stay in Goshen should have been a temporary solution to a short term problem and they should have returned to Canaan the Promised Land. (Genesis 12:7 Genesis 13:14-17 Genesis 15:7 Genesis 35:12 Genesis 48:4) The Israelite had decided to settle down for a permanent stay in Goshen. Even though they prospered their prosperity was selfish. The Israelites had chosen the easy way to prosperity instead of being obedient to God. (Genesis 17:6-8 Genesis 35:11-12)

Another problem is that because of their fruitfulness and prosperity it was now to cost them too much. Their numbers of two million and their commanding wealth put fear into the Egyptians and they found themselves bound into slavery. The Israelites time of peace and prosperity had now come at a high cost to them. The Israelite people never intended to be disloyal to God or to become slaves to the Egyptians. But their intentions now did not matter for both had befallen them.

Verses 8-14

Most likely the new king referred to in verse eight is Sethi I who ruled between 1305 and 1290 B.C., who was the founder of the 19th Dynasty in Egypt. The expression "who did not know Joseph" probably is more than a poor knowledge of history. The statement that Pharaoh "did not know Joseph" is that he did not want to know about Joseph. It seems that the early kings of the eighteenth dynasty wanted to solidify control of Egypt in the hands of native Egyptians. After a long period of control by foreigners, they did not want to acknowledge the greatness of Joseph who was, of course, also a foreigner and a Semite. The native Kings of Egypt were trying to forget anything that reminded them of the hated Semitic rulers.

The Pharaoh's fear of the Hebrews was not as great as one might first think. The Israelite people were living in peace with the Egyptians in their country. Egypt had been invaded by the Hyksos rulers. Preceding him was a series of Hyksos rulers. The name Hyksos probably means "rulers of foreign lands." They were a Semitic people from the northern part of the Fertile Crescent, from the area around Paddan-aram, where Laban, Leah and Rachel's brother, lived. The Hyksos had invaded Egypt about 1670 B.C. and ruled until

Ahmose expelled them. The Pharaoh's fear came from the potential of the Israelite people to join with their enemies. This fear drove him to unreasonable actions.

Forced labor was common in Egypt and the Pharaoh assigned taskmasters to oversee the forced labor of the Israelite people. It would not have been possible for the Egyptian people to have built so many magnificent building projects without the forced labor of the Israelite people. The oppression of the Israelite people was twofold in purpose. First, Egypt would retain the economical benefit of having the Israelites remain in the land while removing their potential for military conflict. Occupying them with forced labor might keep them to busy and unable to stage a revolt. Second, the Pharaoh thought that the exhaustion of their labors would reduce the birth rate. The Pharaoh's plan failed, oppressed people have always found their consolation at home.

The Israelites were building two store cities under Sethi I but they were not named until the time of his successor Ramses II. (1290-1224 B.C) These cities were probably built as either military supply depots or as centers for trade.

Still Israel continued to prosper even under these hard terms of the Pharaoh. This continued prosperity caused a feeling of dread on the part of the Egyptians and they were in awe. The Egyptians were a superstitious people and the continued fruitfulness of the Israelites was terrifying to them.

The Egyptians intensified their efforts to make the Israelites "their lives bitter with hard labor." What had began as forced labor resulted in cruel slavery. The Israelites had finally realized that they were slaves in Egypt but it was too late for them to do anything about it.

Verses 15-22

The purpose of Pharaoh was to reduce the number of Israelite's growth but his plan of slavery was failing as their numbers continued to increase. Now Pharaoh had devised a second plan. His intent was to weaken the Israelites by a systematic extermination of the newborn sons.

There are only two groups of midwives mentioned or remembered and their names mean "Beauty" and Splendor." It is a fairly common practice throughout the Old Testament to name groups of midwives. The "birthstool" was a hollow stone or a pair of stones upon which women sat or knelt during the process of childbirth. This method of giving birth was common in the ancient Near East.

These Israelite midwives failed to obey Pharaoh and it was not for their compassion of the people or because of a desire to thwart Pharaoh, but because they feared God. Many a newborn was spared as the result of the midwives. When Pharaoh called for an accounting the midwives would respond saying the Israelite women "Because the Hebrew

women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them.”

It has been said that the midwives deliberately lied and if this is the case we must realize that their respect for life was greater than their respect for truth. The lie may not have been correct but their values were certainly correct. Another suggestion is that the midwives delayed their arrival until after the child was born. If this is the correct interpretation they had followed Pharaoh’s command that they were to kill the male child during birth. In any event the midwives were blessed because they feared God.

With Pharaoh’s second plan thwarted he turned to his own people and commanded them to begin the extermination of all newborn Israelite sons. The Israelite daughters were spared to be allowed to furnish slave labor, concubines, and probably to be available as breeding stock if his plan was too successful in reducing the number if Israelites.

In verse 22 we read, “Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile.” A point is missed here in translation as the Hebrew translation reads, “you shall cast in the direction of the Nile.” Drowning the newborn was a cruel but quick death. What Pharaoh was ordering was a death by exposure, which was slow, sadistic, and even more heartbreaking.

There is a parallel between this account and that of Herod’s destruction of all newborn sons in Bethlehem. (Matthew 2:16) Neither Pharaoh nor Herod could prevent the successful conclusion of God’s purpose.

Key Verses

Num 1:45-47, Gen 47:1-6, Genesis 12:7, Genesis 13:14-17, Genesis 15:7, Genesis 35:12, Genesis 48:4, Genesis 17:6-8, Genesis 35:11-12, Matthew 2:16

Chapter 2

Verses 1-10

Amram who was from the family of Levi married a Levi daughter named Jochebed, (Exodus 6:20). It is notable here that their child Moses would come from the lineage of Levi, the family from which the Priesthood would be chosen. (Deuteronomy 18:5) At first it would seem that Moses was the first born of Amram but latter we learn that Moses had an older Sister (Exodus 2:4) and an older brother. (Exodus 7:7) Moses’ siblings and particularly Aaron were probably born at the time the midwives were sparing the children but Moses was born under the threat of death. It would have been heartbreaking enough to lose a son to the order of Pharaoh that every newborn male should be cast towards the Nile River, but to lose one that was healthy and beautiful called forth every effort to preserve the child. The name "Moses" comes from a root meaning "take out," because

Moses was taken out of the river (Ex. 2:10). According to one Jewish source, Pharaoh's daughter actually named him Minios, which means "drawn out" in Egyptian, and the name Moshe (Moses) was a Hebrew translation of that name, just as a Russian immigrant named Ivan might change his name to the English equivalent, John. The author of Hebrews states that it was an act of faith on the part of the parents of Moses to hide him for three months. This would imply that not only was Moses a beautiful child but also his parents believed that God had a special plan for him. (Hebrews 11:23)

Jochebed hid her male child for three months until it was no longer possible. A healthy child would cry loudly at three months and would have been noticed by Pharaoh's attendants. Jochebed made a basket of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. Placing Moses in the basket she took it to the Nile River and placed it amongst the reeds at the river bank. This is a clear intention that she did not want the basket to float down the river. Miriam, Moses' sister was placed not far away to watch that no harm came to Moses. It is obvious here in the thinking of Moses' mother that something important was expected. This is also an indication that the parents of Moses were trusting God to care for their child.

It is probable that Moses' mother knew where the Daughter of Pharaoh would come to bathe. Her hope was that the daughter of Pharaoh would do exactly as she did. This was a dangerous plan of Jochebed as a passing soldier could have heard the baby crying but for Jochebed there was no other alternative.

Ramesses II

Ramesses II Born in July or August 1213 BC; referred to as Ramesses the Great, was the third Egyptian pharaoh (reigned 1279 BC – 1213 BC) of the Nineteenth dynasty. He is often regarded as the greatest, most celebrated, and most powerful pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire. His successors and later Egyptians called him the "Great Ancestor." Ramesses II led several military expeditions into the Levant, re-asserting Egyptian control over Canaan. He also led expeditions to the south, into Nubia, commemorated in inscriptions at Beit el-Wali and Gerf Hussein.

At age fourteen, Ramesses was appointed Prince Regent by his father Sethi I. He is believed to have taken the throne in his late teens and is known to have ruled Egypt from 1279 BC to 1213 BC for 66 years and 2 months, according to both Manetho and Egypt's contemporary historical records. He was once said to have lived to be 99 years old, but it is more likely that he died in his 90th or 91st year. If he became Pharaoh in 1279 BC as most Egyptologists today believe, he would have assumed the throne on May 31, 1279 BC, based on his known accession date of III Shemu day 27. Ramesses II celebrated an unprecedented 14 sed festivals (the first held after thirty years of a pharaoh's reign, and then every three years) during his reign—more than any other pharaoh. On his death, he

was buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings; his body was later moved to a royal cache where it was discovered in 1881, and is now on display in the Cairo Museum.

The early part of his reign was focused on building cities, temples and monuments. He established the city of Pi-Ramesses in the Nile Delta as his new capital and main base for his campaigns in Syria. This city was built on the remains of the city of Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos when they took over, and was the location of the main Temple of Set. He is also known as Ozymandias in the Greek sources, from a transliteration into Greek of a part of Ramesses' throne name, Usermaatse Setepenre, "Ra's mighty truth, chosen of Ra".

And so it happened that one of Pharaoh's daughters came down to bathe in the Nile. This may well have been for the purposes of a ritual act as the Nile was worshipped in the form of the god Ha'pi, the spirit of the Nile flood. It would be a private place and her maids would patrol the banks to keep prying eyes away while she bathed. It was the princess herself who spotted the basket, for she was the one who entered the water among the reeds in order to bathe herself in the Nile, and she sent her personal servant to obtain it for her. It is probable that she thought it would contain an image of the gods and wondered why it was there.

"The daughter of Pharaoh," may be more that one from Pharaoh's many concubines. This may not mean simply any daughter of the Pharaoh, but be a literal reproduction of the Egyptian Saat Nesu, "daughter of the king", being the official title of a princess of royal blood, just as Sa Nesu, "son of the king", was the official title of royal princes.

There are two interesting things to note here. First Pharaoh's daughter readily identified the baby as an Israelite child. Perhaps the child was wrapped in a tribal blanket with identifying tribal fringes. Or maybe she noticed that the child had been circumcised as the custom is on the eighth day for the Hebrew male children. Second her heart was touched by the plight of this baby. Pharaoh's daughter was well aware of the order to kill all male Israelite newborn children that her father had ordered. Apparently she was uninvolved in that and was only concerned for the plight of this child whom she had drawn from the Nile. In any case here is another human life that God was using to affect His will and purpose.

Miriam was quick to see an opportunity to offer a nurse for the baby. Neither the Daughter of Pharaoh nor her maids were in the position to nurse a child or take care of the babies needs. Again we see the providence of God and the advice of Moses' mother in play here. It is believed that Miriam's age would have been around five or six and she may not have been aware of a young child's needs for care. A child of that age would need a woman that had milk in her breast and could wean a child. It was the custom in that time that a

mother who had her child slain by the Pharaoh to hire out as a nurse. Most likely Moses' mother had instructed Miriam to offer to find a nurse for the child should he be spared by the one who found him.

As a result Moses' mother was given back her own child to nourish, to love, and to care for. Now Moses had the protection from the daughter of the one who was seeking to kill him.

Jochebed was hired by the Daughter of Pharaoh to raise the child and was given wages to do so. In the case of Pharaoh's decree it had been defeated. God's purposes had been placed in a helpless baby and raised in Pharaoh's family the very family that had condemned him to die. We must be amazed at the way God works. Moses was now living in the best home in Egypt, under the care of his own mother, and protected by the authority of the Egyptian royal family.

"He became her son." It would appear that this is the time at which she named him. It is probable that his mother has already been calling him 'Moses' (mosheh) "one who draws forth" as the one who had been "drawn out" of the water and had "drawn out" compassion from the princess, and that she had explained this to the princess. But her naming of the child is mentioned because it was very important in political terms. It marked him as being of the royal house, and as being a gift from the Nile god.

The name is in deliberate contrast to the fate of other Hebrew males. They were thrown towards the water, but Moses was drawn out of the water. We can compare here 2 Samuel 22.17; Psalm 18.16 which may well have had this incident in mind, and certainly illustrate it, 'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me from many waters, He delivered me from my powerful enemy and from those who hated me for they were too strong for me'. God turned the tables on Pharaoh, and Moses was constantly there as a witness to the fact.

It is probable that Pharaoh's vindictive command did not last for too long a period. Perhaps he found that his own people were unwilling to carry out their invidious task enthusiastically, especially after the first waves of deaths. It was hardly a policy that most people would put much effort into on a continual basis once their blood lust and anger had been assuaged. Perhaps the Egyptians began to recognize that they would lose a good source of slave labor. And perhaps he was made to recognize that it was after all a long term solution. It would be twenty or more years before it even began to work effectively. The animosity which would arise among the large numbers of Israelites would meanwhile be difficult to contain. The fact is that it was not a workable long term policy even for a tyrant.

Verses 11-22

Moses being raised by his own mother also had another effect on his upbringing. Jochebed would have taught Moses the customs and beliefs of the Israelite nation. It would only be obvious that in his adult years Moses would be drawn to his own people.

We are not told what happened during the years between his adoption by the daughter of Pharaoh and the time he began to act for God. Egypt was the center in the ancient world for wisdom. Moses' training in the house of Pharaoh would have been similar to being trained in a modern university campus. Moses had the advantage of the best of learning at that time.

In the house of Pharaoh Moses would have been taught in the business of government, both in the common law and of the ancient Near East and the task of administering them. Moses would have been trained in international relations with specific emphasis upon international treaties and covenants.

Moses would have been trained in the affairs of the military and in the leadership of armies. Moses would have learned strategy and tactics and the problems of organizing and supplying armies marching in the field. All of these matters would serve Moses well for the tasks that God would call him to do. Moses' education from the teacher of the children of the king, his tuition under some important court official with the help of the priestly caste which would probably include reading and writing, transcription of classical texts and civil and military administration, his experience of courtly affairs, his grounding in the faith of his father's by his mother, until at last he was grown up and had reached manhood. The basic training for an Egyptian Prince was almost perfect preparation for the man who was to become the leader of God's people. God is a God of economy and does not waste anything.

But that he knew his background comes out in the incident here as his natural mother had probably made sure of that. And he goes out to visit his relatives. He saw them as his brothers. He deliberately aligned himself with the people of God. Now a grown man at the age of forty as reflected by the sermon of Stephen recorded in Acts 7:32.

Moses saw the Israelite people as his brethren and in comparing their harsh treatment to the life he was leading in Pharaoh's court he was no doubt disturbed by it. From a human standpoint, Moses' actions stand out in the gigantic proportions of a hero, but a hero who was clearly human. His burning passion for justice, his promptness in decision and action, his reckless abandon tempered with careful observation, his blow for deliverance without regard to personal cost, all of these make up the nature of Moses. We shall observe each of these characteristics showing up again.

Moses sees an Egyptian mistreating one of his brethren and kills him hiding the body in the sand. This detail clearly shows the historical truth of this account. Bodies were easy

to hide in Egypt. If this had been told by a later writer he would have not been aware of the sandy nature of Egyptian soil. Moses was clearly wrong in his action against the Egyptian taskmaster as the end never justifies the means. Moses thought he was safe, for there had been no witnesses.

The next day Moses returned and saw the Israelites fighting. Slavery had broken down all semblance of social order. In Moses' question as to why they were striking each other returned a question that brought terror to the heart of Moses, as he realized that his crime was known. Moses had overlooked two things. First the Israelite whom he had rescued the day before would certainly talk about the event. Second to the Israelites Moses appeared to be an Egyptian. By Moses' dress and appearance he would have looked like an Egyptian. Moses may have thought he could live with his conscience but he could not live with the thought of facing prosecution for his crime.

It would not be long before the word of Moses' deed would reach the court of Pharaoh and Moses would become a wanted man. From the outward appearance Moses had ruined any opportunity of being of any service to God or his people.

Moses knew what was in store for him and that his only hope lay in escape. But he little realized that he was treading a path then that he would again tread many years later with responsibility for a large number of people. It was preparing him for what was to come. So he fled the country, taking a similar route to that which he would take later with the Israelites, and that taken by a man called Sinuhe whose life story we discover in Egyptian records. Indeed it was a route by which many were known to attempt their escape.

Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian. Is there here a reflection of Genesis 4.16? And Cain went out from before the face of Yahweh and dwelt in the land of Nod. Both had committed murder, but have the writer in mind that while in the case of Cain he had become estranged from Yahweh; Moses had only become estranged from Pharaoh? Yet both would be a long time in the wilderness (Nod was the land of 'wandering'), and both would find mercy of a kind. On the other hand Cain turned to city-building, while Moses found his way to the mountain of God. Therein lays the difference.

We are not given any detail of Moses' flight from Pharaoh to Midian. Midian is located east of the Gulf of Aqaba, on the east side of the Sinai Peninsula and the Wilderness of Paran. The Midianites were a nomadic people and their land was never defined and probably overlapped into the Sinai Peninsula. This region was several hundred miles from the courts of Pharaoh. We are also not told of why Moses chose this location to flee to but there may be at least two good possibilities. The first reason is that this region was outside of the normal channels of Egyptian commerce and communication. This would be a safer place than traveling back into Canaan where the Egyptians had control. Neither

would the Sinai be a good choice as the Egyptians had extensive mining operations in that area. Moses most likely chose Midian because these people were also descendants of Abraham. (Genesis 25:2) The Midianites, connected with Abraham through Keturah's son Midian, whose name they had taken. They were not a people who would prove helpful to Pharaoh in his search, or among whom he could pursue enquiries with any hope of finding something out. The tribe's people would be inaccessible and uncommunicative, and besides, once he had disappeared Moses was probably not considered to be important enough to make too great a fuss over. No one would know where he had gone. Pharaoh could afford to wait until he surfaced. The Midianites already used camels (Genesis 37.25) which they would later use extensively (Judges 6.5). They were split into a number of groups but could come together when the need arose or when it was of some benefit to them.

A well in a wilderness section of the country would also cause an oasis. This would be a place of rest and refreshment and it would also be a place where travelers would encamp. The story becomes interesting with the introduction of seven daughters of the Priest of Midian. The seven daughters came to the well to care for their father's flocks. Their father was not only a Priest but also a man of wealth. As they were drawing the water from the well other shepherds waited until they had finished and came to drive them away in order to water their flocks. Moses was made aware of what was happening and drove the other shepherds away. Once again we are made to realize the strength and valor of Moses.

The daughters returned home to their father earlier than expected and their father inquired as to the reason. Their father's name is given as Reuel. This name does give a slight problem as he is also identified as Jethro in Exodus 3:1. In Numbers 10:29 he is called Hobab. This is not uncommon for a man in the Near East to have two or more names. Various traditions probably preserved different names. The father's name, Reuel, means either shepherd of God or friend of God. Either definition would have been suitable to his character and priestly function.

When Reuel's daughters reported home they told him of their experience of an Egyptian man rescuing them from the shepherds. Reuel was astounded that his daughters had not invited the man to his house for a meal. A father's responsibility is to get his daughters well married. This was a large responsibility for Reuel because he had so many daughters. Reuel insisted that Moses be invited to eat and so Moses had found a welcome in the wilderness of Midian.

Another gap in information is here in between verses 20 and 21. Verse 21 begins with Moses in the employ of Reuel and married to his daughter Zipporah. There is no way of knowing how much time has passed in between these two verses but it is safe to assume that it was not overnight. Moses has now settled down to family life and shepherding the

flocks of his father in law. The appearance here is that Moses' act of passion in Egypt had permanently closed the door of his service to God there.

Still in Moses' heart was a longing for his people. The first born son of Moses was named Gershom. The name is related to the Hebrew word stranger. Even though Moses seemed to be settled in Midian he still felt himself to be a stranger. Everything was going well for him but he was in the wrong place and he knew it. There was a wistful note of longing in the name he gave his son. Moses knew his people needed him.

Another amount of time has passed and the Pharaoh has died and been replaced with a new Pharaoh. The bondage of the Israelite people still continues and their cries are heard by the Lord. It neither is stated if Moses knew that the Pharaoh had died and been replaced.

Moses had left Egypt when he was forty years old and now he had been in Midian for forty years. There is a slight undertone in verses 24 and 25. Although Moses had deserted his people in Egypt God had not. The Basic messages here are fourfold, and they reflect a growing intensity.

"God heard their groaning." The Hebrew translation indicates that God was doing more than merely hearing, He was consciously listening to the cries of His people. God was paying attention to their cries.

"God remembered His covenant." In the Old Testament a central feature is the covenant relationship between God and the Israelite people. The emphasis always is that regardless of Israel's faithfulness or lack of it, God was always faithful. The central feature of verse 24 and the book of Exodus is the message of God's dependability. It is especially noteworthy as the gods that the Israelite people seem to continually come into contact with are capricious and undependable.

"God saw the sons of Israel." God was not just watching but studying the experiences of his people. God was examining and grasping the total impact of the situation. God is spoken of in very human terms but for man there is no other way to describe God in terms other than our own experiences.

"God knew their condition." In the Old Testament the verb "know" always refers to something more than mere mental awareness. The verb usage refers to something learned experientially. It means that God's knowledge is first hand, personal knowledge. Thus when "God knew their condition," He knew it because He was experiencing it. God had entered into their suffering, even though they did not know it.

When God enters into their suffering the stage is set of His historical acts of redemption. For “God heard, remembered, saw, and knew.” The Israelites felt alone and forgotten but God was with them.

From this chapter we learn that the sufferings of His people are never unknown to God. And they can thus be sure that when such sufferings come, somehow or another, though they have to wait long, God will provide for them a way of escape, whether in this world or the next. For we do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen (2 Corinthians 4.18), just as Moses did here (Hebrews 11.26). For God watches over His own, and when things seem at their worst, that is often when God begins to plan His best.

A further lesson we learn from Moses is that when we genuinely seek to follow His will He will act on our behalf, even despite our folly. Moses committed murder, but God used his folly in order to prepare him for the task that lay ahead, and gave him a new family, wife and children into the bargain.

And just as Moses, though under threat of death, was raised a deliverer, so our Lord Jesus Christ came to deliver us through a threat of death that became a reality. As Moses gave God’s Law to the people so did Jesus Christ bring us God’s Law, taking of the Law of Moses and building on it. And while Moses risked his life for his people, our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life for us, and then in order to accomplish our deliverance rose again that we might live through Him. Thus we look to a greater one than Moses.

Key Verses

Deuteronomy 18:5, Hebrews 11:23, 2 Samuel 22:17, Psalm 18:16, Acts 7:23, Genesis 4:16, Genesis 37:25, Judges 6:5, Genesis 25:2, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Hebrews 11:26

Revelations That Transform Life

Exodus 3:1 to 7:13

Life changes once nations and man become aware of God’s presence. Before the presence of God was made aware to Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh, Israel, and Egypt all were living normally. For Israel life was not good but it had a dependable steadiness. When God’s intervening presence became known by all, everything changed. Even for Pharaoh who tried to deny that when God had come life was never the same.

Chapter 3

Verses 1-3

In Midian grass for the sheep can be scarce to find at times and the life of a shepherd and his flock would cause a lot of wandering. Moses drove Jethro's flock to the mount of Horeb referred to as the mountain of God. Horeb and Sinai may be used interchangeably. It may be that two different traditions are reflected here. It may be that Horeb was the area around the mount but including the mount, for 'Sinai' is always qualified by either 'the wilderness of' or 'Mount' to distinguish the two except for Exodus 16:1 where it is used loosely, and in poetry in Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:5; Psalm 68:8,17, whereas Horeb was usually geographically referred to as a place. There is only once a mention of 'Mount Horeb', and that may even be a different local peak (Exodus 33:6) but see also 1 Kings 19:8, although the latter may arise from the same problem as we have, interpretation). This suggests that Mount Sinai and Horeb, while closely identified, are not to be seen as synonymous expressions, with Horeb having a wider meaning and including the plain beneath the Mount. Indeed the area of Horeb clearly stretched even further afield (Exodus 17:6). There may also be some truth in the idea that Sinai was the Canaanite name for the mountain and Horeb the Midianite name, but that would not fully account for the differing usage. But it may be that the Canaanites tended to think only of the particular impressive mountain while the Midianites thought in terms of the whole place where they wandered.

This account has been variously located in the central or northern regions of the Sinai Peninsula, in the land of Midian but east of the Gulf of Aqaba or in the traditional location in the south central region of the Sinai Peninsula. The identification of Horeb as the Mountain of God is however noteworthy. We are told that Jethro is a priest in Midian and that he was also a descendant of Abraham, it would appear that he would have some sort of experience with God in the region. It is possible that Jethro pointed out to Moses that this mountain was a Mountain of God. In search for grass for his flocks, either by choice or accident, Moses drew near to the mount and to the hour of his destiny.

God appears as "the angel of the Lord". This is another connection of the book with Genesis. It parallels the use of the term in Genesis 16:7-13; 22:11-18; Numbers 22:22-35 compare Genesis 21:17. Ishmael would go on from such an appearance to found a nation. In the Pentateuch the phrase always refers to God directly as openly revealing Himself at a time of crisis in covenant matters. So now in this time of crisis God is revealing Himself in a direct way to Moses. He too is going forward to found a nation. This mention of the Angel of the Lord stresses the direct relationship of His action with the covenant, and relates back to 2:24. The Angel of the Lord was the manifestation of the God of the covenant of their fathers.

Whenever the Angel of the Lord appears in the bible it is always God who is speaking. In some way He is viewed as an extension of Himself. Many view the Angle of the Lord as Jesus. God regularly reveals Himself as fire. (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 13:21; 19:16,18; 20:18; 24:17; 40:38; Deuteronomy 4:11; Ezekiel 1:27; 8:2; Acts 2:3; 1 Timothy 6:16; Revelation 21:23; 22:5) In hot countries of the wilderness it is not uncommon for a bush to burst into flame. As Moses observed this was definitely the fire of God in the bush as the bush was not consumed.

Verses 4-6

There are several things to consider in this first encounter of Moses with the Angel of the Lord. First God initiated the experience. God came seeking Moses. This is always His way. We do not discover God He reveals Himself to us. Second it was a personal experience as God called Moses by name. God called Moses twice by name. Moses then knew that this was personal, something for him and for him alone. Compare Genesis 22:11; 1 Samuel 3:10. The repetition of the name always stresses urgency.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the trauma of this moment. Moses had often wandered in the wilderness. He had possibly often approached this mountain. He had fairly regularly seen bushes burning spontaneously, although never one that continued to do so like this without apparently being affected by it. But a voice was something different, especially a voice that revealed its divine source in what it commanded. We can only imagine the stunned shock. Moses' was filled with fear as Moses was but a man like we are; although later he would become more familiar with the voice (Numbers 7:89).

Third, God said 'Do not draw near.' God was there, and it would have been dangerous to come too close, for God was revealed as a consuming fire. "Take off your sandals." Compare Joshua 5:15; 2 Samuel 15:30. Later the priests performed their duties barefoot. Indeed in many religions men took off their shoes when entering the Sanctuary. The point was that the dirt on men's sandals must not defile the place where God is. It is a symbol of the holiness of God. The washing with water at the laver would have a similar purpose. It did not "cleanse" but prepared the way for cleansing by removing earthiness as man approached God in solitariness, "Sanctified ground." That is, ground that was set apart at that time as uniquely untouchable and holy except by God's grace, because God was there. His presence made all He came in contact with holy and exclusive. No man could be allowed to approach such things lightly. In his youth he had possibly known what it was to come into the presence of Pharaoh, the necessary preparation, the washing, the grooming, and then the solemn approach into the inner throne room. That preparation had been awesome. But he recognized that this was something even more traumatic. For this was unearthly, terrifying, in a way that Pharaoh had never been. Here was an unearthly presence. And he would divest himself of his sandals, and sink to his knees and wonder what was to happen to him.

Forth, God identifies Himself as “I am the God of your father.” The naming of the patriarchs clearly indicates that God was identifying with Moses’ forefathers. Moses received training in his early years in the company of his mother which makes this expression by God come alive. God was identifying Himself as the One about whom Moses had learned in those years of his early youth.

Fifth, Moses hid his face when realizing who was calling him. Moses did this in fear and awe. Moses was overwhelmed in God’s presence something we should observe as we approach our God in prayer. (Psalms 111:10)

Verses 7-12

God begins His divine call to Moses with a statement in verses 8 that is related to what He had spoken in Exodus 2:24-25. “So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.” God knew and was experiencing the oppression of the Hebrews. The divine condescension and purpose of God is now revealed by God, who has been suffering with His people. Earlier God had remembered His promises and now He was about to keep His promises. God was going to take His people out of Egypt and into the land of milk and honey. “Milk and Honey” is a typical description in the Old Testament for the land of Canaan. Such a land would be perfect for an agricultural nation who would have to struggle for a harvest.

The list of peoples who would be found in this land is not exhaustive. (Gen 15:19-21 Ex 3:17 Num 13:29) Both numbers and names sometimes vary. But the list is considered typical of the before conquest inhabitants of the land. The lists include both wandering and settled clans of various racial and national origins.

Moses must have rejoiced at this revelation but God was not through. God’s point was concluded when He added, “Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh.” We must understand two things to put this statement into proper perspective. We know that the Pharaoh that had sought Moses’ life was now dead, but Moses did not know this. Second, since this was true Moses’ call was not only a difficult one but also a call for him to go back and face execution. It is a willingness to die that God expects from all of His servants.

We must also remember that Moses had already made one attempt to provide leadership and was rejected. Exodus 2:14 “But he said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.” In considering this background information God’s call to Moses must have been overwhelming.

The effect of this call must have been catastrophic. Moses had to face some ultimate questions that anyone must face when he is confronted with God’s call.

The first question is, “Who am I?” let us not be too critical of Moses for his response, instead let us remember what Jesus had to say about counting the cost. (Luke 14:28-32) Moses was forced to take personal stock of himself and his resources. Certainly there was some fear and reluctance but there was also a sensible self-evaluation. Moses had to major points to consider, confronting Pharaoh and leading the Israelite nation. To miss either mark would be to fail in the mission that God had given him.

“Who am I? Can I do it?” These are good questions but God had a great answer. God did not tell Moses how many talents he had or how great he was. Instead God offered His assurance that Moses would be in His divine presence.

God also told Moses: “this shall be the sign to you.” What a sign that was: “you shall worship God at this mountain.” Moses was looking for some physical evidence of success and God simply said the fact that He had called him signified ultimate success. Moses wanted certainty but God was demanding faith. Moses wanted to be sure he could do the job before he started and God was saying he would know when he finished.

Verses 13-22

It would be safe to say that this passage in Exodus has not been more vigorously studied in the Old Testament and more diversely interpreted than these here. The interpretation revolves around two issues: What was Moses asking for, and what was God revealing?

Someone’s personal name in the Old Testament always revealed something about the character and nature of the person. A personal name was only revealed to a personal friend or family member. The name by which God was called, Yahweh, was known to Abraham (Genesis 15:2) and was also a part of Moses’ mother’s name, Jochebed. It may be true that these reflect variant traditions, but we must still deal with the passage and the tradition. Also there is the problem of the nature of Moses’ question. Why did Moses ask what instead of who? Could it be that Moses was looking for more than just a name?

When Moses asked “Who am I that I should go?” and God said “It’s not you but Me” Moses’ next question is essentially “Who are you to be sending me before Pharaoh? Who are you to be promising deliverance? Who are you to set Israel free from Pharaoh?” The question about God’s name is not so much a question about identity as it is about power, ability, character, qualifications, authority, etc. Down in Egypt, Pharaoh was the name. Moses is asking, “What is your name compared to Pharaoh’s name?”

God answers the question, “I am who I am.” This is the first person singular imperfect of the Hebrew verb “to be.” It connotes both future action and continuous action. Meaning that God is, God is in the past, God is in the present, and God is in the future. God is present in all points of time, as God is eternal. Thus, some translations emphasize the future, “I will be who I will be,” and others the continuous, “I am who I am.” It is difficult for our English to do justice to this simultaneous presently continuous yet future dynamic.

Old Testament scholar John Durham suggests "I am the IS-ing One." I would modify that to "I is-ing who I is-ing." Or to say "I be is-ing and I keep on is-ing." The action/being of God is present in this moment and continues out into eternity.

Israel's name for God, is the third person singular verb "to be." Thus, God names God's self "I am" and Israel calls God "He is" or "He is-ing." Israel's name for God is a witness that God did not lie when God said, "I am." Israel testifies, "He is!"

The question of God's name is not a philosophical question, but a power question. In Egypt, Pharaoh is. In Egypt, Pharaoh has constructed a reputation and reality that asserts Pharaoh always will be. Reality in Egypt is Pharaoh today, Pharaoh tomorrow, Pharaoh till the day you die, and Pharaoh for your kids and grandkids after you. Pharaoh was, is, and will be. It's his world.

When God says "I is and I will be" God is challenging the world that Pharaoh has built. In essence, God is saying "I am and Pharaoh is not!" God goes on to tell Moses that not only has He heard the Israelites' crying and seen their oppression, but that He knows that Pharaoh will not let them go except under the compulsion of a mighty hand. God says "I will stretch forth my hand and strike the Egyptians. Pharaoh will let you go." "Strike" is the same verb as the Egyptian beating the Hebrew and Moses beating the Egyptian to death. God has the might and the will to shatter Pharaoh's world and to liberate the Israelites from Pharaoh's bondage. God is and will be; Pharaoh is soon to be not.

The imposing "I am" of God cannot be managed or squeezed by Pharaoh, or Israel for that matter. God is making God's world and Pharaoh cannot impinge upon it. God's will and not Pharaoh's will shall be done, in heaven, on earth, and even in Egypt. Pharaoh's is no match for God's is. Pharaoh cannot keep God out of Egypt, cannot keep God from shattering Egyptian reality. God says "I am" and liberated Israel testifies "He is!"

In the Gospel of John we find Jesus laying claim to being the embodiment of the Divine I Am. Jesus makes twelve "I am" statements about himself: I am the bread of life; light of the world (twice); gate (twice); good shepherd (twice); resurrection and the life; way, truth, and life; and true vine (twice). Once, in 8:58, Jesus simply declares, "I am." I especially want to focus on "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). Jesus is saying that not even death can squeeze or contain him. Death may be a reality, but it is not an ultimate reality. The is of Jesus is greater than even the is of death.

Let us now consider what seems to be the best proposed solution to the two issues of: What was Moses asking for, and what was God revealing.

First, Moses was not just asking a hypothetical question. Moses was expecting a natural reaction from his people that would need an answer. Moses knew who he was speaking to but was searching for an understanding of the divine name.

Having more clearly established His divine nature and identity with Moses, God began to put in detail what Moses' call was to be. Moses was to go, gather and speak to the elders of Israel. (Verse 16) God had a message to the Israel people and it was Moses who was to deliver it.

The mission of Moses was to go to Pharaoh and demand that he free the Israelite people to make a journey to serve their God. The Israelite elders were to accompany Moses when he went before Pharaoh. Moses was told that Pharaoh would not accept Moses' demands without the intervention of God. Moses was told of the wonders that God was going to perform. God also told Moses that ultimately he would have victory over Pharaoh.

Moses probably realized that Pharaoh would not let the Israelite people go and it was also no great revelation that Pharaoh would not let the people go without the intervention of God and His power.

Apparently Moses was not completely taken in by the full meaning of God's commission to him. The full impact of the task before him had not really sunk in. Moses was surprised when things became so difficult. It is likely that the mind of Moses was still hanging on one fact: As far as Moses knew he was still a wanted man in Egypt. Moses may have been thinking about the cost of the God's command.

Key Verses

Exodus 16:1, Deuteronomy 33:2, Judges 5:5, Psalm 68:8,17, Genesis 16:7-13, Genesis 21:17, Genesis 15:17, Ezekiel 1:27, Ezekiel 8:2, Acts 2:3, 1 Timothy 6:16, Revelation 21:23, Revelation 22:5, Genesis 22:11, 1 Samuel 3:10, Numbers 7:89, Joshua 5:15, 2 Samuel 15:30, Psalms 111:10, Deuteronomy 33:2, Judges 5:5, Psalm 68:8,17, 1 Kings 19:8, Genesis 16:7-13, Genesis 22:11-18, Numbers 22:22-35, Genesis 21:17, Genesis 15:17, Deuteronomy 4:11, Ezekiel 1:27, Ezekiel 8:2, Acts 2:3, 1 Timothy 6:16, Revelation 21:23, Revelation 22:5. Genesis 22:11, Samuel 3:10, Joshua 5:15, 2 Samuel 15:30, Psalms 111:10, Genesis 15:19-21, Numbers 13:29, Luke 14:28-32, Genesis 15:2, John 8:58, John 11:25

Chapter 4

Verses 1-9

Moses was convinced that he had sufficient knowledge of God to accomplish his mission. Moses was concerned that the people of Israel would not believe in the authenticity of his

mission. Moses had grown up in the court of Pharaoh, was a murderer with a price on his head, had dwelt in Midian for many years, and had a Midianite wife and sons. For these reasons Moses felt the elders of the Israelite nation would not believe he was sent from God.

God gave Moses three signs to perform. The first sign was the transformation of his rod, the second his hand, and the third of the water from the Nile. Jesus later refused to perform such signs and wonders to authenticate His own mission. (Matthew 12:39) Such signs were often used in the Old Testament. When Jesus came He Himself was the sign.

We must understand the meaning of signs. Signs point to a meaning beyond themselves. If we get involved in discussing the nature of these signs we are likely to forget to seek the meaning of the sign. It is obvious that these signs were of divine nature and it is sufficient to recognize that here was something which God did. These signs were to be an outward evidence that God's presence was with Moses.

Verses 10-17

The first two responses of Moses to God's command of "Who and I" and "What is your nature" can be considered legitimate. Moses' third response, "They will not believe me" (Verse 4:1), was a legitimate problem, but it showed a lack of faith in God's promise. In Verse 3:18 God had told Moses that, "They will hearken to your voice." Moses was now moving towards excuses than reasons. Moses did not want to do what God had called him to do. Moses was searching for excuses and exposing a real lack of faith.

Moses' fourth excuse, "I am not eloquent" in verse 10, is never stated to be false. Moses felt unable to do what God had wished him to do. Moses became critical of God when he said that he was the same before God had come. Moses was wrong, as God had made a difference.

The bible does not hide Moses' humanity. Actually this fact helps us to identify with Moses. Neither did God indicate that Moses' estimate of his personal abilities was incorrect. But Moses is blamed here because of his lack of faith.

God's response in verse 11 shows a certain amount of exasperation with Moses. God who made man knows what man can do and what God can do through man. God will never call man to do that which he cannot do. God's command to Moses was to go and God would empower him to do the work before him. Moses' responsibility was to obey God and God's responsibility is to empower us to do the work He has set before us. We are to fulfill our responsibility to God, obedience, and let God fulfill His responsibility to empower through us.

In verse 13 Moses' response is nothing more than a poor attempt at excuse. "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will." God is forbearing but as a sovereign

God He should not be given to argue with His creation. Moses' last attempt to excuse himself from God's command angered the Lord.

God then told Moses that his brother Aaron was coming to meet him. Aaron may have been coming to tell Moses of Pharaoh's death who had been seeking the life of Moses. Whatever reason Aaron was coming God made known to Moses that his brother was coming to meet him. Moses was capable to accomplish the mission God was sending him to do but now he had lost some of the honor he would otherwise have earned. Aaron could speak for Moses but his presence at this point certainly had some bearing in the later sin of the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32.

There are two things to remember in the relationship between Moses and Aaron. The first is they were brothers with Aaron being the elder. We must keep this in mind that traditionally the elder brother is the leader by birthright. In the future dealing between Moses and Aaron this role would now be reversed.

Secondly Aaron was to be the mouth for Moses and Moses was to be as God to Aaron. It is important to remember that in the Old Testament God's message was given to one man and others learned what God had to say through that man. Aaron would be given no message from God; he was only the mouthpiece for Moses. God in no way excused Moses from his call or commission. Moses may have not been going back to speak to Pharaoh but he was going back. God's discussion with Moses had come to an end. Moses would either have to obey or refuse. God would satisfy all of Moses' excuses leaving Moses in no further position to negotiate.

God's final word to Moses was to take the rod in his hand which was to be used to perform his signs. The rod was Moses' symbol of God's presence and power. Later we see that Moses seemed too rely too much upon it. (Numbers 20:11-12)

Verses 18-26

Moses returned to Jethro with the flock. Moses then asked Jethro for permission to return to Egypt to see how his people were doing. This may seem strange to us that Moses would ask Jethro's permission to leave. In the patriarchal family life of the Near East, the patriarch was the absolute head of the family including the in-laws. Moses' exclamation, "To see if they are still alive" may cause us to wonder why Moses did not give his real reason for wanting to return to Egypt. This may be an illustration that men find it easier to talk of human relations than divine ones. Also to say "see if they are still alive" may really mean to see how they are getting along. Jethro granted Moses permission without further inquiry.

Between verses 18-19 we do not know what of Moses' life had transpired or how much time had passed. Moses may have been slow about preparing for his journey back to Egypt. Moses most certainly had on his mind that he was still a wanted man in Egypt.

God then gave Moses a chiding encouragement telling Moses that those who sought his life were dead. Surely this was a relief to the mind of Moses even though he had gotten to the point he was willing to die but surely did not want to. With this word from God Moses' burden was lifted and he sped his departure. God spoke to Moses during his journey and reminded him of the power that God had given him. Moses was to never forget that God was the miracle worker.

In verse 21 we are brought to a statement that some have had a problem with. When God was speaking to Moses He said, "I will harden his heart". Exodus speaks of God hardening Pharaoh's heart; Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and simply the fact that his heart was hardened, without citing its source. God was pressuring Pharaoh forcing him to make a decision. God knew what that decision was going to be but it was Pharaoh's to make. God was also laying the foundation for the final confrontation in the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt. This is also the first time that Israel is referred to as God's firstborn son. Here we also see the judicial foundation for the later visitation of death. If Pharaoh was to keep Israel away from God, which would be spiritual death, God would separate the Egyptians from their firstborn sons. Moses was being taught that God is just and the consequences of sin are brought on by man's disobedience to God's Word.

We now come across a strange passage in verses 24-26. Along the way they had camped at an oasis and we are told that "the LORD met him and sought to put him to death." Some commentators see the "him" as referring to Moses' firstborn son. It seems more likely that in this passage that "him" refers to Moses. The question becomes that why should God who had called Moses now try to kill him when he had finally set out in obedience? Let's look at several ideas.

Illness was often described as being sent from God in the Old Testament times, as all things ultimately came from God. Further is that the fact that one or both of Moses' sons had not been circumcised due to Moses' neglect. Moses probably had neglected other parts of his religious heritage as well. The lack of circumcision would have been a symptom of a more serious problem. Moses fell ill and began searching his conscience to see if there were any obvious explanation, and there was. Neither Moses nor his sons had been circumcised.

Moses being too weak to perform the rite himself had his wife Zipporah do it. When Zipporah had completed her task she flung the skin at the feet of Moses in disgust. The exact meaning of the words Zipporah spoke to Moses has been lost in time. Perhaps it was part of the ancient ritual that has now been lost. Moses had failed to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant and could not proceed in his service of God without doing so. (Genesis 17:23; Genesis 21:4)

Verses 27-31

God was at work both in Egypt and in Midian. Moses had already been told that Aaron was coming to meet him in Exodus 4:14; now the story is being told from the view of Aaron. Moses was coming from Midian and Aaron was coming up from Egypt and they met at the mountain of God in the Sinai.

When they met Moses told Aaron all that God had spoke to him. Apparently Moses found it easier to tell Aaron all that God had said than it was to tell Jethro. One reason may be that Moses had been given authority over Aaron which he did not have over Jethro. We are told nothing of Aaron's reaction to Moses' report and the story immediately shifts to Egypt.

Moses and Aaron gathered all the elders of the Israel people together. The Israel nation was so large that there is no way that Moses and Aaron could have spoken to all the people, or even just the men. So they gathered those men who were the leaders of the nation. Israel like most nations of the Near East placed a premium on age. By mere survival the wisdom and experience gained by age earned the elders a place of leadership.

Aaron began his first task as the mouthpiece of Moses by addressing the elders. Aaron gave the elders the message of Moses which God had given to Moses. In response to the message delivered by Aaron and the signs preformed by Moses the people believed. We are not certain that all the people believed as only the elders were spoken to by Aaron and Moses. In the normal operation of Near East community the elders would have passed the message to the people so it is assumed that the national response is reported here that all the people believed. It is also worthy to note here that the people did not give Moses the trouble that he had feared.

The people of Israel had long feared that God had forgotten them. Suddenly, here came Moses and Aaron with a message to the contrary. The people then believed that God was concerned with their sufferings and that Moses an Aaron were His messengers to do something to free them. This message from Moses and Aaron served to call the people to worship God. Moses was completely accepted as their new leader, and the people rejoiced in the promise of God's deliverance.

Key Verses

Numbers 20:11-12, Genesis 17:23, Genesis 21:4

Chapter 5

Verses 1-14

Moses and Aaron immediately went to the task of meeting with Pharaoh. We are not told if they met Pharaoh at his palace or out in the open. Their demand from God was straightforward and flung towards Pharaoh. "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" The usage of the word feast indicates a festival and therefore a journey of some distance.

This demand to Pharaoh was thrust at him as coming from "The Lord, the God of Israel." Israel was a national or tribal identity and to recognize "the God of Israel" would have to acknowledge these slaves with an identity and dignity that Pharaoh would not grant. Pharaoh's response was expressed with contempt. "I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go." The words "to know" means to have experienced God. Pharaoh was surely telling the truth here for he had had no experience with God. But that was all about to change.

Following Pharaoh's rejection Moses and Aaron made a gentler request. Their response was more polite but the nature of the demand was no less. In the second request Moses identified God as the God of the Hebrews. This was equivalent to say the God of your slaves. Moses was not going allow Pharaoh to be able to plead that he had not understood.

Pharaoh's reaction to the request of Moses was one of total unbelief. Pharaoh, who did not know God, was not able to understand the discussion from those who did. Pharaoh would or could not comprehend the spiritual dimensions of Moses' experience with God. Pharaoh sought to find a natural, normal reason to explain it. Pharaoh's immediate assumption was that his slaves did not have enough work to do. Having too much idle time on their hands, or so Pharaoh thought, had given cause to their foolish ideas about going off to serve their God.

Pharaoh confident in his analysis of the situation took steps to increase the labors of the Israelites. The Hebrew's were slaves used to make bricks for the building projects of Pharaoh. These bricks were sundried and made of clay and straw and much larger than the bricks we are familiar with. Up to this point the chopped straw used to bind the clay together was furnished by the Egyptians but now Pharaoh demanded that the Hebrews furnish their own straw. This increased workload on the Hebrews was the equivalent of working an extra shift. Even so Pharaoh demanded that the amount of bricks produced each day would not decrease.

The Hebrews would have to go out further and further each day to find straw to make the bricks. Eventually they were reduced to using stubble to make the bricks, which was a

poor substitute. With all this increased labor the Hebrews were unable to maintain the required amount of bricks produced each day. When this happened the taskmasters, which were Egyptians, would have the foremen, which were Hebrew beaten.

Moses had come demanding that Pharaoh surrender to the will of God. Pharaoh had refused, just as God had said he would do. Both Moses and Israel were unprepared for the manner in which Pharaoh had reacted. Not only had Pharaoh denied the request; he tried to make them forget their need to obey God.

Verses 15-21

Pharaoh's response to the demands of God made by Moses had caused greater hardship upon the Hebrew people. Instead of the Hebrews being delivered from the burdens of slavery, its grinding and binding nature, the horror of slavery had been made even worse. The Hebrew foremen had cried out to Pharaoh but he refused to listen to them.

The Hebrews laid the problem before Pharaoh by placing the burden of guilt on their overseers, Pharaoh's own people. The Hebrews should have expected that they would find no sympathy from Pharaoh. It is indicated that Pharaoh was ranting when he turned the Hebrews back to their labors. Finding no relief from Pharaoh the foremen could not see in any way that Moses and Aaron had helped them. Neither did the Hebrew's see any help coming for God. Now their labors were increased beyond their ability to produce, and they were beaten for their failure to do so. From the Hebrew standpoint the situation seemed hopeless.

Moses and Aaron were waiting for the return of the foremen from their audience with Pharaoh and met with them. Moses and Aaron wanted to hear the response of Pharaoh from the meeting with the foremen. Since there would be no relief from Pharaoh the foremen turned their hostility towards Moses and Aaron. This is a side effect of Pharaoh's strategy that his actions would cause a division amongst the leaders of the Israelite nation. The real enemy was Pharaoh and Egypt but the leaders turned on Moses and Aaron.

"May the Lord look upon you and judge you," said the foremen to Moses and Aaron. This is a typical expression of righteous indignation from one who thinks he is suffering innocently. The statement is an implied accusation against Moses. The risk of leadership is that when things go wrong the fault is always placed on the leader.

The expression "For you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight," literally means "you have made us stink." The Hebrew people had seen themselves as becoming loathsome in the sight of the Egyptians. Because of this loathing appearance they were convinced that Pharaoh and his people were out to destroy them.

This was a tragic thing for Moses to hear. He was being told that if he had not been trying to do God's will, there would not have been any problems. Obeying God's will is never

easy and sometimes can be a great struggle. When we obey God's will the outcome is always best even when it is very costly. The problem for the Hebrew people is they thought obeying God would be easy, but they were wrong.

Verses 22-23

The reaction of Moses to the rebuff of his people gives us some insight into his nature. Moses shows humanity even as his faith is faltering. Not only had things become worse as far as Moses could see God had done nothing. Here Moses shows us the quality of his prayer life. In contrast to Israel Moses did not lose his faith, even though he could not see what God was doing. Moses took his questioning doubt to God.

Many of the great men of the Old Testament had doubt. Jeremiah, Job, and Habakkuk all had doubt and the Bible never condemned them for this. Characteristically they all took their doubts to God. Great faith seems to grow on doubts honestly admitted and exposed to God.

Moses also expressed his self-concern and loneliness. "Since I came...thou hast not delivered." Here Moses is expressing too much attention to his own actions and too little awareness of what God was doing.

The secret of Moses' greatness may be found in his prayers. Moses never mouthed pious platitudes but exposed his real feelings and problems to God. We should pay attention to several qualities of Moses' prayers. One is the quality of honesty. Moses spoke to God in an accusing voice, but he was seeking a real answer.

The response of God may be seen as surprising, as He did not rebuke Moses for his doubt or accusation. Neither did God rebuke Israel for their lack of faith. God's response was one of encouragement.

Chapter 6

Verses 1-9

The Lord spoke to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh." Pharaoh had responded to Moses with a show of his authority and oppressive power but now God was going to show Pharaoh what real power was.

Moses had said that God had done nothing and God replied with a renewal of the divine call He had given to Moses. In essence God reminded Moses who God was, "I am the LORD," is simply "I am Yahweh." There was no further explanation of the name God had given as none was needed. Moses had questioned where God was and what He was doing. God's response was a reaffirmation of the fact of His existence. "I am the One who is."

God also reaffirmed His relationship to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But there is now a difference in the revelation of who God is. Earlier God revealed Himself to the patriarchs as El Shaddai, God Almighty. In the earlier time the emphasis was on the power of God but now with the usage of Yahweh the emphasis is on the presence of God, His existence.

"By My name, LORD (Yahweh), I did not make Myself known to them." This statement does not mean before Moses no one knew the name Yahweh. It may be that they did not understand the nature of God that the name revealed. There are several times prior to Moses that the name Yahweh was used in the Old Testament. (Genesis 15:2,8 Genesis 16:2 Genesis 24:31 Genesis 38:13) With the usage of the word Yahweh here it is clear that the understanding of the nature of God took a major step forward. There is another significant thought to God's renewed call to Moses. God again made reference to the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Israel is a central focus of Genesis through Joshua. The covenant concept involves several features. (1) God related Himself to His people through His promises and grace. (2) God could be depended upon to remember and keep His promises. (3) The people of God were called upon to remember God's promises and to trust Him to fulfill them. (4) The covenant gives them hope for the future. These four features are wrapped up in the single word *covenant*.

Also in the renewal of God's call to Moses God restated His awareness of Israel's sufferings as well as His promise of deliverance. God's statement added a new dimension: "I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments." This is the first mention in the Old Testament that God speaks of redeeming anyone. In the New Testament the richness of this concept is made full by the description of Jesus as our Redeemer. The word usage of Redeemer comes from the Hebrew word which means "kinsmen-redeemer." This would mean that our redeemer is the closest of kin or the next of kin. The responsibilities inherent in this relationship involved taking a kinsman's widow when he had died childless and producing offspring which would carry on the family name. (Ruth 2:20 Ruth 3:13) Therefore the redeemer was to produce fruit.

A redeemer is also responsible to rescue his kinsmen from bondage. (Leviticus 25:48-49) The redeemer is also responsible to redeem the land, (Leviticus 25:25 Jeremiah 32:1-15) keeping the gift of God within the family. Further, it was the responsibility of the kinsmen-redeemer to avenge the death of a kinsman. (Numbers 35:19 Deuteronomy 19:6) In God's covenant relationship God had established Himself as the next of kin to Israel. Through the New Covenant, Jesus had done the same for us. All the later beauty and meaning of the term "Redeemer" is an outgrowth of this first mention.

God in His redemptive activity towards Israel promises, "Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God" As a result of God's gracious acts Israel will "know" Yahweh. Israel will have experienced God in His redemptive activity. The Israelites knowledge of God will not be intellectual but experiential. All of God's actions are now summed up in His vow to fulfill the ancient promise to lead them to the land of Canaan.

Moses was obviously encouraged by God's reaffirmation of His call to Moses and His divine promises. With Moses' faith renewed and his doubts eased he returned to his people with the message of God. However with the message delivered the people did not respond in belief. "But they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage." The Israelite people's hope had been raised and then dashed. It will be more difficult for Moses to have the people believe again. In the beginning they had expected it to be too easy and now they expected it to be too hard.

Verses 10-13

With the message of God being refused by the Israelite people Moses' confidence again was shaken. At least Moses did not go right away to Pharaoh to renew his plea. God then gave Moses a new commission.

It is not hard to understand the lack of confidence of Moses with his people not listening to him. Again Moses began to argue with God. "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" God did not rebuke Moses for his argument. God understands the weaknesses and frailties of humanity. Instead, God gave Moses encouragement with a new charge to speak to the people and Pharaoh. "To the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh King of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt." It may be that Moses had become so entangled with what he was to say that he forgot that he also was supposed to do something. Moses needed to discover that involvement in action so absorbs our minds that we forget our fears.

Verses 14-27

It may seem a distraction to us with the insertion of genealogy at this point. To us the family lineage may not be important but to the ancient Hebrews it is. For the Hebrews the credentials of the God-called leaders must always be established. What we find here is not a full genealogy. It begins with the three eldest sons of Jacob and continues until it gets to the family of Levi. It then follows the family of Levi until it gets to Aaron and Moses. The order of list is by birth as Aaron is Moses' older brother.

It is also interesting that the as author follows the line onward, it is the family of Aaron that is listed. It may have been done this way as Aaron is the older. Family leadership usually passed through the line of the older first born son. It may also be because of the priestly interest of the author at this point. Moses was the great prophet, lawgiver, and spokesman

for God. But it was through Aaron that the priestly family of Israel was born. The author may have not only been establishing the credentials of Aaron and Moses, but also the credentials of the entire priestly line.

In verses 26 the interest was to establish the position of Aaron and Moses. "Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." The importance of this is that Israel needed to know that God had been preparing the family line all along.

It is also important to see the continuity of the family line. The elder brothers led the people into Egypt and it was to be Moses and Aaron who would lead them out. Also with the importance of the covenant God had made with Abraham it was also important to show it was the descendants of Abraham who had received the promise of God. God does not lose track of His people.

Key Verses

Genesis 15:2,8, Genesis 16:2, Genesis 24:31, Genesis 38:13, Ruth 2:20, Ruth 3:13, Leviticus 25:48-49, Leviticus 25:25, Jeremiah 32:1-15, Numbers 35:19, Deuteronomy 19:6

Chapter 7

Verses 1-7

After the interruption of the genealogy the author retells some of the events that have so far taken place. Perhaps this is to refresh the reader and bring him back into the narrative.

It is important that the relationship between Moses and Aaron be made known. The relationship sheds light upon the Old Testament understanding of the nature of a prophet. Yahweh made Moses "As God to Pharaoh." Moses was given authority over Pharaoh. As we have seen before Aaron was to speak for Moses to the King of Egypt. The words Aaron spoke had an immediacy confronting Pharaoh and demanding a response from him. This is what a prophet is to do. A prophet is to be God's spokesman to a historical situation, demanding response from those to whom he spoke.

Again we are told of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. The difficulties of their task and Pharaoh's refusal either to hear Moses or heed the divine "signs and wonders" are clearly spelled out again. The promise of ultimate deliverance was also repeated to Moses.

There is a new dimension in the retelling that begins with the statement of the divine purpose, that, "The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." The purpose of God was more than redeeming Israel or keeping His promise. Egypt would learn by experience the

sovereign nature of God was another purpose of God. Redemption is always a witness to the nature and power of God.

Moses and Aaron again began to fulfill their divine mission. With this revelation of the purpose of God their strength for the task was renewed. The ages of both, Moses and Aaron, are given to nail down to actual history the events which the author has recorded.

Verses 8-13

Moses and Aaron were told to return to Pharaoh and perform one of three signs. Probably earlier they had preformed these signs before the Hebrew elders. (Exodus 4:30)

God had warned Moses that Pharaoh would demand to see a demonstration of God's power as proof of his claims. The word "miracle" here is the same Hebrew word which is translated as "wonders" in Exodus 7:3. This word does not necessarily mean what we might consider a miracle. Not always is it a supernatural event. It can also be an unusual event or a normal event with an unusual meaning. In the Old Testament, a miracle is frequently supernatural. It can also be something quite natural that became a miracle because it happened at the right time and right place and there was someone who could point to the act of God in it.

"Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent." We must consider several facts in trying to understand what happened in this miracle. First it sounds supernatural from our stand point. Second, the Egyptian sorcerers were able to duplicate it. Either it was a trick by sleight of hand or else it was not a supernatural event. There is nothing in the Bible that would support that the Egyptians were miracle workers. Third, and most important, the serpent from Moses' rod "swallowed" those of the Egyptians. It was seen here that the power of Moses' God was able to overcome the power of the gods of Egypt.

None the less Pharaoh was unimpressed by the initial sign, which the Egyptians had seemingly matched. Neither was Pharaoh impressed that the Egyptian's serpents had been devoured and his heart remained hardened.

Confrontations That Demand Decision

Exodus 7:14 to 13:22

Some of the most skillfully written narratives of the Old Testament can found in chapters 7 through 13. We find here a fascinating story full of exciting events with a simple basic plot. A series of catastrophic events befell Egypt, which brought about the liberation of the Hebrew people. Carefully woven throughout the basic plot are three subplots, and each must be followed if we are to understand the whole.

The first subplot is the confrontation between Yahweh, the God of Israel, and the gods of Egypt. The plagues which came upon Egypt were not God playing cruelly with the helpless Egyptians or merely demonstrations of the awesome power of Israel's God. The Plagues were specific confrontations between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt, and in each time Yahweh was victorious.

The second subplot focuses on the changing reactions of the leaders of Egypt. At first the leadership engaged the entire matter rather lightheartedly. Their attitude slowly began to change, or at least on the part of some of them. As events unfolded the Egyptians began to take Moses and his God more seriously.

The third subplot brings our attention towards Moses. Constantly Moses was faced with the pressure to compromise, to settle for less than what God had demanded. Moses' loyalty to God, his perseverance to his task, and his concern for ultimate victory shine through the story.

The various words used to describe the plagues are all significant. They are called "signs and wonders, (Exodus 7:3) as being described by verbs meaning "I will plague, (Exodus 8:2) or "I will strike. "(Exodus 7:17) The word plague is probably not a completely accurate description of all the events, still it has become so much a part of our vocabulary that we shall continue to use it. We must remember that the events were far more than plagues. We must not miss the fact that they were signs and wonders or we will have missed their major significance.

A second feature to consider before turning to the actual content of each plague is the ethical or moral questions involved. Ethical objections have been raised to the way the Egyptians were treated in these plagues. We must remember that the revelation of the Old Testament was progressing toward the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. If this were not so, we would not have needed and New Testament at all. It should also be obvious that for God to deliver Israel He would have to use His power to do it. The acts that God would have to use to free Israel would have to be oppressive to Egypt. In the Old Testament the men were able to see God's loving, redemptive purpose at work, even in acts of violence. This may not eliminate the moral problem which some have, but it points to the fact that the situation is not a simplistic as some people think.

Verses 14-24

The Nile River was one of the chief gods that the Egyptians worshiped. The rainfall in Egypt was very light and the agriculture of the land depended upon the Nile River. Each year when the snow would melt at the headwaters of the Nile great amounts of water would flow down the river and deposit a fresh fertile layer of soil on the land. This yearly flooding of the Nile also raised the level of the ground water. As the flood waters receded the water could be easily diverted for into a network of ditches and canals for irrigation.

Therefore the Nile River was the source of fertility and water which made life possible in the land of Egypt. This annual cycle of flooding from the Nile held the Egyptian people in awe and also makes it easy to understand the god of the Nile as a major Egyptian god. Without the Nile River there would have been no Egypt. Therefore the first plague was a confrontation between the god of the Nile and the God of the Israelite people.

We should also note here that the plagues came upon the Egyptian people because "Pharaoh's heart is hardened." The developing confrontations intensified the hardness of Pharaoh's heart but from the beginning his heart was hardened.

It may also be significant that Moses and Aaron were to meet Pharaoh at the Nile. It is possible that it was the time of the year for the Nile to begin its life giving flood. Pharaoh and his counselors may have been going to the Nile to check on if that was starting to happen. At the very time when the king of Egypt was expecting the Nile's life giving flood, it was going to be turned into something foul and useless.

God commanded Moses to tell Pharaoh that the plague was coming because, "But behold, you have not listened until now." Pharaoh's failure to let the Israelite people go was an act of rebellion against God's sovereignty. Admittedly it would have been surprising for a king to recognize the God of an enslaved people but he was going to learn.

Moses and Aaron did as God had commanded and struck the Nile River with the rod of God, "and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood." There are several things to look at here. Not all of the water turned to blood as there was still some water for the magicians of Pharaoh to use later to duplicate what Moses had done. It has been argued that what happened may have been both the thickening and reddening of the river by massive amounts of red clay silt from Ethiopia or the massive growth of some form of red plankton. Both phenomena were not uncommon occurrences. If this is what happened, then the expression "turned to blood" is a figure of speech. Such figures of speech are common in all language, and certainly they occur in the Bible. Whatever happened, the result was clearly something foul and dangerous.

If it was a natural occurrence, this does not eliminate the miracle or wonder; it just transforms its nature, as it occurred precisely when God said it would. Natural events do not happen just because a preacher says they will. The miracle may have been literal blood. It may also been a miracle in the timing of a natural event. Either way God showed his power over one of the chief gods of Egypt.

A fascinating side thought is found in this plague. In the entire ancient Near East, there is a common belief that blood is the source of life. This is also true in the Old Testament, which says, "The life of every creature is the blood of it." (Leviticus 17:14) The Egyptians considered the Nile to be the source of life; but when it was turned to blood, the real

source of life; it caused death on every hand. The two very things that the Egyptians considered to be the source of life had combined to bring death.

Still Pharaoh was not moved, "Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this." Pharaoh refused to consider either what had happened or what it might have meant. Seven days then passed.

Key Verse

Leviticus 17:14

Chapter 8

Verses 1-15

Again Moses repeated the command of the Lord, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." Along with this demand from the Lord Moses issued the warning, "But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your whole territory with frogs." Pharaoh was warned by Moses and still he refused to let the Israelite people go.

Egypt is a nation whose major territory is confined to the narrow floodplain of the Nile River. It is expected then that Egypt would have a problem with frogs. Egypt had a goddess (Hekht) whose responsibility was to protect the land from frogs. This plague, like the first, was aimed at one of the Egyptian pantheon. (All the deities of a people or religion considered collectively.) When the God of Israel sent the frogs there was nothing Hekht could do.

The first plague started by Aaron striking the Nile River with the rod of God and this plague started by Aaron holding out the Rod of God. The Egyptian magicians were able to do the same by their secret arts. Again from this miracle is seen from the viewpoint of timing. The frogs came when Moses said they would at God's command. If there was something supernatural about their coming, this does not give us too much difficulty in understanding the acts of the Egyptian magicians. Any good sleight of hand artist could produce frogs in seemingly surprising ways.

This time Pharaoh was moved by the nuisance of the frogs and he begged Moses and Aaron, "Entreat the LORD." These are strange words to come from the Egyptian leader. Pharaoh was requesting the prayers of Moses and Aaron. We must note that all Pharaoh wanted was relief from the plague of the frogs. Pharaoh did promise that if Moses would respond, then he would "let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the LORD." Pharaoh was not sincere in his promise but was desperate enough to make it in order to rid the plague of the frogs.

Moses' response to Pharaoh is significant in that he asked Pharaoh when the deliverance of the Israelite people should come. This may affirm the importance of not so much what had happened but when it happened. It is not a denial of God's miraculous power but focuses on the fact that God is not only powerful but free to act when He pleases.

From Moses' viewpoint it was important that Pharaoh should "know" that there was no one like the God of Israel. When Pharaoh's own goddess Hekht could not deliver Egypt the God of Israel could. An interesting side point of this plague is the problem of the dead frogs, the "land became foul." Here we see the knowledge of the author in knowing the stench of the frogs decaying in the blazing sun. The days following the end of the plague were probably as bad as the plague itself.

The days passed and the frogs were gone along with the stench they had left behind. The Pharaoh forgot his promises, as we are told that, "he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said." As God continued to pressure Pharaoh he became more and more stubborn, but this was just as God had warned Moses.

We should note here that even though the Egyptian magicians could duplicate the coming of the frogs they were not able to rid the land of them. Magicians can seem to make things appear and can also make things seem to disappear but there was no way they could get rid of the stench of the dead frogs.

Verses 16-19

Before we discuss the next plague we must identify the insects involved. The Hebrew word has been variously translated as "lice" (KJV), "gnats" (RSV), "maggots" (The New English Bible), "sand flies" or "fleas" (American Standard Version), and "mosquitoes" (Broadman Bible Commentary). We do not know what the word precisely means; but it appears to refer to some sort of small, flying, stinging insect. "Mosquitoes" is probably the best translation.

There are significant differences in this plague from the first two. There was no warning given to Pharaoh. This plague was brought; however, as were the others, by Aaron's stretching out the rod of God and striking the "dust of the earth." "Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt." This plague is also the first one that the Egyptian magicians were unable to duplicate. "The magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast." The verb form translation of "tried" indicates that they tried over and over again. The failure of the Egyptian magicians demonstrated that Moses and Aaron were doing more than performing magic tricks.

The attitude of the magicians began to change at this point. When unable to duplicate the acts of Moses and Aaron the magicians reported to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." We must not misunderstand that the Egyptians were converting their faith to the God of

the Israelites. They were however certainly becoming aware that the power behind Moses and Aaron was far greater than the power behind them. This is an important development in that supposedly the power behind the magicians came from their gods. This was not just a major victory for the God of Israel over the gods of Egypt but there was also an open admission on the part of the members of Pharaoh's court that this was true.

Pharaoh still unimpressed remains in his stubborn thought patterns. Before he refused to heed Moses and Aaron and now he even refused to listen to his own advisers. Pharaoh should have taken his own council seriously. What Pharaoh could not understand he would not even consider. Still Pharaoh refused to admit that the God of his slaves could have any power at all.

Verses 20-32

As in the last plague the actual insect is lost in the translation but most likely flies would be correct here. It is even possible that they were the sacred scarab beetle. To the ancient Egyptians, this common beetle symbolized hope and the restoration of life. They used the design of a scarab beetle in many ways. Seals were created in the shape of a scarab and used to stamp documents. Artisans made scarab jewelry using precious gems and painted clay. The same design was used to make good luck charms and amulets to ward off evil. In ancient Egypt, scarab jewelry, good luck charms, and amulets were often given as gifts. An inscription was often added with the name of the owner and perhaps a motto or a message, like, "good luck in your new job". Scarabs came in many designs including winged scarabs. The colors were rich and beautiful. Blue symbolized the Nile River. Red symbolized Ra. There were touches of yellow for the desert and sun. Green was used to emphasize growth. Over time, the scarab became a sacred symbol. Egypt was always overrun by insects and their religion provided protection for this problem. In this plague once again the God of Israel was demonstrating His superiority over the Egyptian pantheon.

Once again Pharaoh was warned of the coming plague. This time there was a difference from the previous plagues. The Hebrew's were exempt from the effects of the plague. "I will put a division between My people and your people." Not only now was God showing His power in bringing the plague when He said it would come; He was also showing His sovereignty in being able to control the locality of where it would come. Pharaoh again calls for Moses and Aaron and offers a compromise. "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." Pharaoh was beginning to feel the pressure of all these plagues and now was looking for a way out. At the same time he did not want to lose the economic advantage of the slaves.

The offer was not even worth considering from Moses' point of view. Anything less than what God had commanded Moses to do would be too little. Moses knew that what he had

been called to do on God's behalf would be offensive to the Egyptians. To follow God the Israelites would have to leave Egypt behind. Moses responded in the end, "We must go."

Pharaoh responded by grasping for straws with another compromise. Pharaoh offered to grant part of the demand but still not all of it. "Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away." Putting this in a modern perspective it was as saying if you must seek God go to church, but not very often. Also do not get involved in any Bible study or serious service. Go ahead to your church but do not make a commitment to Jesus Christ. Pharaoh followed this second compromise with a pious plea again: "Make supplication for me."

Moses knew that if he ever got his people to the wilderness that there was no way that Pharaoh could control how far they were to go. Moses agreed to pray for Pharaoh but he also recognized the possibility of Pharaoh's treachery and warned him against dealing falsely. Moses prayed and God removed the plague and as before Pharaoh continued in his stubborn refusal to let the Israelites go.

Chapter 9

Verses 1-7

The pestilence on the livestock of the Egyptians has been argued to have been Anthrax, but there is no real basis for drawing this conclusion. Without identifying the cause of the pestilence it is sufficient to realize the devastating effect the loss of the Egyptians livestock would have been.

Again Moses had warned Pharaoh that this plague was coming with a specific time for its occurrence. And as before this was yet another blow against the Egyptian religious system. All animal life was sacred to the gods of Egypt, and the Apis bull was considered to be divine.

The Apis Bull

In Egyptian mythology, Apis or Hapis (alternatively spelled Hapi-ankh), is a bull-deity that was worshipped in the Memphis region. According to Manetho, his worship was instituted by Kaiechos of the Second Dynasty. Hape (Apis) is named on very early monuments, but little is known of the divine animal before the New Kingdom. Ceremonial burials of bulls indicate that ritual sacrifice was part of the worship of the early cow deities and a bull might represent a king who became a deity after death. He was entitled "the renewal of the life" of the Memphite god Ptah: but after death he became Osorapis, i.e. the Osiris Apis, just as dead humans were assimilated to Osiris, the king of the underworld. This Osorapis was identified with the Hellenistic Serapis, and may well be identical with him. Greek writers make the Apis an incarnation of Osiris, ignoring the connection with Ptah.

This particular god, the Apis Bull, was shown to be impotent in the face of Yahweh, and all other gods were unable to protect that which belonged to them. Again the God of Israel was victorious.

For the second time a distinction was made between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. "And all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the sons of Israel, not one died." There is a difference in that Pharaoh himself checked out the report and saw for himself that God had the power to make this kind of distinction.

These first five plagues had struck at the heart of the Egyptian religion. Because of the extreme discomfort of these plagues they were also a physical blow as well. This time the plague struck at the property of the Egyptians and was a costly matter for them. Hitting one in the bank book always gets that one's attention. Still Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go.

Verses 8-12

The sixth plague comes without warning. Moses preformed a typical symbolic act of a prophet. Old Testament prophets carried out actions that were symbolic and that were believed in some way to actually affect historical events. (Isaiah 20:2-4 Jeremiah 19:10-11 Ezekiel 4:1-3) Moses threw the soot towards the sky and it blew over the land. Following this the people began to break out in boils or skin blisters.

There are two effects the boils would have had. First would be the great discomfort that they would cause. There is a little of the authors humor in his description of the Egyptian magicians discomfort because of the boils. They had earlier been forced to give up their contest with the God of the Israelites and now they were even unable to protect their own bodies. There is a deeper meaning to this plague.

In the ancient Near East Leprosy was the most dreaded disease. The effects of leprosy were horrible and literally caused the flesh to decay and drop of the body. There was no treatment or cure for leprosy. The only way to prevent the spread of leprosy was the isolation of the one who had been infected. A leper could not enter into a place of worship, visit a market, or be in touch with other people. Leprosy in its early stages is hard to diagnose. Because of this anyone with a skin disorder had to be isolated until it became clear whether or not they had leprosy.

When the people of Egypt broke out with these boils they would have been quarantined. The activities of major portions of the population would have been severely disrupted effecting the government, economy, and religion of the Egyptian people. They had an abundance of gods but the plague of the boils would have brought the observances at the shrines to a limp if not a halt. Once again the God of the Israelites was sovereign, putting the entire system of Egypt to flight.

With all this pressure from God Pharaoh still refused the demands of Moses and would not let the Israelites go. Although it had been earlier said that God would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21), this is the first time that "The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart." Pressure from God will either cause a man to turn to repentance or to become more firmly set in his willful way. It had the later result on Pharaoh.

Verses 13-35

Then there came a massive hailstorm. There were great sounds of thunder and lightning. "Fire flashing," was obviously referring to lightning.

There are some significant details recorded about this plague and its meaning. The time of the year is indicated in verses 31-32: "Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they ripen late."

This would date the storm in mid-January, the time when these agricultural details were true in Egypt. This also explains why following such a devastating storm, there was herbage available for the locust to devour in the next plague. It was the early crops that the storm destroyed.

The purpose of this plague is clearly stated: "So that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth." We must remember that Pharaoh was to learn about God through experiencing Him, and did he ever!

Although God could have destroyed Pharaoh He had allowed him to live. "For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth." But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth. "Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go." Pharaoh probably did not feel that he had experienced God's mercy, but he had. The providence of God had been aimed at showing Pharaoh that God was merciful in His use of power.

In spite of God's power and mercy, Pharaoh had not learned anything. He was still exalting himself. The height of sin is self exaltation.

God warned Pharaoh before this plague to protect his servants and his livestock. This too was a new dimension to the plagues. Never had any protection been offered to the Egyptians during a plague. In response to this warning some of the people heeded God and some did not. At least some of the Egyptians were beginning to take God seriously.

The Hebrews again were exempted from the storm. Hailstorms were not unusual in Egypt but storms of this ferocity were unusual. Further it came when Moses said it would and where he said it would.

When the storm came Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron. Pharaoh said "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones." Pharaoh again requested that Moses would pray for him and his deliverance, but only from the storm. There was no sign of repentance in Pharaoh's request, only an admission of guilt. Still this was a major step for Pharaoh who had only recently asked, "Who is the Lord?" (Exodus 5:2)

Moses recognized Pharaoh for what he was but still gave him the chance to prove otherwise. Nothing had changed and Pharaoh returned to his old stubbornness. This plague was also aimed at the gods of Egypt. Their gods were supposed to protect the crops and ensure a plentiful harvest. Once again, the God of the Israelites had shown Himself more powerful than the gods of Egypt.

Key Verses

Isaiah 20:2-4, Jeremiah 19:10-11, Ezekiel 4:1-3

Chapter 10

Verses 1-20

The last plague of hail had destroyed the earlier crops and four to eight weeks later the wheat and spelt would be approaching maturity. The next plague, the locusts obviously came within this period.

There is a twofold purpose stated for this and the other plagues. One was that God could show these signs. "That I may perform these signs of Mine among them." Remember that a sign points to a meaning beyond itself. God was not only showing His power but His sovereignty. Secondly, the plagues were so that Israel would "know" (experience) the sovereignty of God and bear witness of it to the future generations. "That you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD." The acts of God are always a witness to His lordship. When we have come to know them we are to bear witness to them.

Here in verse two we see an interesting phrase, "how I made a mockery of the Egyptians." God was not playing a game with the Egyptians, as this had been a deadly confrontation between the gods of Egypt and the God of Israel. Even though the pitiful puny efforts of the Egyptians on behalf of their gods had been a laughing matter, the plagues was a historical equivalent of the song of Israel's worship which said, "He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them." (Psalms 2:4)

Moses and Aaron again went to Pharaoh with the warning. Their warning came with a new dimension put in the form of a question. "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?" This was quite a question to be asking Pharaoh. Pharaoh was considered both by his people and himself to be divine. Here the god-king of Egypt was being called to submission to the God of his slaves. In that context it may have seemed a ridiculous demand except for the fact of what had happened in the preceding plagues. Underlying this question was that if Pharaoh had learned anything from the first seven plagues. Interesting to note that in the Hebrew understanding of numbers, seven was a complete number. From the understanding of the Hebrews seven plagues should have been enough to convince Pharaoh to obey their God's will. But this was not the case.

The announcement of the coming locusts was also another plague aimed at a god of Egypt. Locusts were not the problem in Egypt that they were in Canaan, but they were still enough of a problem that they had a god who was to protect the crops from their incursions. Again this was another deliberate confrontation with the Egyptian religion. Once this warning was delivered Moses departed.

Now we see a strange occurrence. We have been watching the reactions of Pharaoh's servants to the series of catastrophes. Now we see a major development, as the royal advisers urged Pharaoh to try and make a deal with Moses. "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not realize that Egypt is destroyed?" The royal advisers of Pharaoh were rebuking their divine king. The economy of Egypt had been devastated. The leaders of Egypt could not see how they could stand any more. Pharaoh listened and called Moses and Aaron back and offered a new compromise.

We find the narrative here lively and entertaining. It is a typical diplomatic negotiation of any age. There was a lot of implication towards things left unsaid. There was also a lot of things said which had double meanings. At first it seemed that Pharaoh was granting the demands of Moses when he said, "Go, serve the LORD your God!" then Pharaoh had an afterthought and added a question. "Who are the ones that are going?" Moses quickly responded that all the Israelites were going and that they were talking all that they processed. Pharaoh may have hoped that his concession would have eased the demands of Moses, but he was disappointed.

"Thus may the LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Take heed, for evil is in your mind. Not so! Go now, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you desire." Pharaoh now shows his sarcasm in the blessing that he offered Moses. Pharaoh expresses his hope that God's guidance would be as nonexistent as the royal permission they had been asking. He also accuses them of planning evil against Egypt. Pharaoh knew this was not true, as if they were plotting against Egypt they would have carried it out in the land. It is a typical diplomatic ploy to raise a nonexistent issue in

order to avoid a real one. Pharaoh then tries to appear generous by allowing the men to go and worship their God. In the Ancient Near East, most worship was carried on by the men. The implication of Pharaoh was that all Moses had asked for was the opportunity to worship God. If this were true, then the men could do it. By granting that only the men could leave then they certainly would have returned to Egypt.

We do not know the response of Moses to Pharaoh's compromise. The fact that Pharaoh had Moses and Aaron "driven out" from his presence suggests a complete rejection.

An east wind blew all that day and all that night coming from the wilderness of the Sinai. "The east wind brought the locusts." This miracle was again one of timing rather than event. It was a divine catastrophe and a devastating plague. Pharaoh again confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you." Still this is not to be seen as repentance on Pharaoh's part. Rather it was an expression of regret at the punishment. Again Pharaoh called on Moses to pray to God "He would only remove this death from me." All Pharaoh wanted to do was escape the plague.

The locusts were removed in the same way they had come. "So the LORD shifted the wind to a very strong west wind which took up the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea." As before when the plague was removed Pharaoh's heart was hardened and therefore "and he did not let the sons of Israel go."

Verses 21-29

The last plague struck at the most important god of Egypt, the sun. With no warning given to Pharaoh the sun was suddenly covered, and an intensive, awesome, oppressive darkness enveloped the land. It was described as "a darkness which may be felt." It was also described as "a thick darkness." This latter expression is a "dark darkness." The use of two words gives an emphasis to the blackness.

Some have argued this was probably an eclipse of the sun but we must reject that on two reasons. The Egyptian astronomers were able to predict movements of the heavenly bodies centuries in advance. It is inconceivable that they would have been caught by surprise. Furthermore no eclipse last for the period of time described here.

Others have argued that a massive sandstorm blew in from the desert. Certainly the massive winds described in the previous plague could have accomplished this. The west wind that blew away the locusts would have been coming of the Sahara desert. If it had brought a massive sandstorm, this would have been literally "a darkness which may be felt." It is possible that the ninth plague could have been such an event. If so, then the miracle would not have been what happened but the timing of when it happened.

With no description of this plague being called a sandstorm all probability is that it was a supernatural event. The sunlight being blackened across the land of Egypt would have

been terrifying for the Egyptian people who worshiped the sun god. Whatever had happened there was no doubt in either Moses' or Pharaoh's mind but that Yahweh had done it. As a further justification of this belief, the "but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings." In Goshen where the Israelites lived there was light.

In the midst of this new terror Pharaoh called Moses and offered a fourth compromise: "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be detained. Even your little ones may go with you." This may have been Pharaoh's last grasp, but it was also a temptation to Moses. Pharaoh had given them all freedom to go. Pharaoh knew that if the possessions of Israel remained in Egypt the Israelites would not go far, neither would they stay away.

Moses again rejected the compromise of Pharaoh. Moses pointed out the ignorance of Pharaoh to know what God was going to require of them. Pharaoh then again refused to give the ultimate permission to them. Pharaoh was on the brink of yielding but would not do so. Even under the extreme pressure that God had placed upon Pharaoh he became even more stubborn in his way. In anger Pharaoh ordered Moses to "Get away from me!" Pharaoh had become so angered that he threatened Moses with death if he ever appeared before him again.

We cannot tell the tone of Moses' voice in his response to Pharaoh. "You are right; I shall never see your face again!" it could be that Moses was telling Pharaoh that he had had his last chance. Now there would be nothing left for Pharaoh but to face the full wrath of God.

Words spoken in anger are often spoken without considering future needs. We often say this in anger and then find what we have said is not the way it must be. So it was with Pharaoh and Moses. In Exodus 12:31-32 Pharaoh again calls for Moses and Aaron to come before him. To hold that a man must live up to everything he speaks in anger is to demand more than is justified.

Key Verse

Psalms 2:4

Chapter 11

Verses 1-10

God spoke to Moses and said that this one more plague would bend Pharaoh's will and he would not only let them go but would "drive you out from here completely." After all

that Pharaoh had suffered and still refused to heed the word of God this was a massive turnabout.

Not only that but the Egyptians were going to be so glad to be rid of the Israelite people that they would also pay them to leave. The statement that "Moses himself was greatly esteemed in the land of Egypt," shows us his growing reputation among the people. Pharaoh himself would have to finally accept that as well.

This last plague not only arouses horror but has significance greater than just the suffering it causes. In ancient religions, the firstborn of man and beast was the property of the gods. Egypt had hundreds of gods and not one of them would be able to protect his particular property.

The final words of Moses to Pharaoh issued the warning of this last plague and when Moses had spoken the words God had given him "he went out from Pharaoh in hot anger."

The final warning Moses spoke to Pharaoh included a graphic description of the predicted departure of the Israelites from Egypt. To underscore Moses' words that "you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel," he makes two remarkable predictions. Moses first states "against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark." The Egyptian people were going to be so glad to be rid of the Israelites that not even their dogs would growl as they went out. Secondly Moses told Pharaoh that "All these your servants will come down to me and bow themselves before me," in submission before Moses and his God and beg them to leave the land. What a contrast this is to the arrogant king who said that he would never let them go.

Chapter 12

Verses 1-13

"This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you." Apparently what the Israelites had been recognizing as the beginning of their year was now becoming the beginning of their real existence. The translation of the word month means new moon. The month in question was Abib, the equivalent of our April – May.

Surrounding nations did have some sort of spring religious festival. For the Israelites this festival, the Passover, was tied precisely to their deliverance from Egypt. The mighty acts of God served as a basis for this celebration.

Instructions were given for the selection of the lamb and its preparation. But this was not in any way a typical sacrifice. The first matter of importance was the daubing of the blood. Blood was the seal of life for the Hebrews. This plague that was about to come was a visitation of death. Daubing blood on the door post and the threshold was God saying to

them that he had blocked the entrance of death by His gift of life. In a similar way the blood of Jesus bars the access of spiritual death to us.

The entire lamb was to be eaten and what was not consumed was to be burned. By the Israelites eating the lamb they became identified with it. In that way the lamb became a part of their life. The Israelites were also told to eat the lamb in haste. This was because they had to be ready to go when God had opened the way.

It is also important to remember that the death blow to the first born of the Egyptians was also a blow to their gods. Yahweh said, "On all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments." The blood was a sign of God's protection, of His gift of life.

Also there was no distinction between Israelite and Egyptian; it was not a question of race but one of faithful obedience to God. Whoever did not trust and obey would not be spared. In this last plague, deliverance became a matter of faith. Did one believe God enough to obey Him?

Verses 14-20

A seconded feast was observed along with the Passover. "The Feast of the Unleavened Bread." The Passover was a one night affair but the Feast of the Unleavened Bread was to be a seven day observance. It may be that the prohibition against using leaven was the belief it was intrinsically evil. Leaven was a symbol for corruption. When Moses gave the command for this festival to the Hebrews, he cited as the reason for the use of unleavened bread the haste with which they had to depart. There was no time to wait for the leaven to work through the dough. (Exodus 12:33-34)

Verses 21-28

Moses gathered all the elders of Israel and told them how to observe the Passover. Moses described in detail how to put the blood on the doorposts and the lintel. The word lintel is translated "basin," which also used to mean threshold. It is probable that the lamb was slain at the entrance and his blood poured out upon the threshold. Then it would have been applied to the sides and top. Therefore the doorways would have been blocked by the blood of the Lamb.

For their protection no one was to "go outside the door of his house until morning." The Destroyer had been intercepted. "Not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you." The "destroyer" is commonly accepted as the angel of death. The Hebrews would not have understood this in any way as demonic, for God had clearly stated that He was going to be the One passing through the night of death. (Exodus 11:4-5)

The Israelites were told this was to be a perpetual celebration of theirs on the anniversary of their deliverance. In the far distant days their children would have no idea what this festival meant or the experience they were about to go through. The children's questions

would have been natural and must have an answer. Even to this day the questions of the children are built into the Passover observance of contemporary Judaism. It was not Moses' point that instruction to the children should be a part of the ritual it was that the children would naturally ask these questions about the ritual. It was then that the ultimate responsibility of teaching the children what God had done was that of the parents and leaders.

The elders responded with wonder and awe, as they "bowed low and worshiped." There is another message hidden here. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. In spite of all Moses' efforts there had not been any movement toward their freedom. With renewed emphasis, they were told they had a future in God's Promised Land. They were given rituals to celebrate when they arrived at their destination. This gave them a renewal of hope. On the night of darkness and death they were looking forward to light and life with God.

Verses 29-42

No way can we today recapture the devastation of Egypt on the night of death. The stillness of the night was suddenly broken by the uncontrollable cry of weeping. Forgetting his wrathful pledge that he would never see Moses and Aaron again, Pharaoh sent for them. Burdened with grief Pharaoh urged them to depart. The mighty Pharaoh cried out with agony his final words to Moses and Aaron to "bless me also." Not any of the gods of Egypt been able to protect the first born. Not even the god-king himself had been able to do so.

In their departure the Hebrews asked the Egyptians for gifts. We must not understand this as neither bribery nor thievery. The Israelites were going into the wilderness and would be in need of supplies of food and clothing. They would also be in need of treasure to buy needed supplies along the way. Throughout their journey they would come across nomads from who they could make purchases.

The Israelites left Egypt behind. The number of the Israelites gives a problem. "Six hundred thousand men" seems far too large although the same number is given in Numbers 11:21. A number this high would make the total Hebrew population about two to three million. That many people could have walked out of Egypt at any time they had wanted to. The Pharaoh Ramses in his greatest battle had only twenty thousand fighting men. Among the many proposed solutions, the most likely one focuses upon the Hebrew word that is translated "thousand." This word is also used in the Old Testament and in other ancient literatures as either "clan" or "fighting unit." This would give the total population of about twenty-five thousand and would fit all the biblical evidence. A more detailed consideration of this figure is discussed in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1pp. 349-351.

Another consideration:

"These are the names of the sons of Israel [see Children of Jacob] who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. All the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt." (Exodus 1:1-5 RSV)

And so Jacob, whose name God had changed to Israel, entered Egypt. All of the Israelites that existed in the world at the time were in that small group. They would remain there for 430 years (Exodus 12:40-41) until the Exodus.

Despite their eventual hardships, the Israelites had large families and grew very numerous:

"But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong; so that the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7 RSV).

Although there is no record of the precise number that left Egypt in the Exodus, a military census taken not long after listed the number of men 20 years of age and older who could serve in the army as 603,550 (Exodus 38:26). From that number, the total Israelite population of that time has been estimated at approximately 2 to 3 million.

How can a small group become a nation of millions in just over 4 centuries? A simple bit of arithmetic shows that it was easily possible. If the average Israelite family consisted of 4 children by the time the parents were 27 years old (the Bible record shows that families then were actually much larger), that would provide for a doubling of the population every 27 years (2 children to replace the parents, and 2 children to account for population growth). 430 years divided by 27 years is about 15 generations during the time Israel was in Egypt.

Beginning with the original 70 people, growth of the Israelite nation using our factors above would have been:

❖ 140 people after 27 years

- ❖ 280 people after 54 years
- ❖ 560 people after 81 years
- ❖ 1,120 people after 108 years
- ❖ 2,240 people after 135 years
- ❖ 4,480 people after 162 years
- ❖ 8,960 people after 189 years
- ❖ 17,920 people after 216 years
- ❖ 35,840 people after 243 years
- ❖ 71,680 people after 270 years
- ❖ 143,360 people after 297 years
- ❖ 286,720 people after 324 years
- ❖ 573,440 people after 351 years
- ❖ 1,146,880 people after 378 years
- ❖ 2,293,760 people after 405 years

The example is of course a rough estimate, but it does prove the point that the Israelites could easily have increased to a great number in the given time.

By: Wayne Blank

As the Israelites left they were accompanied by a mixed multitude. "A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock." We are not told who exactly these people were. They may have been other slaves with Semitic backgrounds. They could also have been Egyptian hangers on who had been taking Moses seriously. But since they did not have the faith of Israel, they became a source of problems all along the way. (Numbers 11:4)

Verses 43-51

We return here for a few verses on the regulations governing participation in the Passover. The Passover was to be a family celebration. Slaves could observe it if they were a part of the covenant relationship through circumcision. The only strangers who could participate were those whose whole family had become a part of the covenant relationship. It was by divine intent that only those who had publicly identified themselves with the Israelite family could take part. No exceptions were to be made.

Key Verse

Numbers 11:21, Numbers 11:4

Chapter 13

Verses 1-16

The last divine words of Moses to the people of Israel had to do with God's purposes. The firstborn of man and beast were the property of God and were to be devoted to Him. The Hebrew belief was that it was the first born male through whom the heritage of life was to be transmitted. It was the death of the first born males of Egypt that was the background for this. The first born of the Egyptians could not be protected by their gods. But the God of the Hebrews could protect that which was his. The firstborn of the Hebrews was to be kept alive by submitting an appropriate sacrifice. In this life, not death was God's gift to the first born.

In the future celebrations of these events were to be memorials to the power of God in delivering the Hebrew people from the Egyptians. People have a tendency to forget their history. Having religious and national celebrations keep alive such memories. Another reason for the celebration of the Passover was to stir the imagination of the children. In this way the children would seek to understand what God had done for them. This would give the people the opportunity to retell their divine deliverance.

Binding words on their wrist and between their eyes was common in the ancient Near East and is referred to in Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18. The Hebrew people would place scripture verses on tiny scrolls and place them in little purses or bags and then tie them with thongs around the wrist or around the head. These were latter called phylacteries which translated "mark" and literally means sign. Wearing these verses would be an open sign to their identity as the people of God and would remind them of His mighty acts of deliverance.

Verses 17-22

As the deliverance from Egypt was the result of God's actions, so to was the way selected to travel from Egypt. Central to the book of Exodus and the Bible was that God was leading.

The Hebrew did not leave by the way of the coastal highway. At the time of the Exodus event the coastal highway was under Egyptian control and was defended by Egyptian troops. The coastal highway would not have been the route to take if they wanted to leave in peace.

Instead they traveled the caravan routes into the wilderness. That region was lightly populated and therefore not heavily defended if defended at all. Translated the words "Red Sea" means "Sea of Reeds." We do not know exactly where it was. It could have been one of several bodies of water along the border of Egypt, where now the Suez Canal

exists. It had to be a major body of water in order to block the Israelites and to also overwhelm the pursuing Egyptians.

"The sons of Israel went up in martial array." The Israelites went forth prepared to fight but God did not intend for them to fight too soon. They also were carrying the bones of Jacob, as he had been promised before he died. (Genesis 50:25)

The Israelites depart Egypt by way of Succoth and Etham. Although many Bible maps show these places we really do not know where exactly they are. Any identification is tentative and unproven.

As they traveled the presence of God was with them. In the Old Testament fire is often used as a symbol for God's presence, as we saw in the burning bush. The column of cloud and smoke is easily identified as connected with the fire. The fire and the cloud both served as a constant reminder of God's presence.

Key Verses

Deuteronomy 6:8, Deuteronomy 11:18, Genesis 50:25

The Timing of the Plagues

Here we shall consider the actual time span of the Plagues. We can't absolutely nail this calendar to the wall but there is evidence which gives us hints by which we can draw some conclusions.

First the last plague is clearly identified as occurring in the month of Abib, (Exodus 13:40) and the Passover was on the fourteenth day of that month. (Exodus 12:6) the month of Abib overlapped the end of March and the first part of April. This would make the end of Abib about the end of March.

For agricultural reasons the plague of hail occurred about mid-January. The plague of locusts that devoured the wheat would have been four to eight weeks later. This would have been between mid-February and mid-March. It had to be early enough in that period to allow for the plague of darkness to intervene between this and the plague of death.

The only other plague that gives us any indication of time is the first one, when the water of the Nile was transformed. This was the time when the annual flood was expected, as seems likely, this would have been sometime between June and October. Occurring when the snows melted in the highlands of Ethiopia, the more likely time would have been at the beginning of this period.

If this is correct the overall time of the plagues would have stretched from June of one year to the end of March in the next. The first plague could have been a little later but could hardly have been any earlier. The period of the plagues would have been ten months at the most and possibly a little bit less.

The plagues accomplished their purpose. Both Israel and Egypt had learned the sovereign power of God. Israel was delivered from the slavery they had drifted into, but only by the redemptive act of God. As free men, Israel no longer had to depend on a faith which had been passed on by their fathers. They had been given a historical experience with the living God. It was to this experience that they always looked back. It was to this experience that the prophets always called them back when they strayed away in the future.

Crises That Cripple Faith

Exodus 14:1 to 18:27

The night of death should have been the end of Egypt's involvement with the Israelites. It would have seemed to be the ultimate event of God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery; but it was not the end. The final, climactic deliverance took place at the sea. In typical human reactions Israel constantly forgot the oppressions of Egypt, only to remember the security Egypt had given.

When Israel marched out of Egypt they were filled with hope. But it was not long before their hope was replaced with despair. Between the night of the final plague and the day they arrived at Sinai, they were faced by a series of crises that crippled their faith and undermined their hope.

Chapter 14

Verses 1-4

The Israelites were not only led away from the coastal highway; (Exodus 13:17) they were next told to "turn back" from the natural caravan routes into the Sinai Peninsula. It was apparent that God was planning to lead them along a less used path to Sinai. Pi-ha-hi'roth is a typical Egyptian name referring to a place of meadows, a town in a grassy region, presumably near Goshen. Migdol means watchtower and probably referred to some border fortress. Several towns with such names are known. Ba'al-zephon means "Baal of the north," a reference to a town dedicated to the Canaanite god Baal.

The reason given for this change was an enticement to Pharaoh. This wandering as they march forth would have made the king think that they were lost in the wilderness. This apparent helplessness and hopelessness of Israel would serve to make God's final victory even more magnificent.

We can be sure that Pharaoh's scouts were keeping watch on the Israelites and their progress. No king can afford to have a large group of people wandering around in or near his land without his being constantly aware of it. Israel's seemingly helplessness and their nearness was to great a temptation for Pharaoh. Pharaoh decided to pursue them in order to bring them back. Pharaoh had yet to learn that his real adversary was Yahweh and not Israel. Israel was weak but God was not.

The purpose of this whole ordeal was that God should be glorified by His mighty act, once and for all; Israel should experience the sovereign, redemptive power of God. Every act in this divine act of redemption had been for the purpose of serving as a witness to God. It was the intended result that everyone involved should experience God. That they would know the redemptive nature of God was the ultimate purpose. Men were to learn who God is by what He did.

Verses 5-9

The opening verse can be misleading, "When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled." Pharaoh had not only given the Israelites permission to go he had ordered them to go. With the reports of their progress, or lack of it, coming back to him, he had become to realize they had really left. The Israelites were gone for good and with them a major source of cheap labor. As the economic consequences of their departure began to sink home, both Pharaoh and his people regretted their action of releasing the Hebrews from slavery.

The seeming apparent wandering of the Israelites provided an opportunity for Pharaoh and he decided to pursue them. Pharaoh's intention was not to fight them, as he would have done with an invading army. His intent was to recapture them. Pharaoh's actions were more of a police action seeking escaped prisoners than a military action. Pharaoh made ready his own chariot and took his people with him. Pharaoh did not take a slow moving army with him that would not be effective in rounding up fleeing slaves. He took fast moving chariots that could overtake and round up the slaves on the edge of the wilderness.

Pharaoh took his choicest chariots, which were the best for the desert pursuit he anticipated. They would be able to move quickly without problems of supply. If Pharaoh had taken a major army, it would have taken more planning and sacrificed speed in movement. So Pharaoh took his best chariots and best chariot crews, as he intended for nothing to slow him down.

Pharaoh went out "He chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly." Israel going out boldly may refer to the attitude of the Hebrews but it may also refer to the fact they able to go because of God's bold acts. The Israelites were delivered by the sovereign power of God.

Israel had departed Egypt for a number of days but their slowness and frequent change of direction has prevented them from getting out of Egyptian territory. Pharaoh moved quickly and overtook them where they were camped at Pi-ha-hi'roth.

With Pharaoh's chariots in sight of the Israelites the stage was set for the final confrontation. Still Pharaoh had not realized that he was not confronting Israel but Israel's God. This failure was to be Pharaoh's downfall.

Verses 10-18

When the Israelites saw the Egyptians coming, their faith collapsed. Panic gripped their minds and hearts. "The sons of Israel cried out to the LORD." This was not so much a prayer for deliverance as a cry of blame. As is typical, they quickly turned from crying out to the Lord and turned to crying out to Moses. We can see our own actions in that of Israel's. When everything was going well, Moses was a great man. But when trouble came, they placed the blame on him and wished that he had left them alone.

The Israelite people went on to imply that they never had any desire to be free from slavery in Egypt. But we find no record that they ever said to Moses: "Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians." Now that they are faced with this new crisis, this was certainly what they had wished they had said. Seeing Pharaoh's chariots drawing near, they totally caved in. It never dawned on them that Pharaoh had not come to kill them but to recapture them.

The Hebrew's collapsing faith made Moses' great statement of faith more emphatic. In the face of their terror, Moses cried out to them, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD." The Salvation that Moses was speaking about was that in the sense of military victory. The biblical concept of salvation moves forward from this early meaning to the latter one of spiritual deliverance from sin and death. Moses was confident in his statement that God was going to win a mighty victory over Pharaoh and that after this; Egypt would no longer be a problem to Israel. Moses' faith was based upon his past experience with God and upon God's recent revelation.

On the other hand Moses may have been showing the he has the same problem that we have. That it is easier to proclaim our faith than it is to actually practice it. We have no record of what Moses said to God after his proclamation of faith but we do know God's response. "Why are you crying out to Me?" this may imply that Moses was wanting to know what God was planning to do. Apparently Moses may have thought that God was allowing the Egyptians to draw a bit too close.

God gave Moses a startling response. "Tell the sons of Israel to go forward." Forward was into the sea. To the Israelite nation that would seem impossible. But God gave Moses further instruction. "As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land."

The image is that of cutting a channel through something hard. What a miracle that was going to be!

God gave Moses a twofold promise. Israel should cross the sea. Not even a major body of water can stand before the power of God in leading to the land of His promise. However, after Israel crossed the Egyptians would follow; and in the process God would receive "glory" from the event. In this text the word for glory means to be made heavy or to become significant. The mighty act of God would make Him significant over all the gods Egypt served and who were expected to grant victory over the arms of Egypt. Further, as a result of this mighty act, the Egyptians were to have fully experienced the sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The Red Sea

The children of Israel lived in the Nile delta area or the land of Ramesses, and first encamped at the northern end of the Gulf of Suez or Succoth at the beginning of the Exodus. This was the first point where they went into the camping mode. Then they traveled through the wilderness of the Red Sea, or what we call today the Sinai Peninsula, and encountered the Gulf of Aqaba. (I Kings 9:26 calls this the Red Sea.)

When traveling through "the wilderness of the Red Sea" Ex.13:18, escaping Pharaoh's army, God told Moses to turn south, so they headed through a wadi or canyon area that is called the Wadi Watir which led to the sea. The Bible in Ex. 14:3 says, "They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in."

When arriving at the beach, the children of Israel felt trapped, as they could not turn back, nor head north because at the northern end of the beach was a three story, Egyptian military fortress which is still standing today undergoing restoration. Additionally there were mountains obstructing their escape. To the south the mountains came down to the sea, as mentioned by Josephus, "For there was [on each side] a [ridge of] mountains that terminated at the sea, which were impassable by reason of their roughness, and obstructed their flight" Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 2, 15-3. You can see the mountains at the beach today. The people were about to turn against Moses because he had led them to an area where they were trapped and would surely die, or so they thought.

God caused a strong east wind to blow the waters back so the people could walk ten miles through the Red Sea to safety in Arabia. The crossing path is about a quarter to a half mile wide and is on a gradual slope down to the bottom of the Red Sea and then up to the Saudi beach. On either side of this path are the depths of the Red Sea, the Eilat Deep and the Aragonese Deep, each 3000 and 5000 feet deep respectively.

The Bible said all the chariots of Egypt and 600 choice chariots, or gold veneered models, were in the army pursuing God's people. It is speculated there were 20,000 chariots

destroyed that day. There are numerous chariot wheels, plus human and horse bones at the crossing site.

http://www.arkdiscovery.com/red_sea_crossing.htm The Red Sea Crossing Site Found by Ron Wyatt

Verses 19-29

The Egyptian forces drew near and for all purposes they had the Israelites pinned against the sea. To any observer it would be obvious that Israel's situation was hopeless. Such a conclusion would have failed to consider God. "The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them." The Egyptians and the Israelites were separated by the angel of God. The pillar of cloud not only gave guidance to the people of Israel but also protection. From Egypt's perspective the cloud only served to delay their certain victory. For Israel it served to give time for Moses to obey God and to allow for the separation of the water.

"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided." Of course God could have done this without Moses' outstretched hand. The point of using Moses was to let the Israelites know that this was no freak of nature but a direct act of God. Wind is a normal occurrence but a wind of such strength to force the parting of the waters happened at the right place and at the right time.

Once the Hebrews had crossed Moses was again commanded to stretch out his hand. The wind of God apparently stopped blowing and the waters rushed back into the void and swept over the Egyptian forces that had pursued the Israelites into the sea bed. The God of Israel had defeated the gods of Egypt.

Chapter 15

Verses 1-21

With the end of the Egyptian bondage over the awesome nature of the catastrophic victory dawned on the Hebrews. The author records an eyewitness detail that grips the imagination. "Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." (Exodus 14:30) The first reaction of the Hebrews was of awe. Not only did they see the dead Egyptians but they realized the nature of the event that had brought it to pass. The Hebrews saw the great work that the Lord had done. The Hebrews stood in holy terror before the mighty power of their God. God had done what He had promised. Out of this their faith grew in His redemptive power, for they "they believed in the LORD." As a part of their faith in God, a new trust was placed in the man whom God had sent. As the awe and terror of this experience began to wear

off it was replaced with overwhelming joy. At last they were free. The gratitude they felt for their mighty God caused them to burst forth in song. The song they sang was of great poetry toward their mighty God. The overwhelming victory they had just witnessed produced great emotions, and great emotions produce great poetry. As we read the introductory words of the song of Miriam, there was an impression that this was the first song to be sung. The song of Miriam accompanied by dancing, led the people in an exuberant celebration "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted"

More stately but no less joyous was the song of Moses. Beginning with the same words as Miriam's song, it proceeds with a theological statement of God's nature "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name," continues through a recounting of the great deliverance, (Verses 4-10) restates God's unique nature, (Verses 11-12) moves to a statement of God's future acts, (Verses 13-17) and concludes with a final affirmation of faith. (Verse 18)

There are three major ideas that stand out in this majestic hymn of victory. First, there was the realization and affirmation that the deliverance over Pharaoh was the result of God's act. The wind may have accomplished it, but it was God who did it. Israel looked at the event at the sea and did not attempt to explain it away by appeals to secondary causes; they simply saw God at work.

Second, they now had a magnificent hope for the future. Building on the acts of God in the past, they placed their faith in Him to complete His purposes to bring them in and plant them in the place that He had promised. We will see that their faith and confidence will not always be strong. But at this moment of God's victory, they could look forward confidently to future victories.

Third, the ideas of God's nature are most profound in the hymn. (Verses 2-3, 11-12, 18) The hymn is bold in its statement that God was the source of strength, song, and salvation in this context referred to a military and physical deliverance. The Bible soon enlarges this idea to include spiritual deliverance as well. The hymn also lays claim to the faith that the God of their heritage, "My father's God," had become real to them, "This is my God." Men do not come to believe God through argument but through historical experiences. We must meet Him to believe Him. One dimension we sometimes miss is God is "The LORD is a warrior." In the ancient times people saw God's visible power in the conquest of His enemies. Not until later did they realize that the greatest enemy was sin and that the greatest power was love.

"Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?" We have a warning here not to read all of our New Testament faith back into the Old Testament. In this time of Israel's pilgrimage of faith, they did not believe in monotheism (one God only) but in monolatry (only one

God for them). The ancient peoples of their day worshiped many gods. Israel had not yet followed far enough in their faith experience to cast away the concept of other gods. For them it was a major step forward to believe that their God was different from all the others and that He was the only one for them.

The most profound statement of faith in this hymn is in the concluding verse. "The LORD shall reign forever and ever." The use of the word reign clearly indicates recognition that Yahweh was king. Egypt had their Pharaoh. Israel had Yahweh. Further this admission of His kingship was an acknowledgement of submission to His kingly authority. This glorious shout of faith and confidence serves as the foundation of Israel's highest faith throughout her history. This was also picked up by the author of Revelation, in his triumphant cry: "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15) This song of victory has become the foundation of confident faith.

Verses 22-27

We cannot be exactly sure of the route that the Hebrews took in the wilderness. There are some suggested locations of the wilderness of Shur and the oases of Marah and of Elim. The route the Hebrews took likely lay somewhere along the western edge of the Sinai Peninsula.

The Hebrews were traveling with their flocks and herds, as well as with their children. A journey of three days would probably been between thirty and forty-five miles. It may be significant that Moses had said they wanted to go a three days journey to serve God. In actual fact, when they had covered this distance they turned against Moses. Such is the way of human faith.

The word "Marah" means bitter and was descriptive of the water there. Desert oasis was often named for the springs or wells that were there, as the water was the central feature. The Israelites seeking for an abundant water supply quickly turned against Moses. Moses took his difficulties to God and God "showed him a tree" which was able to make the bitter water sweet. It is a possibility that Moses having spent a large portion of his life shepherding the flock of Jethro in similar situations, was familiar with a variety of tree that had such qualities. Modern Arabs say there are such trees. If this is the case, the significant event here would be that God caused Moses to find the necessary tree. It is also possible that here was some form of supernatural event. Either way, Moses and Israel were sure that God had delivered them.

This was an opportunity for proving or testing Israel. Their grumbling was a clear indication of just how badly they had failed the test. The divine response to this experience was "a statute and an ordinance" commanding Israel to trust and obey. The message

from God was that if Israel would remain loyal and faithful they would not suffer the plagues that Egypt suffered. Furthermore, they would discover that God was their healer. When difficulties came they would find health from God.

God dealt gently with the Israelites in this first crisis in the wilderness. They failed their test but were mercifully delivered. The "twelve springs of water and seventy date palms" at Elim showed that following God's deliverance, they found an abundant supply of life's necessities.

Key Verse

Revelation 11:15

Chapter 16

Verses 1-36

The Hebrews rested at Elim and then set out again on their journey. They traveled into the Wilderness of Sin. There may be a connection of the Wilderness of Sin with Mount Sinai, but its true location is unknown. The Israelites had departed Egypt on the 15th day of the month of Abib; they would have arrived there exactly a month later. This kind of chronological detail would appear to be based upon eyewitness account. Following their deliverance from the Egyptians and the experience at Marah, it would have seemed that Israel should have learned to put their trust and faith in their God. But this was not the case.

The Wilderness of Sin

The Wilderness of Sin is a geographic area mentioned by the Bible as lying between Elim and Mount Sinai. Sin does not refer to sinfulness, but is an un-translated word that would translate as the moon; biblical scholars suspect that the name Sin here refers to the Semitic moon-deity Sin, who was worshipped widely around the entire periphery of pre-Islamic Arabia, the Levant, and Mesopotamia.

The location the Bible refers to is unknown, as its determination relies heavily on the location of Mount Sinai. The traditional identification of Mount Sinai as Jabal Musa, one of the peaks at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula, would imply that the wilderness of Sin was probably the narrow plain of el-Markha, which stretches along the eastern shore of the Red Sea for several miles toward the promontory of Ras Mohammed; however, most scholars have since rejected these traditional identifications. The more popular identification among modern scholars, of Sinai as al-Madhbah at Petra, would imply that the wilderness of Sin was roughly equitable with the central Arabah.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Food in the wilderness was scarce. With the lack of food the people quickly forgot about their servitude at the hands of the Egyptians. All they remembered was the meat pots in which the meat was cooked. As slaves, they probably would not have had all that much meat to eat. But the memory of their meager amounts seemed sweet and they also remembered eating "bread to the full." With hunger in their stomachs they grumbled bitterly against Moses and Aaron. We again see the frailty of human nature. They all were eager for their freedom from the Egyptians when it had cost them nothing. Now that they were having to sacrifice and had demands put upon them, it appeared to be too expensive.

It should not seem too hard for us to believe that the same people who had sung the song of victory (Exodus 15:1-18) could not believe that God had brought them into the wilderness "to kill this whole assembly with hunger." It would be hard to believe if we did not recognize the same tendencies in ourselves.

God again deals with His children with merciful patience. God promised them bread from heaven. The main emphasis here was upon manna, although there was reference to the supplying of quail. Jesus Christ who was the Lord of the Exodus explained that He was the true "bread from heaven." (John 6:32-35) God's statement "that I may test them," was a major purpose behind God's providential care. God was certainly meeting their need which is an obvious purpose. God was also testing the Israelites to see if, with their weak faith, they could trust God for their daily needs. Moses and Aaron made it clear that their complaining against them was really directed "against the Lord."

Moses also made it known to the people that the provision coming to them from God was a direct result of the fact that the Lord had heard their murmurings. God hears us even when we do not know it. In God's answer the people again became aware of the "glory of the LORD." The Israelites had forgotten that God was with them and His glory shown in the cloud to point to them His redemptive presence.

Quail are migratory birds that fly north and south over major areas of the Sinai arriving completely exhausted. Under such conditions they would be easy prey for those who hunt them. Manna had been understood to be a sweet secretion from desert trees. It drops upon the ground and turns white. Both of these phenomena occur in the late spring and early summer, the actual time recorded here. These events may be supernatural in every sense of the word. Or they may be natural events that happened when God said they would.

However you understand the event, for Moses and for Israel it was obviously understood as coming from God. It would seem that such miraculous provision would have led to open obedient response on the part of Israel. But the people continued to disobey. In their greed they tried to keep too much and it spoiled. When they failed to make provision for

the Sabbath, they found none at all. God was fulfilling the promise of verse 8. We read of these birds again later. The people complained about the manna (Numbers 11:4) and God sent Quails with disastrous results. (Numbers 11:31 Psalms 78:27) Here the Lord may have been testing them to see if they would continue to demand their Egyptian diet. They accepted the manna. In a later story, they complained again and were punished.

In verse 31 we read "The house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey." The word "like" indicates that it was not coriander seed. Coriander is an herb used for seasoning. (Genesis 2:12 Numbers 11:7)

The reference to the Sabbath here is the first reference in the Old Testament of what was to become one of Israel's major religious observances. The idea of the Sabbath was found in Genesis 2:2-3, although there is no specific reference to it. Whether or not the Sabbath had been observed before this time it would be observed from this time on. At Sinai it became one of the major foundation stones of Israel's faith. (Exodus 20:8)

Israel was to be in commemoration of God's gracious providence by filling a jar with the manna to be kept in the middle of their sanctuary. The purpose was that they should never forget God's providential care. This act of remembrance should have served to strengthen their weak faith. We also see a mundane detail that shows the human nature of the author: "Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah." In our terms, an omer is about two quarts, dry measure.

Key Verse

John 6:32-35, Numbers 11:4, Numbers 11:31, Psalms 78:27, Genesis 2:12, Numbers 11:7, Genesis 2:2-3

Chapter 17

Verses 1-7

From one resting place to the next the people of Israel moved in stages. At Rephidim they made a major encampment for rest and refreshment. It was expected that there would be water at Rephidim but there was none. Again the people turned on Moses and God. There are at least three records of the people turning on Moses because of thirst. (Exodus 15:22-27 Exodus 17:1-7 Numbers 20:1-13) All of these references are probably different occurrences, while some say they are the same. In a wilderness region some oases dry up with changes in climate. There is no reason not to think this is a separate event. The details are different from the earlier experience at Marah.

The term "quarreled with" is a typical legal expression. Apparently their murmuring led to some sort of legal action against Moses. We see the possibility continue in the statement of Moses, "A little more and they will stone me." The action against a leader is stoning. (1 Samuel 30:6 John 10:31)

Moses condemned his people by asking "Why do you test the LORD?" It is man who is judged by God, not the reverse. Moses' implication was that the people had put God on trial. How quickly people forget God's acts of deliverance. How often do we when a new crisis comes forget God's victories of the past.

God commanded Moses to demonstrate God's power before the elders. It was to be the responsibility of the elders to pass the word on to the people of God's new provision.

Moses named this place with a double name. The name Massah, which means proof or test, and the name Meribah, which means contention are how they translate. The geographic locations of Israel's memories served as a reminder of their foolish lack of faith. Knowing human nature as we do we can be sure to know that Israel will again question God. As their faith was growing through God's gracious care still they had their human natures.

Verses 8-16

Suddenly Israel found themselves in a different kind of crisis. The earlier crisis that had crippled Israel's faith was that of an enemy whom they thought had been defeated and the lack of provision in the wilderness when they thought they could not survive. With the Amalekites, there was an enemy in front of them, prohibiting them from continuing on their way to Sinai. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:12) and therefore related to Israel. Throughout the Old Testament they are seen as enemies of Israel. We are not given a reason for the attack here; it was probably based upon the belief that the water and sparse grass of the wilderness was not sufficient for both the Israelites and the Amalekites.

For the first time Joshua appears. Joshua is Israel's military leader. The action of Moses during the battle with the Amalekites is best understood in the symbolic actions of the prophets. Moses lifting his hands towards the heavens is to be seen as releasing the divine power of God. This kind of act was always considered to be an outpouring of divine grace. Here Aaron and Hur are portrayed as faithful servants who literally undergirded their leader in his faithful service. By their aid, with Joshua's military leadership, and as a result of God's power, Israel had the victory.

We have another new dimension in the conclusion of this episode. Moses is commanded to commit something to writing. The Hebrew has a definite article, making the order refer to "the book." This was the record of the past to be used as a basis for future actions. This should not be considered a strange act for a man who was trained with the education of

Pharaoh's court. In that compactly Moses would have been knowledgeable in the importance of good records.

We cannot be sure of the details of the last passage in this chapter because of the difficulty in translating the Hebrew. But the passage obviously serves as a prediction of a long series of future conflicts between Israel and the Amalek. The basic meaning seems to have been that God would always serve as an ensign of the armies of Israel.

Key Verse

Numbers 20:1-13, 1 Samuel 30:6, John 10:31, Genesis 36:12

Chapter 18

Verses 1-27

After the victory over the Amalekites, Jethro arrived with Moses' family. Jethro came apparently to both see for himself about God's mighty deliverances and reunite Moses with his family. We must remember that Jethro was a priest descended from Abraham and would have had a particular interest in the actions of Yahweh. We are to know then that the reports of God's great acts were spreading abroad.

We do not know when or why Moses had sent his wife and family away. It has been suggested that Moses sent them away when he began his major conflicts with Pharaoh so that they would be protected. We should also not that the Hebrew expression "sent her away," is one normally used for divorce. If this were true, it might explain why Moses seems to have greeted his father-in-law with more warmth than he did his wife. (Exodus 18:6-7)

Moses told Jethro "all that the Lord had done," and Jethro rejoiced in a cry of praise to God. In addition, Jethro uttered a strong profession of faith when he said, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods." Such a statement that his earlier faith had based upon ancient reports, while he now could point to contemporary experience as a bases of faith. Jethro then led a service of sacrifice and a communion meal. In such a celebration held "Before God," it would be assumed that God was a partner to the meal.

The next day Moses was dispensing justice and Jethro was observing. In the ancient world men came to inquire from God's leaders for rulings on all sorts of things from legal cases to matters of faith. Moses was bogged down with this task and it was keeping him from furnishing the leadership that Israel needed. Jethro boldly confronted Moses by saying, "The thing that you are doing is not good." The priest of Midian gave Moses a major lesson in effective leadership and administration.

Jethro had called Moses to get his priorities right. Moses' first task was to be an intercessor, to "be the people's representative before God." Moses later learned this lesson well, as he became one of the Bible's greatest intercessors. Then Jethro called Moses to be a teacher to Israel, telling them the words of God. Further, Moses was to be a leader, guiding Israel in being God's people. Finally Jethro urged Moses to set up an organization with competent, honest, godly leaders over small groups of the Hebrews. It would be their task to hear the complaints and to dispense justice. Jethro urged Moses to implement this if "God so commands you." It was important to Jethro that his advice only be followed if God was in it. Moses found the advice to be good and did as his father-in-law suggested.

Jethro returned home after Moses had implemented the organizational plans for his new administration. It may be viewed that this crisis of leadership was not as significant as the crisis of faith and obedience that confronted Israel. That may be true, but Moses' leadership was seriously weakened by poor organization and administration. Leadership problems must be dealt with just as effectively as problems with faith and obedience if God's people are going to accomplish his will on earth.

Every crisis that Israel faced from the night of the Passover was one that could have destroyed them. It was by the patient, gracious leadership of God that they had progressed to Rephidim. From there they were ready at to move to Sinai.

Surrender That Calls for Cleansing

We now have reached the major turning point in the Exodus experience and in the book itself. The Mighty Acts of redemption had been completed, and the divine gift of the covenant was about to be made. In the deliverance from Egypt, the complete sovereignty of Yahweh had been demonstrated. Yahweh had overwhelmingly showed His absolute control over nature, over Egypt, and over the Egyptian gods. Beginning here and continuing through Leviticus and into Numbers 10, Israel was told by God what His redemption really meant. They were given the covenant as well as a multiplicity of related laws. The covenant and the covenant laws set forth what God was expecting from them. There are some occasional brief narratives along the way, but the basic emphasis is the calm of God upon their lives.

This particular chapter sets forth the preparation demanded of them before the giving of the covenant. It involved three basic emphases: (1) God's invitation to and their acceptance of the covenant life; (2) their consecration in anticipating of the meeting with God; and (3) their realization of the terrifying holiness of God.

Chapter 19

Verses 1-9

We begin by rooting this part of our adventure in history by stating that it was "the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt." The Hebrews had left Egypt on the 15th day after a new moon. The third new moon following would indicate the entire journey had taken about two and one half months. A "wilderness was not a forest or even a desert, but generally referred to an uninhibited region. It was usually rough, rocky, and uninventing. It was the kind of place where there would be no distractions.

Israel arrived and made an encampment at the base of Mount Sinai. This must have stirred Moses. The sign that had been given to Moses in his initial call had been that Israel would eventually serve God "upon this mountain." (Exodus 3:12) Moses would have been most certainly overwhelmed with awe as he drew near to this mountain. It was here that had all began for him.

Moses' first instructions from God were to remind Israel of the fact that their deliverance, both from the Egyptians and the wilderness, had been accomplished by God's acts. That Moses was to set forth the demand for faithfulness: "obey My voice and keep My covenant." God's redemption is accompanied by demands. Let us note here that obedience did not bring deliverance, but deliverance is expected to be followed by obedience. Israel was told that the end result of such obedience would be a special relationship with God. Israel would be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This new relation would demonstrate to the world their dedication to God. Israel would bear the responsibility of serving as priest (mediators) between the world and God. It is significant that the New Testament picked up this image to describe the nature and function of the Christian community. (1 Peter 2:5,9)

Israel's response to the message from God through Moses was complete surrender: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" It is important to note that they promised obedience without knowing all the demands of the covenant. The Israelites were signing a spiritual blank check.

It may not be important to recapture all the details of the conversation between God, Moses, and Israel. God certainly did not need Moses to tell him what the people of Israel had said. On the other hand, since Moses was reporting God's demands to them, it was to be expected that he should report their response to God.

God's promise to speak with Moses from the "thick cloud" was intended to demonstrate to Israel that Moses was really receiving a revelation from God. A thick cloud was a common symbol in the Old Testament for the presence of God. The visible manifestation of God's presence was intended to serve as Moses' authorization to speak for God.

Verses 9-15

We are not told the words of the people reported to the Lord by Moses. But the people had said they were willing to hear the words of God and to obey them. So the next step for Israel was to get ready to receive the covenant demands.

Several things were involved in the consecration of the people. The concept itself rested on the Old Testament understanding of holiness. The verb “to consecrate” is the root from which the noun holy comes. Basically holy means something that was to be set apart from the world to God. Places, objects, or people were made holy (consecrated) as they were withdrawn from the world and turned over to God. Looking from the other direction, such things were made holy as God took them over and possessed them.

The three days of preparation indicated a sacred and complete time for the accomplishment of the necessary cleansing. As of yet the full ritual of cleansing had not been given to Israel, but such rituals were common in the ancient Near East. Certainly Israel would have some certain standard procedure to perform in order to accomplish this. The specific commands given to Israel involved three matters.

They were to wash their garments. This would have not been easy in the wilderness. But the difficulty did not remove the necessity. The physical cleansing was probably understood as symbolic of an inner moral cleansing.

There were boundaries set around the mountain. Man could not approach God too closely. The penalty of death shows the how serious violating this restriction would be and how serious they should take it.

The final demand for their purification was they were "do not go near a woman." This expression would refer to a sexual relationship. Our understanding of this is not to believe that a sexual relationship was something unclean. The Old Testament has a far higher understanding than this. The restriction was to focus one's energies and attention on a spiritual confrontation with God. Nothing else was to take their attention away from this at this time.

The entire ritual of consecration had one essential function: to demonstrate that the approach to God must be taken seriously. The ritual of consecration made sure that anyone approaching God did so with a through consciousness of God's awesome holiness.

Verses 16-25

On the third day the Lord descended on Mount Sinai. The images of thunder, lighting, cloud, fire and earthquake are familiar ones in the Old Testament for God's drawing near to man. It was an event of terror for the Hebrews. The sound of the trumpet announced the divine appearance. In the ancient world, the trumpet was used for three purposes. It

served as a call to worship, as a warning, or as an announcement of the presence of royalty. All three of these purposes are to be understood in the experience as recorded here.

Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. It is important to make note that Moses could only approach God when God choose. This particular confrontation was different than before when Moses was with God. This was to be the time of the divine gift of the covenant. As such, their conversation was unique. It was, in a since, God's self giving. Moses was warned to make sure the people did not "break through," the boundaries that had been established. It was apparent the need to control the crowd from the pressure of their curiosity.

The special instruction for the consecration of the Priest is an interesting point. There has been no indication that Israel had priest prior to the giving of the law code at Sinai. It may be that clan or family leaders served in this compactly of priest until the establishment of a regular order of priest. It is thought here then that these leaders are the ones to who the special instructions were given.

Having responded to God's invitation by a willing submission, and having made preparation in accord with the divine design, Israel was ready for the awesome approach of God. Here is an essential message of the Sinai experience and it is also the message of the cross. When man submits himself obediently to the command of God, he is ready to receive the divine revelation.

God was visibly on the Mountain Sinai and the people and Moses waited expectantly. The stage is now set for the curtain to rise on the next act of the divine drama.

Key Verse

1 Peter 2:5,9

Demands That Call for Obedience

Exodus 20:1-20

The Ten Commandments are the second major focus of Exodus, along with the Passover account. (Exodus 12) There are repeated with a slightly different wording in Deuteronomy 5:6. These Commandments seem to have served as the basis for a major portion of the laws of Exodus. They are certainly the foundation for the ethics of the Old Testament and have made a major impact upon the law codes of the nations of the civilized world.

Covenant Background

Biblical interpreters consider the divine covenant with Israel to be unique. There is no similar covenant known. There are many covenants mentioned in the Bible and known from the ancient world, these were generally made between two individuals or nations with an essentially equal status to one another. In the Bible, examples of this kind of covenant can be seen between Jacob and Laban, (Genesis 31:44) between David and Jonathan. (1 Samuel 18:3) Obviously the covenant between God and Israel was on a totally different basis. In no way could it ever be seen as between to equals.

Recent archaeological discoveries made by Dr. George Mendenhall have shed significant new light upon the form of Yahweh's covenant with Israel. This special study has focused upon the "suzerainty treaties" which were common in the ancient Near East of the second millennium B.C. This kind of treaty or covenant was made between a suzerain (great king) and his vassal. The suzerain usually identified himself as "king of kings" and 'lord of lords.'" These titles were picked up later in Revelation 17:14 and Revelation 19:16 as descriptive of the Lord Jesus. By these titles the suzerain claimed ultimate authority over all other kings. In the typical treaty of this nature, several features stood out. Note these as we compare them with the covenant statement in the Bible.

1. The suzerainty treaty began with a statement identifying the great king: "Thus says XYZ, king of..." compare with "I am the LORD your God." (Exodus 20:2)
2. Then followed a statement of the events which led up to and made the treaty possible. This usually emphasized the gracious acts of the suzerain for the vassal. Compare this with "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Exodus 20:2)
3. At this point, the treaty would usually set forth a prohibition against any foreign alliances. This should be compared with "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3)
4. Following this would be a statement of the covenant obligations for the vassal. Here would be set forth a list of matters which must be done and those which were prohibited. This compares with the rest of the Ten Commandments, setting forth Israel's obligations to God.
5. After this came the statements concerning where the covenant document was to be kept and specifying its public reading. Although this is not contained here in Exodus, it is recorded in retelling this event in Deuteronomy 31:9-11.
6. The typical suzerainty covenant called upon the gods of the great king and his vassal to serve as witnesses. As would be expected, this element is lacking in the Old Testament account of the covenant. It is worth noting however, that the prophets regularly called upon the heavens and the earth to serve as witness against Israel for having violated the covenant. (Isaiah 1:2 Jeremiah 2:12)

7. These treaties usually concluded with a list of blessings and curses that would befall the vassal depending upon whether he remained loyal to the covenant. This compare with Exodus 23:20-33 and Deuteronomy 27:1 to 28:68.

Two things stand out in this comparison. First, the form of God's covenant with Israel was one with which they were certainly familiar. It was a form with which Moses must have been trained in the palace of Pharaoh. Thus God had begun the preparation of Moses long before Moses ever knew it. The use of these forms serves to illustrate again how God frequently takes common things and fills them with uncommon truth. Second, the very use of this form said to Israel, with an unmistakable clarity, that Yahweh was the great King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The use of the form itself communicated God's claim to absolute sovereignty over Israel.

Chapter 20

Verses 1-11

The opening statement points out several fundamental facts. First, the covenant was given by God. The covenant was not a matter of negotiation between God and the Israelites. They could only accept it or reject it. In later years they often broke the covenant but there was no way that they could change it. God's covenant with the Israelites was never a matter for debate. By their acceptance the Israelites were accepting the lordship of Yahweh. Likewise by rejecting the covenant they would be rejecting His lordship.

Second, the covenant was rooted in Yahweh's historical acts. God was laying claim upon Israel because He first redeemed them. Fundamental to Israel's understanding of God is that He had redeemed them. Some have suggested that the covenant was basic to Israel's faith, but it seems more appropriate to say that the Exodus was basic to the covenant. We should never minimize the importance of the covenant, but we should never magnify it over God's redemptive act in the Exodus.

Third, and less significant, Israel was reminded of their heritage as slaves. The Israelites had no greatness to which they could point as bases of God's love for them. The Israelites were free not because of their power but because of God's power. Therefore they had no bases for pride.

"You shall have no other gods before Me." God's call upon Israel was that He was to have their sole allegiance. The word "before" can mean besides or in addition to. We should note that this commandment made no claim to Yahweh's being the only God. That would come much later in Israel's history. This was not a statement that other nations did not have other gods, but that Israel could not do so.

This commandment prohibiting no other gods was implicit in that "you shall have only me." The Hebrews had come out of Egypt whose people had worshiped many gods. They

were going to Canaan, where there were an equally large number of gods. The fact that they were going to be tempted to have many gods is obvious from the fact that the prophets condemned them for this very sin.

This Commandment speaks to our contemporary culture as well from two directions. To those who seek to place their allegiance in God and in any other source of power, either real or imaginary, it is God's command for a total commitment. For those who think there is no God at all, it is the divine claim that a person must have God. There is no real life apart from God.

"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Let's realize that this Commandment was not a prohibition against artwork but against anything that might take the place of God in Israel's understanding. In the ancient world the idol maker was in many ways a theologian. It was not his intention to say, "My god has the body of a lion, the legs of a bull, the wings of an eagle, and the head of a man." Rather, the idol maker was saying, "My god has the speed of a lion, the power of a bull, is exalted as the eagle, and has the wisdom of a man." With the use of a visual aid, he was trying to describe his god's attributes. However, the worshiper transferred these attributes to the idol itself. The basic thrust of this commandment was the prohibition against substituting anything for God.

This can become a real problem in contemporary Christianity. We have a tendency to substitute allegiance to certain words and phrases that describe God for a genuine submission to God Himself. Even orthodox descriptions of God can become an idol. Nothing must be allowed to take the place of God in our lives.

The statement that the Lord is a "jealous" God would be better translated as a "zealous" God. This word, which is used only of God, focuses upon an action rather than upon an emotion. It speaks of the fact that God will act to prevent Israel's unfaithfulness or to transform if it occurs.

"The third and fourth generation" is a typical expression of the ancient wisdom movement that merely implied continuance. It is true that the sins of one generation have their effect on the following generation. The real emphasis here was on God's steadfast love, which was far more extensive than His judgment. It is imperative to see that the demonstrable fact of love is obedience. Biblical love was never an emotion but was always an action. The love that God promised is a word always found in the context of the covenant. God committed Himself to an unswerving covenant loyalty in His actions.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." This Commandment is probably the most misunderstood of the ten. Most will think that it applies to cursing only or the use of some word for God in an expletive. Although it certainly applies to such usage, to narrow its meaning to this alone is almost to misunderstand it completely. Basic to its understanding is the understanding of the Old Testament concept of "name." A name is descriptive of the person who bears it and it reflects who that person is.

"Take" is a verb translated to mean lift up, bear, or carry. Further, the phrase "in vain" literally means "for nothing" or "emptiness." In seeking to grasp the meaning of this Commandment, we must also consider the fact that among ancient peoples, divine names were considered to have magical properties.

This Commandment was clearly a prohibition against assuming that the mere use of the name of God would produce results. God will not be manipulated by those who seek merely to use His power. Anyone who carries about the character or nature of God and has nothing happening in his life has violated this Commandment. The presence of God in anyone's life should produce visible fruits.

He who carries about the nature of God must be a fruitful person. Anyone who fails to do this we have this warning "the Lord will not leave him unpunished."

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." The longest Commandment has often been misinterpreted. "Remember" should not be translated as an imperative but as a continuing action. The phrase is difficult to translate, but something like this comes close. "Remembering the Sabbath day for keeping it holy." As we learned before, that which is holy is set apart for God. A day that is holy is one which is devoted to God's special purposes.

We must also note that this Commandment governs the use of all time, not just the seventh day. Israel was responsible, as we are, for the use of all the time God has given. The seventh day was peculiarly devoted to God's service, but all time was a stewardship from Him.

We can get into problems when we define how to keep a day holy. Let us recognize immediately that it cannot be done by legislating standards. Jesus established the basic principle when He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark

2:27) The Pharisees had missed the point when they tried to legalize its observance. The day is kept when it glorifies God.

The foundation for the Sabbath observance was set in God's creation. Further, it was God who hallowed it or made it holy. The responsibility of man is twofold. Man must demonstrate that he recognizes its holy nature. Further, he must keep all time as God's gift.

The first set of Commandments focused on the vertical dimensions of the covenant, specifying fundamental relations between man and God. The second set turns their attention on the horizontal dimensions. Here the concern was with the relations that existed between members of the covenant community.

At first glance these commands seem quite restrictive; we should note that this is not really true. A negative command is only for a specific action, leaving all other areas free from restrictions. A positive command is far more restrictive, for if you can only do what you are told to do, large areas are left forbidden. The fact, therefore, that all but the first of these last six are negative gives Israel a greater freedom than we might have at first expected.

Verse 12

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you." This, like the fourth Commandment, is a positive obligation. Also, like the fourth, it was stated in terms of continuing action. Their lives were to be characterized by honor towards parents. The word "honor" comes from a word which literally meant to give weight to or to give significance to. The people were to recognize the importance of their parents and to make sure that they were put in positions within the community that utilized that importance.

We tend to limit this command only to young children. But this was not the intent at Sinai. Paul certainly applied this to children, (Ephesians 6:2) when it was given as a part of the covenant it was addressed to the adults of the covenant community. This was also a command to give significance to the senior citizens. In many primitive societies, when a person became old and useless, he was sent out to die. It was not to be so in Israel.

The promise connected with this set forth the concept that an enduring society must not only care for its elderly; it must profit from their wisdom. Paul appealed to this promise in his letter to the Ephesians. (Ephesians 6:2-3)

Verse 13

"You shall not murder." in the Hebrew translation the word is "kill." Kill is a rare word in the Hebrew and has been translated to our English word murder. This may be correct and so states that no man can lift up violent hands against another. It is certain that the

Old Testament never considered this to be a prohibition against capital punishment, as many of the covenant laws have a death penalty. Neither is it a prohibition against war, for Israel; regularly went forth to battle, sometimes at the command of God.

Jesus further explains the concept behind the meaning of this word in Matthew 5:21-22. It is probable that the word referred to an act of violence that arose out of feelings of hatred or malice. Perhaps murder is the closest word that we have in the English language. We must not lose sight of the emotional bases behind the actual meaning.

Regardless of the specific meaning of the verb, the basic purpose of the command was to set forth the sanctity of life. Life is God's gift and therefore life is sacred. No man has the right to destroy what God has given.

Verse 14

"You shall not commit adultery." This command is a prohibition against the taking of another man's wife. Yet it falls short of the attitude taught by Jesus. (Matthew 5:27-28) In the Old Testament times a woman considered as little more than property which could be bought, sold, or taken by force, this laid a new foundation for marriage. The marriage covenant was to be considered inviolable for people in the covenant community.

Israel took this command seriously, as not even King David could ignore this command. (2 Samuel 11:1 to 12:15) Adulterers and murders were understood to be of the same nature. (Job 24:13-17) When the Prophets sought for an image to describe Israel's sins against God, they used the image of Adultery. (Isaiah 1:21 Hosea 1:2)

The Hebrew's were called by this Commandment to a purity of life to which no other people had ever been called. God's people were to live by a higher standard.

Verse 15

"You shall not steal." The word used here for steal implies taking something secretly. It may be of significance that this commandment and the two prior relate to things done secretly. In the ancient world, as well as in the modern, many people believed that nothing was wrong as long as you did not get caught.

Property could not be taken from another is the basic thrust of this Commandment. Again this was an important commandment of the Israelite people. The Prophets had severe words of censure for those who stole the property of others. (Isaiah 5:8 Amos 3:10) Property was to be gained by labor and not by thievery. Stability in a society was, and is, dependent upon security of life, home, and property.

Verse 16

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." There is some question as to the actual meaning of this Commandment. It is possible that it meant that the covenant

community had a right to expect and demand truth in legal matters. If this was correct, then this commandment would have been limited to a prohibition against lying in legal proceedings. It is also possible that this referred to the normal speech of daily life. It would be a more likely meaning in its appearance, since each of the other Commandments related to life in the community.

Verse 17

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor." This Commandment not only deals with the emotion of covetousness but also the active planning of the appropriation of the coveted property. However, the word used here does not necessarily carry that meaning.

It may be the better part of wisdom to interpret that as being nothing more than what it appears to be, as prohibition against envy. Ultimately, the foundation for this Command was the concept that everything a man possessed was a gift from God. Further, to envy what another had was to despise what you had. Therefore covetousness was a rejection of His loving providence.

Verses 18-20

As Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments the people were caught up in the phenomena that demonstrated the presence of God. The presence of God had struck them with terror, for "they trembled and stood at a distance." The Hebrew words are much more graphic in their description, as the last word literally means that they were staggering or reeling. The awesome holiness of God sent them backward from His presence. The people may have come out in curiosity and drawn close to the mountain, but the actual presence of God had produced the opposite effect.

It is implied that the fear of death had sprung up in the people in response to hearing the words of the Ten Commandment. The demand of God had showed them just how far they were from the holiness of God they were. For the first time they could see the real nature of their sin. The awesome light of God had illuminated the stain of sin.

Consequently, they desired Moses should be the mediator between them and God. Knowing their own sinful natures they did not wish to hear the voice of God directly. The fear of death at the voice of God is a common theme throughout the Old Testament. (Isaiah 6:5)

Moses was obviously willing to be Israel's mediator. This is the very nature of God's spokesman. There was both the divine call to service and the human call to intercession. Moses' earlier call from God gave him a willingness to respond to this request of his people.

Moses urged the people to not be afraid. God had not come to kill them as a punishment for their sin but “to prove” them. This emphasis upon testing is basic to Exodus. The presence of God searches out the heart of men. This knowledge of testing should serve to help them develop the proper “fear” of God. The true fear of God is the desire to avoid sin rather than to avoid the consequences of sin.

The ultimate purpose of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai was that they should not sin. God’s purpose for Israel was that they should be able to live lives of such quality that they would find it satisfying and fulfilling. The same may be said of the redemptive work of Jesus in our lives. It is His purpose to deliver us from sin and its consequences so that we may really live and not merely exist. This is the good life, the abundant life, in every sense of the word.

Decrees That Govern Life

Exodus 20:21 to 24:14

This section of Exodus is known as “The Book of the Covenant.” The title comes from the statement that “Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people.” (Exodus 24:7)

Although not all the laws in this section are directly related to the Ten Commandments, they are expansions of the basic demands of the Decalogue. They served as the foundations of Israel’s faith and life. They governed her worship and her ethics. From the beginning, the people of Israel clearly understood that they were a people governed by law. But they also recognized that the laws by which they were to be governed were those of God.

In seeking an understanding of these legal materials, we must beware of trying to interpret them primarily from a Christian point of view. To do so is to miss their essential thrust. We must begin by seeking to understand them against the background of their own time. We must also beware of actually failing to consider them because we find the details foreign and strange.

Verses 21-26

We are now given instructions concerning the nature of proper worship. “You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.” Obviously based on the Second Commandment, this prohibition covered anything of value. For the Hebrews, gold and silver covered all precious metals. Any type of image would be far removed from the God who actually “has spoken to you from heaven.” But proper worship involved more than a mere prohibition.

They were given instruction for the making of an Altar. Although sacrifice had not yet be regulated or even commanded. Foreign to our own thinking, the ancient sacrificial system

was a means by which men expressed their adoration of and gratitude to God. Life was considered sacred. Therefore any animal that was slaughtered was killed in a manner which would express both reverence for life as well as thanks for the gift. The altar itself was to be either of earth or of unhewn stone.

Natural objects were considered to be exactly as God had made them. For man to take the dirt and make bricks or to take the stone and shape it was to imply that he could do a better job than God had done. Building altars out of natural elements as dirt or stone would be quicker and more suitable to a nomadic people.

Israel was being told that not only was worship important but proper worship was important.

Key Verses'

Mark 2:27, Ephesians 6:2-3, Matthew 5:21-22, Matthew 5:27-28, Job 24:13-17, Isaiah 1:21, Hosea 1:2, Isaiah 5:8, Amos 3:10, Isaiah 6:5

Chapter 21

Verses1-11

It this day and in our society we find slavery archaic and inhumane. The very idea of slavery is abhorrent to us. In the ancient times slavery was a very common practice. In that environment Israel was given a profound truth: Slaves have rights too. Instead of being treated as property, slaves were to be considered as persons. As it is, this is the first step in the long road to the abolition of slavery. Significantly, these laws only governed the rights of Hebrew slaves.

We are given here two sets of laws, those governing male slaves and those governing female slaves. The male slave was to be offered his freedom; he was to be given the privilege of remaining a slave. This was to be done publicly and to be indicated by a sign that was to be openly visible. The expression "bring him to God" probably meant to take him to a shrine or sanctuary where God would witness that there was no coercion being exerted.

The female slaves were on a lower level of privilege, just as a woman in that society was on a lower level than that of a male. At the same time, because of her lower social status, in many ways there was a greater responsibility toward her. The more unimportant a person was the greater the responsibility to protect his or her rights. The legal concepts of the Old Testament place a greater responsibility on caring for the weak than for the strong.

The female slaves were often a concubine and occasionally even a wife. If such a slave did not please her master, he could not sell her to another. He could only let her be redeemed. That is, he could only sell her back to her family. In no way could she be abused or mistreated. Further, if she was so abused, she could go free without the payment of the redemption price.

Verses 12-17

The next set of laws puts forth a series of crimes which were punishable by death. These may appear unduly harsh if judged by Christian standards. On the other hand, these wrong acts were to be taken seriously. Sin must always be taken seriously. Perhaps today man takes his wrongdoing too lightly.

The first three of these capital crimes was premeditated murder. In order to clarify the nature of the act identified in the basic statement, two explanatory statements were made. To "lie in wait" obviously referred to a planned attack. Such an act would fit into the category of one "to kill him craftily." This type of killing was considered treachery. It was a betrayal of the common covenant bond that united the people of Israel.

The expression "God let him fall into his hand" is a simple way of saying that the attack was not planned. If the death came as a result of an accident, the killer could flee to the altar of God. Later, specific cities of refuge were established for such purposes. (Numbers 36:6) Such a refuge prevented the typical blood feuds that sprang up in the ancient world. Only the guilty should die. This distinction was a major step forward in the world's laws.

Two of the capital crimes relate to striking or cursing a parent. In the ancient world, words were considered to have an objective reality in themselves. Curses, once spoken, released power and would carry out their work. In the rough society of the ancient world, Israel was being told that order and respect in the home were both important and imperative. Israel's very existence was to depend on obedience and respect within the home.

Kidnapping was fairly common in the ancient world. The slave markets were kept filled by these practices. Even Joseph was so treated by his brothers. (Genesis 37) Whether the criminal was found with the victim or merely in possession of the money from his sale, death was to be the penalty. A man accused of such a crime, unexplained wealth was to be assumed as evidence of guilt.

Israel was being told that the covenant community was to be pure. Crime should not exist in such a community and could not go unpunished.

Israel's legal responsibility ultimately rested upon their covenant with God. With the Exodus, they had been delivered from slavery to Egypt. With the covenant laws, they

were being provided with the first step in their deliverance from sin. This was not completed until the cross, when the ultimate death penalty was paid.

Verse 18-32

The next set of laws deal with personal injury to the body. They are fairly straightforward as far as meaning is concerned. There are some underlying considerations that we should look at.

A first concern when injuring another person is that the person must be repaid for the loss of time and that "he is completely healed." In that time medical expenses may have been minimal so this may mean responsibility to the support of the person until there was a complete healing.

Slaves were held at a different standard. Among the various social strata of that day, slaves were the lowest. Slaves, as mentioned before, were considered as property. With these laws the master of a slave now had some responsibility towards the slave. The slave was not only property but also considered to be as a person. This was a significant step in the right direction for Israel.

The laws regarding miscarriage imply nothing concerning the personhood of the unborn. The punishment here was based upon the injury to the woman. The fine was to be suggested by the husband, but also must be approved by the judge.

At the core of this section was the *lex talionis* or law of retaliation. Certainly Jesus transcended this with his statement of the law of love. (Matthew 5:38-39) There is also a major statement on human responsibility. In the ancient world, vengeance was the rule of the day. Here Israel was clearly told that no one could exact more than justice for any injury. This law was intended to prevent excessive punishment for the one causing the injury.

These laws in reference to slaves also further the personhood of the slave. In other ancient societies, slaves were to be paid for such injuries. In Israel, they were to be given freedom as well.

An ox was a very dangerous animal. The owner was to be responsible for his ox and for protecting others from it. In some cases, failure to heed this responsibility could even cost the owner his life. In some cases it was possible that the courts could set a sum that a man could ransom his life by the payment of a proper fee of redemption.

The ideal of paying to ransom a life has an interesting twist in late times. The price for a slave was, "thirty shekels of silver, has significant overtones for our understanding of the scorn with which the high priest and Judas considered for Jesus, thirty shekels of silver. The slave was at the lowest rung of the social structure.

Key Verses

Numbers 36:6, Matthew 5:38-39

Chapter 22

Verses 1-17

The next group of laws relate to property rights. Property ownership was a basic right in Israelite society. Built upon the concept of personal ownership, Israel was given a new development in the common laws of the ancient Near East. The new idea was that the loss of property would be made right by equivalent payment. Other ancient law codes provided for vengeful retaliation and even bodily mutation of the thief or responsible person. The concept of indemnification was similar in purpose to the earlier *lex talionis*. For Israel, justice would be the rule of the day.

Further set forth was the principle that, as important as property was, human life was more important. In the darkness, a thief may have been accidentally killed. There was no such justification for this if such an act happened in the daytime.

Animals were the basic source of wealth in a nomadic society. Stealing another's animal to kill or sell indicated some degree of premeditation and planning, therefore a major repayment was assessed. While it is just as wrong to steal and keep an animal, it was more likely to have been an impulsive act and the fine was not as severe. Never was a man allowed to profit from a crime. Upon these principles, the laws themselves can be understood.

Laws relating to one man's animals grazing over the land of another had no real significance for the wandering Hebrew nation. Once they settled in Canaan they became intensely significant. Once the Hebrews settled the problems of land usage became more intense as many used their land to farm. Further, the problem of fire was of prime significance to Israel. The Mediterranean summer was dry, and a wildfire could cause untold havoc and loss. He who kindled the fire was responsible for it. The responsibility was theirs regardless of the intent.

The stewardship on another man's property was not to be taken lightly. Upon this concept they later developed their belief of the seriousness with which they must take their stewardship of God's gifts. Also, lost property still belonged to its owner. In the case where one man claimed that another had his property they both were to be brought "before God". This apparently refers to taking an oath in the sanctuary. The priest or elders apparently sat in judgment of such claims. Whoever was found to be in the wrong was to be treated as a thief by being required to repay double.

Natural dangers of animals kept in the wilderness were not the responsibility of the shepherd. On the other hand, if he allowed an animal to be stolen, he was responsible. Further, though he might not be able to prevent attack by wild beast, he was responsible for making an attempt to do so. In the event of his failure, he was expected to produce the carcass as evidence.

The set of laws regarding the seduction of a virgin are based on the concept that such a girl was the property of the father. When the daughter was given in marriage, the father expected to be given a “marriage present” for her. If the daughter had been seduced then she no longer had this value. If a man took a girl in marriage without paying the marriage price, he must do so. The expression “pay money” literally means to weigh silver. Actual money as a medium of exchange had not yet been invented. Payment was made by weighing up a specific amount of gold or silver.

The principles of justice here were the basis for the high sense of justice the prophets possessed. To them, injustice was a sin against God and a violation of the covenant.

Verses 18-20

At first look these three offences seem to be completely unrelated. But they are each aimed at keeping the worship of Yahweh pure.

Sorcery was a common practice in the ancient Near East. Even as the specific command was aimed at the “sorceress,” the Old Testament also speaks of sorcerers. The prohibition is aimed at any form of sorcery. Throughout the Bible its practice is clearly identified with paganism. This condemnation was aimed eliminating the paganizing influences in Israel. Sorcery continued to be a problem as can be seen by the prophets who attacked the practice later. (Isaiah 8:19 Micah 5:12 Malachi 3:5)

There is an obvious difference between "You shall not allow a sorceress to live" and the expression "put to death" and "shall be utterly destroyed." Sorcery was to be dealt with drastically and the intent was aimed at keeping it from getting started and stopping it if it did.

The prohibition against sexual intercourse with an animal is a more significant perversion than we may normally see it as. This practice was used as a form of magical worship in several nations of the ancient world. Therefore this command was not only aimed at sexual perversion but also at false worship. Any such practice was punishable by death.

Further, any worship of any other god than Yahweh was prohibited. The verb translated “utterly destroyed” has religious overtones difficult to translate. The word refers to the through extermination of the offender and all he possessed, since they had been devoted to another god. Egypt of the past and Canaan of the future both worshiped many gods. It would have been natural for Israel to have worshipped Yahweh along with other gods.

This command was seeking to prevent this from happening. Its necessity is seen in the fact that Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah consistently condemned Israel because they tried to integrate the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the Canaanite Baals.

The purpose of these three commands was to see that Israel's faith remained pure both outwardly and inwardly. They were not to worship any foreign gods and they were to avoid anything that might give the appearance of such worship.

Verses 21-27

The Israelites had responsibilities to the underprivileged in their society. They were commanded to show justice tempered with mercy to the weak, the helpless, and the underprivileged of their society. Unique to Israel was the expressed concern of their God for such people.

Their first responsibility was directed to the stranger. The term here was aimed specifically at a stranger who was a permanent resident on the community, not one who was just passing through. In the ancient world strangers rarely had any legal recourse to mistreatment. God was reminding Israel that in Egypt they had experienced what could happen to such people. It was to be their responsibility to see that similar things did not happen to anyone who lived among them.

God's laws contained protection for widows and orphans. Without husbands and fathers, such people in Israel's society belonged to no one and therefore faced extreme hardship. In the Bible they were considered the most helpless of society. In most ancient societies the gods were concerned with only the strong and powerful. In Israel God expressed his prime concern with the weak and helpless.

The laws concerning borrowing and lending may give difficulty to us in our present day society. It is hard for us to see how we could exist without credit, banks, and savings and loan institutions. Are these wrong? Before we can answer that we must look at the culture in Israel's background. In Israel's world money was not used yet. Precious metal was occasionally used as a medium of exchange. But most exchange was done by barter or by labor. This law must be seen against that kind of social structure.

Like the preceding laws these were aimed at protecting the weak. It prohibited taking advantage of another's misfortune. If disease or a wild animal had killed a man's ox he would have no way of getting another except by trading sheep for one or working for it. The one who furnished the ox was prohibited from making a profit from the others misfortune. The word translated "interest" literally means to bite or sting.

Further, in those days, since the community was not settled, there was little which any man had in the way of "pledge" or collateral. About the only thing a man had was his cloak or tunic. It served as a coat on the cold days and as a blanket at night. The creditor could

hold it during the day, but it had to be returned at night when he slept. This practice made it of little value as a pledge but it did serve to remind that a debt was owed. Such concern for the less fortunate in God's laws of the Israelites was because God was "compassionate". The word would be better translated as merciful or gracious. Because God was of this nature, Israel would be also.

Verses 28-31

The following commands have religious overtones. It may seem strange to us to combine cursing God and cursing a ruler in the same verse, it is not. In Israel's early days, the "ruler" appears to have been the tribal chief who was assumed to have been appointed by God. To "curse" such a person would be to curse the one who appointed him. To the Hebrew mind, an attack upon God or upon the divinely appointed leader would have been the same thing, blasphemy.

The next command literally says, "You shall not delay the offering from your harvest and your vintage." The Israelites were being commanded to bring their offerings from God's abundant blessings at the earliest possible moment. There is never an excuse for delaying the bringing of the offering to God. Although the tithe was practiced earlier (Genesis 14:20) and commanded later, (Leviticus 27:30) the first officially commanded offerings were these. The idea not to put off or to delay our offering to God is that once we have we tend to continue. God is faithful and blesses us daily; we should bless him with his portion of that blessing without delay.

The concept of the firstborn belonging to God was a common throughout the ancient Near East. This principle was not too binding upon Israel. It had been earlier stated (Exodus 13:2) that the firstborn were to be consecrated to God. Now as a part of the covenant law, this possession was set forth as an actual gift to God.

The fundamental assumption of the covenant law was that the Israelites were "You shall be holy men to Me." They were all responsible for functioning as priest. (Exodus 19:6) As such, they were not to eat anything that had not been properly killed. The blood of an animal, which was the symbol of life, had to be handled correctly. The flesh of any animal that had not been so killed was prohibited to them. As men were set apart for God, they had special obligations to fulfill.

Key Verses

Isaiah 8:19, Micah 5:12, Malachi 3:5, Genesis 14:20, Leviticus 27:30

Chapter 23

Verses 1-9

Other nations of the ancient world at times show a sense of justice. But only Israel from the beginning felt a divine compulsion toward justice for all. This was one of their national characteristics. The priest sought it as a matter of course. The Prophets proclaimed it. The wise men taught it. God's people were and are expected to practice justice.

The first set of stipulations deal with legal justice, justice within the law courts. They begin with a statement of truthfulness. The phrase "join hands" refers to the handshake following a legally binding agreement. They were prohibited from entering into such agreements with "wicked men" or from perjuring themselves. Neither were they to become a part of the majority when they were wrong. The will of the mob was never to become confused with justice.

The last stipulations have given interpreters trouble over the years. The Israelites were prohibited from "be partial to a poor man in his dispute." We might expect such warnings to be made in the case of great or wealthy men. However, the unexpected here really makes more sense. Everyone was aware of the tendency to be partial to the great man. But the tendency to be partial to a poor man is no less real and more subtle.

We also see commands relating to the treatment of "your enemy's" animals and property. These commands are not specifically related to the courts, there may be a legal background. The enemy may be referring to one who is the adversary in a lawsuit. Whether or not this is so, the obvious sense here was that responsibility for justice must always be placed above personal or legal relations. It was not far from this to the concept of "love your enemies" proclaimed by Jesus. (Matthew 5:44) The second instance would have required a greater commitment than the first. In the second case they were required to help an animal while the enemy was present. They could not leave "him with it." They had to help "him to lift it up." It is easier to be good to an enemy when he is not around but it is more important when he is.

The stipulations on justice give the other side of the rich-poor controversy. There is a different word for poor in verse 6 than that in verse 3. The first meant the man was impoverished. The one in verse 6 is usually used to refer to the "pious poor." Therefore this command had the purpose to see that the poor man who was right got justice.

Israel was also warned against leveling false charges, for such could bring about the death of one so charged. The term "wicked" here refers to the one who brought such a charge. Bribery was also identified as corruption, a pollution of the cause of justice.

Earlier Israel had been warned against wronging or oppressing a stranger, (Exodus 22-21) they were here commanded to see that the stranger had the same justice that anyone

else got. As a foundation for this command they were reminded of their own experience in Egypt. "since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger." From the beginning to the end Israel was expected to practice justice in all of their dealings.

Verses 10-19

The world in which Israel lived in, proper ritual demonstrated the people's devotion to their God. It was principle based that if one was going to serve God, he should do it worthily, in a manner which would bring glory to His name.

We now set forth three sacred festivals. Passover was not mentioned. This may be because it was assumed to be the first day of "unleavened bread." The "Feast of Harvest" was fifty days after Passover and later became known as Pentecost. (Called Shavuot, the Jewish festival also known as Pentecost means "fifty" and designates the fiftieth day after Passover.) Its purpose was to celebrate the beginning of the harvest. The third was the "Feast of Ingathering" which was later called the 'Feast of the Booths" and finally as the "Feast of the Tabernacles."

The blood and fat of an animal was considered to be sacred and required special handling. The "first fruits" of the earth were considered to be Gods, just as the first born of man and beast.

The Israelites were prohibited from boiling "You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother" was for a long time considered to be an inhumane practice. However, since archaeologist discovered and translated the great library of Canaanite at Ras Shamra, we now know that such a practice was a form of worship to a Canaanite god. Therefore the prohibition was a warning against doing anything that might be interpreted as having pagan overtones. It set forth the principle of avoiding any appearance of evil. The concept is still applicable to God's people today.

Verses 20-33

The covenant code comes to an end with both promises and exhortations. The basic promises from God concerned His leadership, guidance, fruitfulness, and ultimate victory.

The word translated as "angel" literally means messenger. The messenger was from God and was to guide Israel in following God.

We also have some basic warnings as well. Israel was not to rebel against God's messenger but to hearken to him. They were also warned against having any involvement with the inhabitants of Canaan. That Israel failed here is amply illustrated by the later messages of the prophets, condemning them for their Canaanite involvements.

The ultimate promise was the assurance of victory coupled with a warning that it would be slow in appearing. We are called upon to be obedient and faithful. We can only follow where he leads, waiting for his victory.

Key Verse

Matthew 5:44

Chapter 24

Verses 1-14

When the laws of the covenant were concluded, Moses was given instructions for sealing the covenant. This ceremony was important as it gave an outward testimony to an inner commitment.

The two older sons of Aaron Nadab and Abihu were to go up with Moses and Aaron. The two sons of Aaron were intended to follow the footsteps of Aaron as priest and leaders of Israel. Unfortunately, they failed to be faithful to the Lord and lost the privilege of service and ultimately, life itself. (Leviticus 10:1-2) The elders were to draw near to God as representatives to the whole of Israel. Moses was allowed to draw closer than the rest.

Moses reported "all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances" we cannot be sure but the words may refer to the Ten Commandments and ordinances may refer to the rest of the material in the covenant code. However, later in the same section God gave Moses the two tablets of stone which the Ten Commandments were written upon. The entire episode here is a bit unclear.

When Moses reports the words of the covenant the people committed themselves to it with which they had made their earlier commitment. (Exodus 19:8) The earlier commitment had been based only upon their knowledge of God. This renewed commitment was based upon a more detailed understanding of God's demand and expectations.

The record of writing the book of the commandments is the first record in the Old Testament of Moses writing laws down. We must remember that in the ancient Near East, oral traditions were the most common way of passing on people's history, its faith, and its cultural heritage. The fact that Moses wrote this down would indicate that it was considered of supreme importance.

There are two things that seem to be of significance in the ceremony of consecration. The "young men" served as priest. This was before the setting a part of a priesthood. Young men would have been needed at this point to overpower and handle the sacrificial oxen.

The other thing of significance was the handling of the blood. Blood was of significance as the source of life and therefore a gift of God. Blood had to be handled with particular care, further, in the ancient world; covenants were usually sealed by blood. An indication of how significant it was, Jesus picked up and developed this concept in the upper room on the night of His betrayal. (Matthew 26:28)

Following the sacrificial ceremony of ratification, there was a communal meal. The idea of a meal serving as the seal of a covenant arose quite early. This surely has some overtones for our understanding of the Lord's Supper.

With the meal over, Moses was called higher up the mountain to receive the tablets. The late evidence would indicate that these tablets only had the Ten Commandment upon them. (Exodus 31:18 Exodus 32:19 Exodus 34:1,28) The fact that Joshua was selected to go is an indication of the increasing importance he was being given in Israel.

Moses spent six days in preparation for his next encounter with God. When Moses was completely ready and the time was right God called to Moses. All the usual manifestations were present, the "cloud", and the "fire" and God's voice. From a distance the people could see the cloud and the smoke. But they could not know what was happening on the top of the mountain. As the days dragged on, the people's anxiety grew until it burst its bounds and overflowed in the experience of the golden calf. (Exodus 32)

Key Verse

Leviticus 10:1-2, Matthew 26:28

Worship That Demands the Best

Exodus 25 to 31:18

Prior to this we have seen God as the Lord of both history and nature as he prepared Moses, delivered Israel, and led them to Sinai. There He was seen as the absolute Lord of life. From this point, continuing through Leviticus and the early portion of Numbers, God presented Himself as the Lord of worship.

There were no atheists in the ancient Near East. Everyone worshiped gods of some kind. Long before the Exodus, Israel's ancestors were worshiping God. Their forms of worship had been similar to and occasionally identical with the worship of their neighbors. With the Exodus, however, they had been given a new experience with God. They needed new worship forms and facilities to express their new relationship to a new understanding of God. So they were given both new worship forms and new meanings for old forms.

Chapter 25

Verses 1-9

God first told Moses how the materials to build his tabernacle were to be obtained. The first principle was that the offering was to be completely voluntary, being received from every man "heart moves him you shall raise My contribution." Unlike other gods the Lord wants us to give out of the desire of our heart. (2 Corinthians 9:7) The word in Hebrew referred not to the seat of the emotions but to the seat of thought, purpose, and will. The offering was not to come from those who felt like giving, but from those who knew and were committed to the offering as the right thing to do.

God specified the needed materials. Some of the material was identified as to their purpose. God specified the ultimate purpose of the offering, "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me." The reason for the sanctuary was also stated as being that God might "dwell among them." The people knew that God was with them at Sinai. The future sanctuary was to be visible evidence of His continued presence.

Under the directions and purposes of God the offerings were to be used. It would be imperative that God's people use their resources in accord with His will. Nothing less will do. Much of the offerings specified were part of the plunder they had taken with them from the Egyptians.

Verses 10-40

Few were the objects of the interior but they were rich. Three objects were basic: the Ark of the Covenant, (Exodus 25:10-22) The Table of Showbread, (Exodus 25:23-30) The Golden Lampstand. (Exodus 25:31-40)

The ark was a small box to be overlaid with gold. (A cubit was the length from the tip of the fingers to the elbow, about eighteen inches.) The method given to carry the ark was to prevent anyone from ever touching the ark itself. The "mercy seat" comes from a Hebrew word that literally means to cover. This word is consistently used in the Old Testament with the theological concept of God's covering or atoning for sin. Here it is translated as "mercy seat" rather than by its more ordinary function of serving as a cover for the ark or box. On the top of the lid were soldered two small cherubim. (Cherubim/cherubs are angelic beings involved in the worship and praise of God.) Cherubim were regularly considered to be symbolic of the messengers and attendants of God. Later, in the Temple, two gigantic cherubim were erected. (2 Chronicles 3:10-13) In the ark was to be placed "testimony". This referred to the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. The entire ark was to serve as the place God would speak with Israel.

There was also to be a table just as luxuriously finished as the ark. The table was portable and designed to hold the utensils used in worship. There were "dishes and its pans" used

for incense offerings and "jars and its bowls" used for the drink offerings. The "bread of the Presence" was twelve flat cakes (Leviticus 24:5-6) which were set out fresh each morning and were removed each evening.

There was the Lampstand, which was called the Menorah, which is still one of the basic symbols of modern Judaism. The lamps upon the stand were primarily present for their practical value. They were to give light to the holy place within the tabernacle. In later times the light from the lamp came to symbolize the presence of God.

The beauty of the design and the worth of its content were surpassing. It is difficult to determine the actual weight of a talent. It seems to have varied from time to time. A talent was the largest measurement for weight in Israel and varied from about 70 to 130 pounds. The Lampstand itself with its branches and leaves apparently symbolized a tree. The almond tree later served as a reminder to Jeremiah that God was watching over His people. (Jeremiah 1:11-12)

In a final warning to Moses God said see that all of the furnishing was made in accord with God's directions. It was imperative that the people follow the plans that God had given them in their divinely appointed tasks. The worth of the furnishings served as an obvious reminder that they were to use their very best in His service.

Key Verse

2 Corinthians 9:7, 2 Chronicles 3:10-13, Leviticus 24:5-6, Jeremiah 1:11-12

Chapter 26

Verses 1-17

The wooden frames determined the outline of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was thirty cubits on a side (twenty frames of one and one-half cubits each) and about nine cubits on each end. (Six frames of one and one-half cubit each) The walls were ten cubits high. The rear was actually wider at the bottom than at the top, due to the shaping of the corner frames. (Exodus 26:23-24) The rear third of the tent was set apart from the holy place. It was called the "most holy" place, and later came to be known as the holy of holies. The luxurious hangings were on the interior only, with a roof and exterior covering of normal tent cloth. The holy place was lighted by the lamps upon the Lampstand. The most holy place was totally dark. It contained only the ark, with no auxiliary lamps.

Chapter 27

Verses 1-21

The altar stood outside of the tabernacle and was made of wood overlaid with bronze. On each of the four corners the horns were projected outward. The altar itself was hollow in order to make it easier to carry. In use it was probably filled with earth to keep the wood from burning.

There was a set of curtains in the front of the tabernacle to isolate the courtyard, which was considered to be holy. The east wall was not completely closed but had a screen so that it would not be open to profane viewing. The exterior vessels were not of the same luxury of the interior.

The final provision was the oil that would be used for the Lampstand in the holy place. Only the purest of olive oil was good enough for God's service. Also the lamp must burn continually.

The design of the entire complex was to proclaim to Israel the abiding presence of God and to demand from them, in response, faithful, obedient service. The complex was also portable indicating that God and they were going to be on the move. They were being led to a land beyond. The wilderness was not their home, nor was it Gods.

The Tabernacle of Moses

The tabernacle is a visual dwelling

Tabernacle means "tent," "place of dwelling" or "sanctuary." It was a sacred place where God chose to meet His people, the Israelites, during the 40 years they wandered in the desert under Moses' leadership. It was the place where the leaders and people came together to worship and offer sacrifices.

The tabernacle was first erected in the wilderness exactly one year after the Passover when the Israelites were freed from their Egyptian slavery (circa 1450 B.C.). It was a mobile tent with portable furniture that the people traveled with and set up wherever they pitched camp. The tabernacle would be in the center of the camp, and the 12 tribes of Israel would set up their tents around it according to tribe. The instruction on how to build the tabernacle was first given to Moses in the wilderness, who then gave the orders to the Israelites.

"...make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8)

"Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them." (Exodus 29:45-46)

And so God dwelled among His people in the tabernacle in the wilderness. He appeared as a pillar of cloud over the tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire by night in the sight of all Israel. The people would not set out on their journey unless the cloud lifted. It was an unmistakably powerful visual statement indicating God's presence among them.

God knew that the Israelites needed visual evidence of His presence. When Moses went up to Mount Sinai for 40 days and the people did not see or hear from him, they grew impatient and gathered their gold to form a golden calf that they worshipped in place of God. After ten generations of living in Egypt, it was not surprising that the Israelites mimicked the Egyptians in fashioning a visual idol of their own. This act of disobedience demonstrated their need to follow and worship a God who was visually tangible. God's provision of a tabernacle — itself a splendor to behold — not only allowed the people to sense His presence, but also to see their leader go in to meet with God in a concrete place and not disappear up a mountain.

The tabernacle of Moses is a lesson of unquestionable authority

The tabernacle was more than just a dwelling place. All the components of the tabernacle were part of an intricate visual aid to illustrate God's relationship with His people. One aspect of this relationship was God's requirement for complete obedience. God told Moses to create the tabernacle exactly the way He commanded. It was not to stray from God's blueprint.

“Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.” (Exodus 25:9)

To this end, God gave very specific instructions about the size of each component and the materials the Israelites were to use, as we will see in the following sections of this discussion. These seemingly cumbersome rules were not intended to burden the people, but to show God's unquestionable authority and holiness, and emphasize that people could only come to God on God's terms, not on their own. They had to obey reverently not only in the construction of the tabernacle, but also in the way they worshipped. Any irreverence or ritual uncleanness could result from an individual being cut off from his people or in death.

For example, the anointing oil for the tabernacle and the incense for the altar of incense (made from God's own prescribed formulas of spices) were both declared holy by God and could only be used for the purpose of the tabernacle; anyone else using the same formula for their own consumption would be cut off from Israel (Exodus 30:34-38). The special garments for the priests were holy; if they did not wear the right clothing in serving the Lord, they could die (Exodus 28:2, 43).

The wilderness tabernacle is a projection of God's redemptive plan

In the New Testament, John writes: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (John 1:14) This word “dwelling” is the same word for “tabernacle” in the Old Testament. In other words, God came in living flesh to dwell or to tabernacle among His people. As He walked upon the earth and lived among the Jews, Jesus Christ Himself fulfilled the picture of the Old Testament tabernacle. In that and many other ways, as we will see, the tabernacle really was a prophetic projection of the Lord's redemptive plan for His people.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’” (Rev. 21:3)

Tabernacle and Basic Layout

The tabernacle consisted of a tent-like structure (the tabernacle proper) covered by rug-like coverings for a roof, and an external courtyard (150 feet by 75 feet). The whole compound was surrounded by a high fence about 7 feet in height. The fence was made of linen hangings held by pillars.

The tent (tabernacle proper) was divided into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The tent was made of acacia wood boards overlaid with gold and fitted together to form the walls, measuring 45 by 15 feet. On top, four layers of curtains acted as a roof to shield the tabernacle from sun and rain: The innermost layer was woven with fine linen and embroidered with figures of cherubim (angels), the second layer was made of goat's hair, the third layer was made of rams' skins dyed red, and the outermost layer was made of porpoise skins. The curtains were pinned to the ground with loops and clasps.

The specific layout of the tabernacle and its courtyard is significant because it illustrates God's prescribed way for man to approach Him.

The whole compound was surrounded by a high fence with only one entrance. A person could not simply come from any direction into the tabernacle as he pleased — he had to enter through the one gate, which was always located to the east (so that people were facing west when they entered the tabernacle — a direct opposition to the pagan sun worshippers of the day who always faced east). Upon entering the gate, he encountered the brazen altar, where he was to present his animal offering, and then hand the reigns over to the priests, who make atonement and intercession for him in the tent.

This setup informed the Israelites that they could only come to God in the way He prescribed. There was no other way. As we will see even more clearly in the following

sections, God is using the Old Testament tabernacle to tell us that we, too, must come to Him only through the way He has provided for us — Jesus Christ.

The Gate

There was only one gate by which people could enter into the tabernacle courtyard. The gate was 30 feet wide. It was located directly in the center of the outer court on the east end. The gate was covered by a curtain or screen made of finely twisted linen in blue, purple and scarlet.

The one and only gate is a representation of Christ as the only way through which one could fellowship with God and worship Him. To do this, one must enter in through the gate to the place where God dwelled. Jesus said in his famous “I am” statements:

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) and

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” (John 10:9)

He also said:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14)

The act of entering the gate to the tabernacle was significant to the Israelites. By entering, one could find forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God. The first thing that one saw upon coming through the gate was the brazen altar, which served as a reminder of man’s sinfulness and his need for a blood sacrifice in order to be fellowship with God. One needed to repent and offer sacrifices for their sin. Those who did not repent were not entering this “narrow way.”

The Brazen Altar

The brazen altar, bronze altar, or altar of sacrifice was situated right inside the courtyard upon entering the gate to the tabernacle. The Hebrew root for altar means “to slay” or “slaughter.” The Latin word alta means “high.” An altar is a “high place for sacrifice/slaughter.” The altar stood raised on a mound of earth, higher than its surrounding furniture. This is a projection of Christ, our sacrifice, lifted up on the cross, His altar, which stood on a hill called Golgotha.

The altar was made of wood from the acacia tree and overlaid with bronze (usually symbolic of judgment on sin in the Bible), measuring 7.5 feet on all four sides and 4.5 feet

deep. Four horns projected from the top four corners and a bronze grating was inside to hold the animal.

The altar was the place for burning animal sacrifices. It showed the Israelites that the first step for sinful man to approach a holy God was to be cleansed by the blood of an innocent creature. For a sin offering, a person had to bring an animal — a male one without blemish or defect from the flock or herd — to the priest at the tabernacle gate.

“He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.” (Leviticus 1:4)

By laying his hand upon the head of the offering, the person was identifying with the sacrifice. His sin and guilt was being moved from himself to the animal. The priest would then slaughter the animal, sprinkle its blood in front of the veil of the Holy Place, burn the sacrifice, and pour the rest of it at the bottom of the altar. Blood is a significant agent of atonement (i.e., covering for sin; click on link to read a more detailed definition) and cleansing in the Old Testament.

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.” (Leviticus 17:11)

“The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22)

The Significance of the Tabernacle Sacrifices

Although the blood of the sacrifices covered over the sins of the Israelites, they had to perform the sacrifices year after year, for they were not freed permanently of a guilty conscience. However, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, came as the ultimate and last sacrifice for mankind when He offered up His life. As Isaiah prophesied, the Christ would be like a lamb that is led to slaughter and pierced for our transgressions. His blood was sprinkled and poured out at the cross for us. The Bible says much about this:

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (Mark 14:24)

“For you know that ... you were redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:13-14)

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ...By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. ...And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.” (Hebrews 10:10, 14, 18)

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Horns were a symbol power and strength in biblical times. When the sacrifice was made, blood was dabbed on the horns of the altar, signifying the power of the blood to atone for sins. In the same way, there is mighty power in the blood of Christ. Jesus is the “horn of our salvation” (Psalm 18:2, Luke 1:69).

The animal sacrifices bore reference to the Passover lambs, which the Israelites slaughtered in like manner to save their firstborns from the last plague of God's judgment on Egypt (Exodus 12:1-13). Similarly, as the Passover lambs were eaten after they were slaughtered, some of the sacrificial lambs also were eaten. Just as the sacrificial lambs were sacrificed and eaten, so Jesus' body was sacrificed and "eaten." It was no coincidence that on the night before the Passover when Jesus was crucified, He “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body’” (Matthew 26:26). Earlier Jesus had taught His disciples:

“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” (John 6:53-56)

Jesus Himself is the Lamb of God as well as the Passover Lamb for those who believe in Him.

The Laver

The laver, or basin, was a large bowl filled with water located halfway between the brazen altar and the Holy Place. Although God did not give specific measurements for the Laver, it was to be made entirely of bronze. The priests were to wash their hands and their feet in it before entering the Holy Place.

The laver was located in a convenient place for washing and stood as a reminder that people need cleansing before approaching God. The priests atoned for their sins through a sacrifice at the brazen altar, but they cleansed themselves at the laver before serving in the Holy Place, so that they would be pure and not die before a holy God.

The application for believers today is that we are forgiven through Christ's work on the cross, but we are washed through His Word. We need to be washed daily in His Word to cleanse ourselves, so that we can serve and minister before Him.

"...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27)

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled [with blood] to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22)

The Menorah

After washing their hands and feet at the laver, the priests could enter the Holy Place, which was the first room in the tent of the tabernacle. There were three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place: the menorah, the table of showbread and the golden altar of incense.

The menorah, also called the "golden lampstand" or "candlestick," stood at the left side of the Holy Place. It was hammered out of one piece of pure gold. Like for the laver, there were no specific instructions about the size of the menorah, but the fact that it was fashioned out of one piece of pure gold would have limited its size.

The lampstand had a central branch from which three branches extended from each side, forming a total of seven branches. Seven lamps holding olive oil and wicks stood on top of the branches. Each branch looked like that of an almond tree, containing buds, blossoms and flowers. The priests were instructed to keep the lamps burning continuously.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the Lord from evening till morning, continually.'" (Leviticus 24:1-3)

The lampstand was the only source of light in the Holy Place, so without it, the priests would have been moping around in the dark. The light shone upon the table of showbread and the altar of incense, enabling the priests to fellowship with God and intercede on behalf of God's people. Just as the lampstand was placed in God's dwelling place so that the priests could approach God, Jesus, the "true light that gives light to every man" (John 1:9) came into the world so that man could see God and not live in spiritual darkness anymore. Jesus said:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” (John 12:46)

Jesus is represented by the main branch of the lampstand, and we as believers are represented by the six branches that extend from original branch. Having believed, we are now living as “children of light” (Ephesians 5:8) who draw our source of light from Jesus, the true light. Jesus calls us “light of the world” and commands us to “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5: 14, 16). Not only so, but the branches serve as a picture of Jesus’ description of our relationship with him: “I am the vine, you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Two other significant symbols that can be seen from include the fact that it was made of pure gold (not gold plated) and had seven branches. Pure gold is a representation of the deity and perfection of Jesus Christ, and seven is the number of completeness in the Bible. The believer is made complete by the perfection of Christ.

The Table of Showbread

The table of showbread was a small table made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. It measured 3 feet by 1.5 feet and was 2 feet, 3 inches high. It stood on the right side of the Holy Place across from the lampstand and held 12 loaves of bread, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The priests baked the bread with fine flour and it remained on the table before the Lord for a week; every Sabbath day the priests would remove it and eat it in the Holy Place, then put fresh bread on the table. Only priests could eat the bread, and it could only be eaten in the Holy Place, because it was holy.

“Showbread” also was called “bread of the presence” because it was to be always in the Lord’s presence. The table and the bread were a picture of God’s willingness to fellowship and communion (literally speaking, sharing something in common) with man. It was like an invitation to share a meal, an extension of friendship. Eating together often is an act of fellowship. God was willing for man to enter into His presence to fellowship with Him, and this invitation was always open.

Jesus exemplified this when He ate with tax collectors, prostitutes and the sinners of Jewish society. But this was more than just a gesture of friendship on earth. Jesus came to call sinners to Him, make them right with God, so that they could enjoy everlasting fellowship with God.

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died.

But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.” (John 6:35, 49-50)

God so desires our fellowship that He was willing to come to earth from heaven as our “bread of life” to give eternal life to all those who would partake in it. At Jesus’ last Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus described Himself as bread again:

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’” (Matthew 26:26)

Jesus’ broken body is our only access to fellowship with God. Today, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, or communion, to remember this important truth. And today, as in the day of Moses’ tabernacle, God still desires to have fellowship and sit down for a feast with His people.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” (Revelations 3:20)

The Golden Altar of Incense

The golden altar of incense, which is not to be confused with the brazen altar, sat in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This altar was smaller than the brazen altar. It was a square with each side measuring 1.5 feet and was 3 feet high. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. Four horns protruded from the four corners of the altar.

God commanded the priests to burn incense on the golden altar every morning and evening, the same time that the daily burnt offerings were made. The incense was to be left burning continually throughout the day and night as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. It was made of an equal part of four precious spices (stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense) and was considered holy. God commanded the Israelites not to use the same formula outside the tabernacle to make perfume for their own consumption; otherwise, they were to be cut off from their people (Exodus 30:34-38).

The incense was a symbol of the prayers and intercession of the people going up to God as a sweet fragrance. God wanted His dwelling to be a place where people could approach Him and pray to Him.

“...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isaiah 56:7)

The picture of prayers wafting up to heaven like incense is captured in David’s psalm and also in John’s vision in Revelations:

“May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” (Psalm 141:2)

“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. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” (Revelations 8:3-4)

The golden altar, furthermore, is a representation of Christ, who is our intercessor before God the Father. During His days on earth, Jesus prayed for the believers. He was like the high priest of the tabernacle, who bore the names of each of the Israelite tribes on his breastplate before God. Just before He was betrayed and sentenced to death, Jesus interceded for His disciples and all believers, asking God to guard them from evil and sanctify them by His Word, and that they may see God’s glory and be a witness to the world (John 17:1-26). Today, Jesus still is our high priest at the Father’s side, interceding for God’s people:

“Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34)

Since we have been forgiven of our sins through the blood of Christ, we also come boldly in prayer in Jesus’ name. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we are praying based on the work He has done and not on our own merit. It is in His powerful name that we are saved and baptized, and in His name we live, speak and act.

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)

The horns of the golden altar were sprinkled with blood from the animal sacrifice to cleanse and purify it from the sins of the Israelites (Leviticus 4:7, 16:18). Just as the horns on the brazen altar represent the power of Christ’s blood to forgive sins, the horns on golden altar signify the power of His blood in prayer as we confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:15-16)

The Holy of Holies and the Veil

Within the Holy Place of the tabernacle, there was an inner room called the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place. Judging from its name, we can see that it was a most sacred room, a place no ordinary person could enter. It was God’s special dwelling place in the

midst of His people. During the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, God appeared as a pillar of cloud or fire in and above the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube — its length, width and height were all equal to 15 feet.

A thick curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. This curtain, known as the "veil," was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. There were figures of cherubim (angels) embroidered onto it. Cherubim, spirits who serve God, were in the presence of God to demonstrate His almighty power and majesty. They also guarded the throne of God. These cherubim were also on the innermost layer of covering of the tent. If one looked upward, they would see the cherubim figures.

The word "veil" in Hebrew means a screen, divider or separator that hides. What was this curtain hiding? Essentially, it was shielding a holy God from sinful man. Whoever entered into the Holy of Holies was entering the very presence of God. In fact, anyone except the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies would die. Even the high priest, God's chosen mediator with His people, could only pass through the veil and enter this sacred dwelling once a year, on a prescribed day called the Day of Atonement.

The picture of the veil was that of a barrier between man and God, showing man that the holiness of God could not be trifled with. God's eyes are too pure to look on evil and He can tolerate no sin (Habakkuk 1:13). The veil was a barrier to make sure that man could not carelessly and irreverently enter into God's awesome presence. Even as the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he had to make some meticulous preparations: He had to wash himself, put on special clothing, bring burning incense to let the smoke cover his eyes from a direct view of God, and bring blood with him to make atonement for sins.

"But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance." (Hebrews 9:7)

So the presence of God remained shielded from man behind a thick curtain during the history of Israel. However, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross changed that. When He died, the curtain in the Jerusalem temple was torn in half, from the top to the bottom. Only God could have carried out such an incredible feat because the veil was too high for human hands to have reached it, and too thick to have torn it. (The Jerusalem temple, a replica of the wilderness tabernacle, had a curtain that was about 60 feet in height, 30 feet in width and four inches thick.) Furthermore, it was torn from top down, meaning this act must have come from above.

As the veil was torn, the Holy of Holies was exposed. God's presence was now accessible to all. Shocking as this may have been to the priests ministering in the temple that day, it is indeed good news to us as believers, because we know that Jesus' death has atoned

for our sins and made us right before God. The torn veil illustrated Jesus' body broken for us, opening the way for us to come to God. As Jesus cried out "It is finished!" on the cross, He was indeed proclaiming that God's redemptive plan was now complete. The age of animal offerings was over. The ultimate offering had been sacrificed.

We can now boldly enter into God's presence, "the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf." (Hebrews 6:19-20)

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body ...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith." (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The Holy of Holies is a representation of heaven itself, God's dwelling place, which we have access now through Christ. In Revelations, John's vision of heaven — the New Jerusalem — also was a perfect square, just as the Holy of Holies was (Revelation 21:16).

"For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ...But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:24-26)

The Ark of the Covenant and Atonement Cover

Within the Holy of Holies, shielded from the eye of the common man, was one piece of furniture comprising two parts: the Ark of the Covenant and the atonement cover (or "mercy seat") on top of it. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold inside and out. It was 3 feet, 9 inches long and 2 feet, 3 inches wide and high. God commanded Moses to put in the ark three items: a golden pot of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. We will discuss these three objects in further detail below.

The atonement cover was the lid for the ark. On top of it stood two cherubim (angels) at the two ends, facing each other. The cherubim, symbols of God's divine presence and power, were facing downward toward the ark with outstretched wings that covered the atonement cover. The whole structure was beaten out of one piece of pure gold. The atonement cover was God's dwelling place in the tabernacle. It was His throne, flanked by angels. God said to Moses:

"There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites." (Exodus 25:22)

“Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.” (Leviticus 16:2)

Other Scriptures also speak of God’s throne:

“...the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.” (2 Samuel 6:2)

“O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.” (Isaiah 37:16)

Above the ark and the atonement cover, God appeared in His glory in “unapproachable light” (1 Timothy 6:16). This light is sometimes referred to as the Shekinah glory. The word Shekinah, although it does not appear in our English bibles, has the same roots as the word for tabernacle in Hebrew and refers to the presence of the Lord.

Because the ark was God’s throne among His people, it was a symbol of His presence and power with them wherever it went. There are quite a number of miracles recorded in the Old Testament surrounding the ark: With the presence of the ark, the waters of the River Jordan divided so the Israelites could cross on dry land, and the walls of Jericho fell so that the Israelites could capture it (Joshua 3:14-17, 6:6-21). Yet the ark could not be treated with irreverence because it was also a symbol of God’s judgment and wrath. When the Israelites fought their enemies the Philistines during the time of the prophet Samuel, they disregarded the commands of the Lord and took the ark out to the battlefield with them, “summoning” God’s presence. God caused the Philistines to win the battle and “the glory departed from Israel, for the ark of the Lord was taken” (1 Samuel 4:22). However, God showed His power to the Philistines when He caused their idol, Dagon, to fall to the ground when the ark was placed next to it, and several Philistine cities were plagued heavily when the ark was in their midst (1 Samuel 5). Ultimately, the ark was returned to Israel.

Articles in the Ark of the Covenant

What may seem strange to us today is that, hidden in the special golden box representing God’s presence were not treasures and precious gems, but three unlikely items: a jar of bread, a stick and two stones. What were these curious keepsakes and why did God want them in His ark?

The three articles represented some of the most embarrassing and disgraceful events in the history of the Israelites.

First, the pot of manna:

“This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer [portion for one man] of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’” (Exodus 16:32)

God had provided this bread-like food for the Israelites when they grumbled during the wanderings in the desert. It was bread from heaven! He continued to provide the food daily and faithfully, but the people were not one bit thankful. They complained and wanted something else. The pot of manna was an uncomfortable reminder that despite what God had provided for them, the Israelites had rejected God’s provision.

Second, Aaron’s staff that had budded: The people, out of jealousy, rebelled against Aaron as their high priest. To resolve the dispute, God commanded the people to take 12 sticks written with the names of the leader of each tribe and place them before the ark overnight. The next day, Aaron’s rod from the house of Levi had budded with blossoms and almonds. God confirmed his choice of Aaron’s household as the priestly line.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die.’” (Numbers 17:10)

The staff reminded the Israelites that on more than one occasion, they had rejected God’s authority.

Third, the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments: God had chosen the Israelites as His special people. For the Israelites to qualify for that distinction, God had demanded one thing. They must obey His Law, the Ten Commandments. This was a conditional agreement:

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5-6)

The Israelites had said heartily, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” in response to God’s covenant (Exodus 19:8). But how did they fare in fulfilling their end of the contract? Miserably. It was impossible for them to keep the Ten Commandments perfectly. Over and over again, they violated God’s holy Law, and God made it clear to them the consequences of their sin by sending plagues, natural hazards and foreign armies upon them. The stone tablets in the ark were a reminder that the Israelites had rejected God’s right standard of living.

These three articles were preserved in the ark throughout Israel’s history as an unpleasant symbol of man’s sins and shortcomings, a reminder of how they rejected

God's provision, authority and right standard of living. It pointed to man as a helpless sinner.

It may have been uncomfortable to think that God's splendor was so close to the three articles associated with man's sinfulness. But this is where God's provision comes in. When God looked down from His presence above the ark, He did not see the reminders of sin. They were covered by a necessary object — the atonement cover.

The Atonement Cover

Every year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Bringing burning incense to shield his eyes from a direct view of God's glory, he sprinkled blood from a bull onto the atonement cover for his and his household's sins, then sprinkled blood from a goat for all the sins of Israel. God promised that when He saw the blood, it would cover over man's sin. (To atone for means to cover over — hence the name atonement cover.) God did not see the sin anymore but the provision instead, and it appeased His wrath.

The Israelites found acceptance with God by believing His word to be true — that when their sins were covered by blood, God temporarily overlooked their sins as if they had been obliterated. But Jesus Christ has become our permanent atonement cover. Through Jesus' blood, our sins have been covered over. When God looks at us, He doesn't see our sin, but the provision: His own Son. Jesus lay down His life for us as an innocent sacrifice so that God would look on us and see His perfection.

The atonement cover was God's throne in the midst of the Israelites. God is on His throne today in heaven and Jesus, our high priest, is at His right side. When we come to God now, we approach a throne of grace.

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

Articles in the Ark — Revisited

The three items in the ark that served as a sore reminder of man's shortcomings have taken on a different meaning since Jesus Christ redeemed us from our sins. Let's review the three articles and see how they point to Christ.

First, the pot of manna: When Jesus came and walked on earth, he didn't reject God's provision. Rather, He became God's provision to us. Manna, the bread from heaven, in itself did not impart life. But Jesus told us that He is the true bread from heaven.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. I am the bread of

life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.” (John 6:32, 48-50)

Second, Aaron’s budding staff: Jesus didn’t reject God’s authority. Instead, He submitted Himself to the Father’s will and died on the cross.

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” (John 6:38)

But He came back to life like Aaron’s budding rod, “the firstfruits from the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:15-26)

Third, the Ten Commandments: Jesus didn’t reject God’s right standard of living. He lived a sinless life and obeyed God’s law perfectly, becoming our perfect sacrifice and intercessor. His sacrifice instituted a new covenant that was not based on the Law.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” (Romans 3:20-22)

http://the-tabernacle-place.com/articles/what_is_the_tabernacle

Chapter 28

Verses 1-43

The robe of the priest was described in detail, but some of the references are unclear to us since we are so far removed from the times. The garments were to be set apart or holy from ordinary clothing. The garments were to be for the purpose of being "for glory and for beauty." The garments then were a symbol of the priest social status in rank as well as their particular relationship to God. The garments of Aaron were those of the High Priest, and were much more ornate than those of his sons, who were just ordinary priest.

The “ephod” may have been a vest like garment supported by two straps that were fastened at the shoulder by two stone clasps, which were engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel. When the High Priest was serving in the tabernacle he was bearing with him the entire nation of Israel.

Upon the priest chest was the “breastplate of judgment” that may have been a small pouch hung across the chest. It was so called because within it was the sacred lots, "Urim and the Thummim." These names literally mean “the Lights and the Perfections.” They may have been used to describe the nature of God whose will they were thought to reveal.

There are numerous instances in the Bible where lots were cast to determine the will of God. The pouch in which the lots were kept was the lodging place of the judgments of God. The pouch was decorated with twelve stones and served the same purpose as the stone claps of the ephod.

On the skirts of the priestly robe were the golden bells that were intended to ring as the priest moved about in the holy place. This allowed the people outside to know that the priest was not dead. That he was alive and moving demonstrated that their offering had been accepted by God.

“Pomegranates were ancient symbols of fruitfulness. Whether they had meaning here or were merely decorative is unclear. Most likely, they intended to represent Israel’s fruitfulness as a gift from God.

The golden plate on the turban was engraved with the motto "Holy to the LORD." It was symbolic of Israel’s offering to God. It had the purpose of making them acceptable before God.

Near the end of the priestly garments was the commands “anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them.” Anointing was done with holy oil and set apart that person or thing specifically to God’s service. “Ordain” as used here, literally means “you shall fill their hand.” This reference probably meant to put in his hand the tasks of the priesthood. Consecration was to set someone apart, to make them holy, for the service of God.

After the description of the garments for the ordinary priest were the specifications of the “linen breeches.” This was probably designed to indicate that Israel’s worship was in no way to be similar to the fertility cults of the surrounding nations. Other nations played up the sexual nature of their worship, Israel demonstrated that their worship had no sexual overtones at all.

Chapter 29

Verses 1-46

In the setting a part of the priest for service to God there are some basic principles which have some permanent significance. The ceremonies of washing, cleansing, anointing, and offering the special sacrifices were preformed to show that a priest could not lead others further in the service of God than he had gone himself. In order to serve God, one must be both clean and pure, as well as being set apart by God.

The washing away of all that was unclean was probably the forerunner of Christian baptism. The priesthood was to belong to the family of Aaron by a “perpetual statute.”

There were three types of animal sacrifices: a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a wave offering. The sin and burnt offerings had been used over the years by the Israelites but

for persons other than priest. The final offering, though similar to other wave offerings in the Old Testament, was specifically designed as the offering of ordination.

Each offering had a separate meaning for the priest. The sin offering was to cleanse the priest of their sins. The burnt offering, which was wholly consumed, was symbolic of their total devotion to the will and service of God. The priest laid their hands on the heads of the animals to show they were identifying themselves with them. There are other symbols present with the wave offering of ordination. Blood was used in the sense of life and touching it to the ear, thumb, and toe showed that God had given special life to these organs. The priest was to hear and obey the voice of God, while his hands and feet were to be devoted to the divine service.

In the wave offering a portion of the animal was moved towards the altar and then away from it, rather than in a right to left motion. The symbolism here was that the offering was being given to God and then being given back to the priest by God. Throughout the history of Israel these portions were the payment to the priest. This was their "It shall be for Aaron and his sons as their portion forever from the sons of Israel."

The seven day devoted to the ordination of the priest was probably quite literal, and it carried the idea that they were completely devoted to God. Seven days of ordination was also to signify that every day of the week was to be devoted to their service of God. During this ceremony, not only were the priest sanctified; the altar was also sanctified.

The laws concerning the daily sacrifices were next given. These later came to be the heart of the Hebrew sacrificial system. The purpose of these daily sacrifices was set forth as indicating that as Israel presented her sacrifices at the door of the "tent of meeting," so God would meet with them and reveal his word to them.

As Moses, the priest, and the people were going through these symbolic motions, the actual consecration of both persons and objects was done by God. His grace made this effective. This purpose of this ritual and this consecration was that God "I will dwell among the sons of Israel." Thiers was a ritual to help the Israelites to remember that is was their God who redeemed them from Egypt. The final phrase "I am the LORD their God" is uniquely a covenant phrase. The Israelites were His people through the Exodus and the covenant; they had a special ritual of worship.

Chapter 30

Verses 1-10

The altar of incense was a smaller version of the larger altar of sacrifice in front of the tabernacle. This place was in front of the veil in the holy place which shut off the most holy place. Two times during the day incense was to be burned on this altar. Apparently

the reason was to send up a cloud of smoke which was to remind Israel of the presence of God.

There were four small horns on the upper corners of the altar. The ceremony of annual atonement for the altar is probably to be understood as a part of the ritual of the great Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 16 Leviticus 23:26-32) The altar had to be atoned because it belonged to sinful people. In the Old Testament, objects were considered to have qualities which were attributing only to people in modern times,

Verses 11-16

Anytime there was a census in Israel they were supposed to pay a tax to the sanctuary. This was "for the service of the tent of meeting." There were no specifications for when the census was to be taken or how often. It was such a census that gave the Book of Numbers its name. (Numbers 1) Disregard for this census tax gave problems in King David's time. (2 Samuel 24) Since the people of Israel were God's army, in time of crisis a census must have been needed to determine the availability of fighting men. In times such as this, since Israel as a whole was God's firstborn, each man needed to be ransomed. In this time there was no coined money, so the taxes were assessed by weight. The "shekel of the sanctuary" was a standard weight, equivalent to about two-fifths of an ounce.

Verses 17-21

We do not know the size of the bronze laver but apparently it was rather small. The laver held water for the priest in their ceremonial cleansing before they entered the tent of meeting or before they offered a sacrifice upon the altar. The cleansing was an obvious task as the priest would need to wash after slaughtering the sacrificial animal. The expression "so that they will not die" clearly indicated that those who served in holy worship must be clean. Cleansing the outer man was symbolic of the cleansing of the inner man.

Verses 22-33

Anointing was intended to set an object or person apart to God. The amount of holy oil to be prepared would have been quite large. A "hin" was about one gallon. The total amount prepared would have been about thirty eight pounds plus the weight of a gallon of olive oil. This anointing oil could not be used for any other purpose and to do so would invite punishment by death. That appears to be the meaning of "cut off from his people."

Verses 34-38

The incense used was described as "most holy." In contrast to the "holy oil" the incense was used closer to the ark and therefore closer to God. Not all of the recipe of rare spices can be presently identified. Frankincense is regularly indentified as quite valuable. The addition of salt is an intriguing idea. Salt may have been nothing more than a preservative,

but that is unlikely. The fact that sharing salt between two people was considered their seal upon a covenant relationship was probably the bases of this command. Israel offering their salt to God was probably considered their seal upon the covenant relation that God offered. As in the case of the oil, violation of the rules for the use of the incense was punishable by death.

Key Verse

Leviticus 23:26-32

Chapter 31

Verses 1-11

The tasks now known that had to be performed in the construction of the sacred objects and vestments, God then indicated that He had appointed two men as leaders and others as helpers in accomplishing these tasks. The name Bezalel means “in God’s shadow,” while Oholiab means “my tent is the Father.” These names show that their parents found sustenance in the presence of God. This heritage certainly must have made an impact upon these men.

Both of these men had been gifted by God to enable them to accomplish the tasks set before them. Bezalel, the apparent leader, as he was listed first and with much greater qualifications, was said to have been filled with the “spirit of God.” As evidence, he had been given “ability,” “intelligence,” “knowledge,” and “craftsmanship.”

God had given abilities and skills to other men that they might be utilized in doing the works necessary for the preparation of the tabernacle and its appointments. Along with their skills came a promise from God that they would be faithful and obedient in their work. "According to all that I have commanded you."

Verses 12-17

Throughout the Old Testament the observance of the Sabbath was considered an outward sign of Israel’s covenant commitment. It was a sign that God had set them apart unto Himself. The pronouncement of the death penalty for those who violated the Sabbath shows how seriously it must be taken. Though this law was not enforced regularly it was once enforced in the wilderness. (Numbers 15:32-36) the Sabbath laws also served as a bases of early attempts to execute Jesus. (John 5:16-18)

The base for keeping the Sabbath was again set forth as the rest of God from His creation activities. As a memorial to God’s creative activity and as a permanent sign to their covenant relation, they were to keep the Sabbath. For the Christian, the one day in seven

which we observe stands as a memorial to the resurrection that symbolizes God's new creation in Christ Jesus and to our covenant with Him.

Verse 18

With all the instructions Moses needed given by God for the preparation of Israel's worship facilities, God then gave Moses two "tables of the testimony." It is generally accepted that what was written in these two tables were the Ten Commandments. When Moses had destroyed them God replaced them. (Exodus 34:28-29)

The expression "written by the finger of God" might offer a possible problem. It may be literal and therefore God would have written these words in stone. On the other hand the expression "This is the finger of God" as used in Exodus 8:19, would indicate that the expression may have referred to the power of God at work through a dedicated Moses. Looking further, when the tablets were replaced, God told Moses "I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered." But when it was done it was done by the command of God. (Exodus 34:27-28) Either way the point is the same: The message came from God and with His authority.

Key Verses

Numbers 15:32-36, John 5:16-18

Renewal That Follows Rebellion

Exodus 32:1 TO 34:35

The events of this section were beginning while Moses was on the Mountain with God. The basic theme is common to the Old Testament: rebellion, restoration, and renewal. The question and answer of these events is simple: "Is there mercy and forgiveness for stubborn rebels just as there was deliverance for helpless slaves?" the answer came forth with a resounding "Yes!"

If there was any doubt of Moses' basic character it was removed in these events. Moses resisted the temptation of self pride and stepped forward as the great intercessor of the Old Testament. Moses showed his total devotion to the people and ministry which God had called him. Moses' anger was violent. But his violence sprang from his love, not from any lesser emotion.

Chapter 32

Moses had gone up on the mountain to be with God disappearing in the cloud of smoke. The Israelite people were waiting down below. Up to this point the emotions of the Hebrew people had been stretched to the breaking point. There had been the up and down moments in Egypt waiting for Pharaoh to let them go. Then wandering in the wilderness

and being pinned against the Red Sea by Pharaoh's chariots and then God parting the waters for their final deliverance from the Egyptians. On the heels of that experience came the high and low moments of the wilderness, as well as the exhausting experience of their journey to the mountain. This had led to the terrifying and wonderful confrontation of the giving of the covenant.

Now their leader had disappeared upon the mountain with God. The Israelites may have waited patiently for a few days; but, as the time of Moses' absence drew out, they became restless and unsure. They were used to excitement now suddenly the peace and calm of the desert began to hang heavy upon them. Further, they may have been a fear that something may have happened to Moses. This is the background we have seen as we examine their rebellion.

Verses 1-6

People have a tendency that if something is not happening then there is nothing there. When God was not doing something visible it is assumed that He is not there. The Israelites had failed to accept what God had done for them. Their almost contemptuous description of Moses as "the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt" showed that they had failed to recognize that it was God who had redeemed them.

They also showed a lack of trust. Their statement "we do not know what has become of him" clearly demonstrates their lack of concern for Moses and their lack of trust in God. The God who had constantly led and rescued them could well have taken care of Moses on the mountain.

Israel wanted a leader that they could see, something tangible that could guide them. They approached Aaron and this gave him a real opportunity for leadership. At the very least Aaron should have reminded them of the laws prohibiting idols. At best Aaron could have exhorted them and led them away from the evil they were planning. Aaron did neither. Instead, he submitted to their wants and became a leader in their apostasy. Like so many that would follow him Aaron chose that which was popular instead of the prophetic way.

There is somewhat of a question of the "molten calf" which we need to note. The immediate impression is that it was solid gold which was molded and then carved. However, the fact that it would later be burnt and then its residue "ground it to powder" would indicate it was a wooden carving overlaid with gold.

The word calf would have been better translated as bull. The choice of a bull to represent their God was probably based upon the Canaanite Baal worship. The Baals were frequently represented by the figure of a bull. In trying to understand there are two things to consider. First, they were not yet convinced that God was the God for them. Second, neither were they convinced that they should not worship an image. We need to

remember that they were fresh out of slavery in Egypt. This new freedom was as yet more than they were able to cope with.

The greatest tragedy was that the Hebrews gave their handmade god credit for their deliverance from Egypt. It was a sad day for Israel. Giving the credit for the acts of mercy of God to some other force or power is a frequent temptation. We too face the ever real temptation to serve things for their real or imagined power. Although somewhat more subtle, such service is little different from Israel's rebellion.

Aaron saw that they were going to worship the bull "he built an altar before it." It was probably an earthen altar or loose stones. It is obvious that this was not a sudden burst of misguided exuberance that led them to worship the golden bull. It took time and effort to erect an altar and this demonstrates there was organization to their idolatry.

Some have suggested that Aaron's proclamation that "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD" was a brave attempt to salvage something of worship to Yahweh out of this rebellion. There is no indication that the Old Testament ever took any such view of his action. It is more likely that Aaron was identifying the God of Israel with Baal. Such identification and merging was precisely what the prophets attacked so vehemently in Israel's subsequent history. Complete open rebellion was viewed with less hostility than this kind of consolidation. The Israelites were saying that all gods are alike. The Bible clearly teaches that the God of Israel is unique.

On the day of celebration they offered the typical sacrifices, the "burnt offerings" and the "peace offerings." This was followed by the typical communal meal. Following this, they "rose up to play." This expression may suggest the type of sexual orgies that accompanied the worship in the Canaanite fertility cults. These cults were dedicated to the Baals is another indication that the "bull" was probably to be identified with the Baals of Canaan.

This worship would be the lowest aspects of human nature. That it was ascribed to the worship of the God of Israel who in the Ten Commandments had revealed is moral nature was both unbelievable and an unbearable insult. This whole event could go neither unnoticed nor unpunished.

Verses 7-14

Abruptly the scene shifts from the lighthearted merrymaking in the valley to the heartbreak on the mountain. God informed Moses of the sin of Israel, breaking into their communion with the abrupt command, "Go down." The contrast of these two scenes makes the spiritual gulf all the more real.

There is a change in pronouns which make this more emphatic. "Your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." Israel had repudiated God; now God was repudiating Israel. Such is always the way with sin.

There are many dimensions to Israel's rebellion. They had "corrupted" themselves. This refers to the marring, spoiling effects of sin. They had "They have quickly turned aside." It was not a gradual drift away from God but a sudden, deliberate choice. They had made "a molten calf," which was a deliberate violation of the covenant. They had given credit to the idol for doing what God had done. Such was the nature of Israel's sin. God then described them as a "stiff-necked people." This was a common Old Testament description which would have been familiar to people who dealt with large farm animals. It was the description of an ox which would not respond with a rope around its neck was tugged. It reflects a stubborn disobedience.

In verse 10 God reveals himself in a divine paradox. At the same time He put Moses to the test. At first reading we see the all consuming wrath of God about to issue judgment. But a second reading shows that the promised judgment was made conditional upon Moses' agreement, for God said, "Now then let Me alone." God had left the door open for intercession and therefore mercy.

The test to Moses was couched in words identical to the earlier promise to Abraham. (Genesis 12:2) "I will make of you a great nation." The temptation to Moses was whether he would abandon his call to lead Israel and turn aside from his faith in the divine promises. God knew Moses. God regularly calls upon his saints for a public demonstration of those inner qualities of commitment.

Moses responds to God in one of the most profound intercessory prayers in the Bible. The Prayers of Moses is one the secrets of his greatness. Moses based his prayer on three appeals. First, there was the appeal to the fact that God had redeemed Israel with "great power and with a mighty hand." Moses appealed to God not to repudiate His mighty acts. Moses also stated that they were "thy" people and not his. Second, Moses appealed to the consequent scoffing of the Egyptians if Israel were destroyed. Third, Moses appealed to the divine promise to "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel." The fundamental basis for the appeal was the very nature of God. God had promised. God would be faithful.

The end result was that "So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people." The word used in the Old Testament for divine repentance is not the same word used for human repentance. This word has no connotation of guilt or a change of purpose because the first was wrong. Rather, it is essentially a word of deep feeling, implying the choice of an alternate course of action. We must recognize that Moses had not overpowered God's unwillingness to spare Israel. Moses had seized upon God's desire to be merciful. Guilt must be punished. It is a fact that God's inherent nature

is merciful which Moses both recognized and claimed. Moses had been called to lead Israel and he would not forsake them for his own glory. This is the measure of Moses' commitment to both God and Israel.

Verses 15-35

Moses went down the mountain carrying the tablets of stone. The artist conception of the size of these tablets is probably on the large side. It would have been very difficult for Moses to have carried tablets of that size while climbing down the mountain. Further, the indication that the tables were written on both sides would also have indicated that they were small.

Several factors were involved when Moses broke the tables. It was an outward expression of his anger at the sin of the people. Far beyond that, however, it was intended as a visible sign that Israel had broken the covenant. It was also a clear testimony that they had completely repudiated the work of God. As the tables were the "work of God," either actually or based upon God's authority and power, so was the covenant they had broken.

After the burning of the golden bull, there would have been leftover gold which could have been ground up. This, along with the ashes, was mixed with water and given to the people to drink.

There is a little humor in the conversation between Moses and Aaron, and it is also tragic. The nature of Moses' question implied that he found it inconceivable that Aaron could have participated in such a sin without major threats or pressure. There were two avenues to Aaron's excuse. Aaron first blamed the people and then blamed Moses for staying too long on the mountain.

Aaron's second avenue of excuse was to imply some sort of miraculous event. To worship the work of our own hands is foolish. To imply that it created its own self is even more so. Moses did not waste time arguing with Aaron. Even if Aaron's excuse had been true, the fact that he had allowed them to "break loose" was also an evidence of his guilt.

Moses then issues a call to decision: "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." The call was for a specific choice, an act of will. The question of Moses left no room for anyone to set on the fence. The fact that only the sons of Levi responded shows how widespread the crisis was. It also made Aaron stand out as a failure. Even those in his own clan were more loyal than he.

Moses spoke to the sons of Levi "He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.'" And "about three thousand men of the people fell that day." It is bad enough to go along with the crowd and commit sinful acts but it is quite another to continue

in the sin once it has been revealed. Obviously three thousand was not the total number of everyone who was involved in the worship of the Golden bull. Perhaps when Moses returned to the camp some order had been restored by his presence. Others, though, were the ringleaders of the rebellion against the command of God and had made their decision to continue in their idolatry. God in His mercy spared those who repented but placed His judgment on those who continued in their lawlessness.

We must also be careful in the evaluation of their actions on the bases of New Testament ethics. To understand these events we must do so in the background of their culture. Their sin was dealt with in harsh roughness. But it was tempered by mercy beyond that of the surrounding cultures.

The expression "Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD." It was a way of saying that they had filled their hands voluntarily and obediently with the service to their God. This would be the foundation of their commitment to God's service and as the future leaders of Israel.

Following that Day of Judgment and mercy, Moses went back to God as their intercessor and mediator. "Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Moses was going to try superficially what only Jesus does fully. With a great intercessory prayer Moses tried to lay hold of God's mercy. In Moses' prayer he had offered to die along side of his people or in place of his people. God did not allow Moses to do what only He could ultimately do. It was in Christ Jesus that He Himself would die for His people.

God being just, told Moses that their sins must be punished. Also God reiterated His promise that Israel could go on to the land of promise. Further, there would be the guidance of God's angel along the way.

"Your Book" presupposed a book of life that God was keeping, and is the first mention of this concept in the Bible. It was referred to later in Psalms 69:28, Isaiah 4:3, Philippians 4:3, and Revelations 3:5.

Key Verses

Genesis 12:2, Psalms 69:28, Isaiah 4:3, Philippians 4:3, and Revelations 3:5

Chapter 33

Verses 1-23

God then again tells Moses to take the people to the land of Canaan. This was not so much an order to depart as an assurance that God would ultimately keep His promise. The Israelites did not actually depart from Sinai until after the giving of the complete law.

(Numbers 10:11-12) God also said that He would send His angel as a guide. Moses asks "But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me." The emphasis was on the fact that the guide was a substitute for the presence of God. The reason given was not so much to punish the Israelites but to protect them, "I might destroy you on the way."

The Israelites removed their ornaments as a sign of mourning, as well as a sign of obedience. It is possible that the ornaments may have been religious medallions of some sort. Archaeologists have uncovered many such. On the other hand, they may have been put away since it was from these ornaments that they had made the idol. In this case they would have been removing the temptation. Not wearing such ornaments set them apart from their neighbors and reflected their relationship with God.

The "tent of meeting" was placed at a distance from the camp because sin had caused a distance between them and God. God would no longer be in their midst. In order to seek Yahweh the people would have to separate themselves from the rest of the people. The principle applied here is that man must separate himself from the world to commune with God. It also showed that Moses had a closer relationship with God than that of the people. The Lord spoke with Moses "face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend."

We have no explanation why Joshua remained behind in the tent after Moses departed. Perhaps Joshua had become Moses' closest assistant instead of Aaron. Aaron had forfeited this right by his sin with the golden bull.

Moses pleaded with God for more assurance. Moses was asking specifically to know who would go with them as a guide. Or Moses may have been seeking indirectly for an assurance that God would go with them. "Let me know Your ways" may mean that Moses was wanting a road map or an additional revelation of the purposes of God.

God assured Moses of two things, His presence and His rest. Once again, Moses' intercession had laid hold of God's willingness. The "rest" of God was a sense of security and peace rather than a cessation from labor. This would be an inner rather than an outer experience.

God's assurance of His presence to Moses was that which would make Israel distinct from all her neighbors. The ultimate distinctiveness of people rests upon the relationship that people have with God. Without God any distinctiveness people have is superficial.

Following this assurance, Moses prayed for a special, unique vision of God. The word "glory" used here, referred to the actual presence of God. Moses was first given an inner revelation of God, that God's real nature is grace and mercy. The real glory of God is seen not in a form but in the experience of His gracious mercy. Grace is the real evidence of the glory or presence of God. Moses was also assured that the holiness of God was such that no one could really see Him and live. Man can only see where God has been. The

description of looking upon God's back was a picturesque way of describing the fact that our best view of God is found in seeing what He has done and what He is doing. This is precisely what Jesus had said to messengers of the imprisoned John the Baptist. He told them to report what they had seen going on. (Matthew 11:2-6) It is in the actions of God that we really discover His nature.

Key Verse

Numbers 10:11-12, Matthew 11:2-6

Chapter 34

Verses 1-10

Again Moses is commanded to prepare two tablets to replace the ones that he had broken. Moses was told to come up to Mount Sinai alone. He was warned that no should be on the mountain and that the flocks should not be on the mountain either.

A major experience of the renewal of the covenant was made upon the fact that God was "the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." These characteristics are worked out in His "forgiving" of sin as well as in His justice. The full revelation of this was not seen until Jesus came. While iniquity would be visited upon the third and fourth generations, His steadfast love reached out to thousands of generations. The loving nature of God, even in the Old Testament, was His fundamental nature. The statement of iniquity being visited upon the third and fourth generations should not be understood as implying that children and grandchildren were to be punished for the sins of their fathers. The people later understood it this way, and Jeremiah and Ezekiel sought to counteract it. (Jeremiah 31:29-30 Ezekiel 18:-14) This statement could be understood as referring to the nature of the world God had created. The unrighteousness of the fathers does show up in the practices of the children.

Moses plead for a continued reassurance of God's presence and blessing through God's pardon was a bases for the covenant renewal. It may seem that Moses was in need of a repeated assurance of God's presence. It is possible that since the threat of God that He would not go with them had been so real, Moses was constantly searching for a reassurance that God would be with them. It would have been a very human reaction.

God's statement that the covenant was being renewed was the reassurance that Moses needed. As part of this covenant they were promised God's marvelous works as an evidence of God's presence. These were not just for the benefit of Israel but also as a witness "And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord." The power of God among His people is always a visible thing.

Verses 11-28

This next group of verses seems to be the same as the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. There are many similarities but they are not the same. It is quite likely that various traditions were preserved by various portions of the tribes of Israel and ultimately brought together under the inspiration and leadership of God. We also need to recognize that in no way did they record or claim to have recorded everything that was said and done. The summary of these records would have served to remind them of the totality of God's messages and deeds. Therefore to limit what is recorded here in this renewal would be a mistake. To fully understand what was said in the original covenant and in the renewal, we need to consider both sets of material.

Some additional ideas need to be considered here. The very fact of their covenant with Yahweh precluded their making a covenant with the people of Canaan. This applied to any kind of covenant, including the marriage covenant. In the ancient Near East, any covenant with another people involved their gods.

The commandment for the Sabbath observance was also quite broad and very specific. They were to observe it "In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest." This was especially significant for a society based upon agriculture. The service of God was more important than the service to self. This is still a basic principle for anyone who seeks to serve God. God comes first.

Verses 29-35

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai from the presence of God he was unaware "the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God." This radiance was a symbol of the closeness of Moses to God. The attitude of the people towards Moses reflected the awe with which they held him.

Exodus seems to imply that Moses put the veil over his face so that he would not frighten the people. Paul, on the other hand, says simply "Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor" (Corinthians 3:13)

The experience of apostasy and rebellion had come to an end. It came to an end by the action of God, not by the action of Israel. God renewed the covenant and through that experience Israel was restored to their relationship with God. But what had happened was to become a pattern for Israel. The Israelites were to find time and time again how difficult it was to be obedient and faithful. It still is. But we have the advantage of the New Covenant in Jesus. The Israelites had been redeemed from slavery. By God's grace, we have been forgiven and redeemed from sin.

Key Verses

Jeremiah 31:29-30, Ezekiel 18:1-4, Corinthians 3:13

Obedience That Delights the Spirit

Exodus 35:1 to 40:38

Much of what is written in these final chapters duplicates what we have read in Exodus 24:25 through 31:18. The earlier chapters gave the commands for the worship equipment while these describe the actual construction. There are some significant truths here to be found and are worth noting.

Exodus 35:1 to 36:7

In setting the Israelite people to work, Moses first set forth the Sabbath commandment. The Sabbath commandment was in the conclusion of the last chapter and now the author restates it again in the introduction here. There was obviously a deliberate reason. The observance of the Sabbath was a basic sign of Israel's covenant relation and the fact that Moses began with it here served to reaffirm that fact as well as to underscore that it was to be observed while they were actually involved in the construction project. Being involved in God's work is not sufficient justification for not observing the Sabbath.

Nowhere else in the Old Testament is found the prohibition of kindling fire on the Sabbath. It may have been intended to prohibit the smelting or working with metals on the Sabbath. This was a major task in the construction project

Moses then called for the people to provide the materials needed for the construction of the tabernacle, but only those who were "of a generous heart." As slaves from Egypt the Israelites could not have possibly possessed the materials needed for the project. These offerings must have come from the treasure which they had asked for and received from the Egyptians.

Not only were the supplies needed but also the workmen. This appeal was directed to "every skillful man among you come" that they should give their time and talents to the construction of the tabernacle. Whatever a man's skill, there was something he could do. God's Kingdom still uses the ability which we might have. His call is still for "able" workers.

The people responded overwhelmingly. They came as the will and purpose led them, bringing their gifts to God. Another thing to note is that "both men and women" participated in the offering. Women played a small part in the Israelite life, that they were mentioned here shows how significant a part they must have played in this offering.

Bezalel and Oholiab were men of God given skills and they were also "put in their heart to teach." The workmen came with willingness, skill, and with intelligence. Without all three the work would have suffered.

Another great significance is that the offerings of the people were overwhelming. It was reported that "The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the LORD commanded us to perform." Measures had to be taken to end the offerings. When the people of God respond with joyous generosity to God's call for gifts, there should always be an abundant supply.

Exodus 36:8 to 38:31

This next section gives us a report of the construction of the tabernacle. At a glance it appears that all of these accomplishments were done in sequence, one following the other. It is more likely that all of these tasks were going on simultaneously.

The record here indicates that the tabernacle was constructed in a brief period of time. It is possible that some of the later features of the tabernacle as it existed in Canaan, before the erection of the temple, may have been read back into this initial construction. If this is true, the actual construction may have lasted over years rather than months.

The interior equipment was also made just as it had been described. (Exodus 77:1 to 38:20) The construction is recorded in logical sequence rather than how it was commanded.

One significant item is the bronze laver that was made "from the mirrors of the serving women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting." In those times mirror's were made of polished metal. The identity and function of these "serving women" is unknown. The only other record of such is found in 1 Samuel 2:22, but it sheds no real light. What these women did is lost to our knowledge. Whatever their function, it was obviously a service dedicated to God and one which continued after the erection of the tabernacle and on into the settlement of Canaan. It seems this service came to an end after the settlement in Canaan. This was probably due to the fact that in Canaanite worship, women who served in their shrines were sacred prostitutes. Israel would have done away with this practice as it may have caused a misunderstanding.

Exodus 39:1-31

In these verses we find a recurring phrase "as the Lord had commanded Moses." (Exodus 39: 1, 5, 7, 21, 29, 31) It is hardly by accident that this phrase was repeated seven times. This would have indicated to them the sacredness and completeness of the making of the priestly vestments.

Another significant fact is the statement that "they hammered out gold sheets and cut them into threads" as a description of the technique used to manufacture the gold thread. Such detail offers fascinating insights into the skills and handicrafts of the day.

One more point of interest is the absence of any mention of the Urim and Thummim in the description of the breastplates. (See Exodus 39:8-21 and Exodus 28:15-30) This

omission may indicate that the sacred lots were natural stones and not shaped, fashioned, or otherwise manufactured. This becomes probable when we remember that the stones of the altar were to have been of such a nature. (Exodus 20:25) That which was natural was considered to be more sacred than that which had been fashioned.

Exodus 39:32 to 40:33

Once the work was complete they brought all the various items to Moses. (Exodus 39:32-43) This was done for his inspection. The repetition of verses 42 and 43 lays force upon the fact that they had done the work exactly as they had been told. By listing the details the fact of Israel's faithfulness and obedience to the minutest detail was visibly complete.

After the construction of the tabernacle was completed Moses was instructed to set it up. (Exodus 40:1-15) This divine command called not merely for the setting up of the tabernacle but also for its consecration.

The tabernacle was set up "in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month." This would have meant that the tabernacle was erected eleven and one half months after the actual exodus from Egypt. This would also indicate that the time spent in Sinai up to the setting up of the tabernacle was nine months.

The statement "Moses erected the tabernacle" is not to be understood as Moses did all the labor. It would have been impossible for any one man to have completed such a task. The expression probably means that the task was done under his authority.

The only detail added here is the washing of the hands and feet of the priest. (Exodus 40:30-32) This was to indicate that one's feet had to be clean before he could step into the holy place and that his hands had to be clean before he could serve the Lord with the sacrifices. This outward cleansing signified that an inner cleansing was also necessary.

When the tabernacle was dedicated, the "cloud covered the tent of meeting." The symbol of God's presence had descended from the mountain and had moved to the tabernacle. This visible movement had served to demonstrate to both Moses and Israel that God had accepted and approved their labors. The glory of God had so filled the tent that no longer could even Moses enter the most holy place.

In the beginning of Exodus, Israel was enslaved in Egypt and did not know that God was either near or aware of them. In the end of the book, they are free, redeemed people, on to the land of promise, accompanied and guided by the almighty God Himself. So it has ever been. Those who have been redeemed by God are guided and sustained through the wilderness as they journey to the new land of promise. God always leads those whom he has redeemed

Key Verse

1 Samuel 2:22

