Joining the Journey in EXODUS 1-20

A unique, verse-by-verse, life-application commentary
by Terran Williams.
Intro to Exodus 1-20

We’re all on a journey. But where are we going? And what is the meaning of our journey?

Exodus 1-20 tells of two world-changing journeys that intersected with each other 3300 years ago. As we track their journeys, something amazing happens: we see the journey we’re on in a brand new light.

On the one hand, we track the footsteps of Moses, a fallen prince of Egypt, as he transitions from being a self-made prince, to a humbled shepherd, to a reconstructed liberator. On the other hand, we re-live the journey of fledgling Israel as they miraculously escape Egyptian oppression and march boldly into … well, apparently into the middle of no where.

As we follow the journey of both a people and a man, we’ll learn how God still leads us as individuals and as a church. And, as we revisit the surprising twists and turns of their journey, we'll discover God's secret wisdom for the often-confusing paths that mark our own lives.

Two milestones in their journey - the sacrificial death of a lamb in Egypt, and the receiving of the law at Sinai - prophetically foreshadow the two most important events in history: the death of Christ, and the giving of the Spirit. That’s why, as we follow Moses and the Hebrews through the desert, we will also collide with the cross of Christ, and the transforming work of the Spirit - events that transpire 1300 years later.

Psalm 84:5 says, ‘Happy is the person who has set their heart on the journey towards God.’ Why not join the journey?

You may own a Bible, but does your Bible own you?

• It’s not enough to own a Bible. Our Bible should own us. After all, it is the main way God speaks to us.
• Did you know that God put every verse in the Bible so that your mind could be totally renewed, so that your life could be deeply changed, and so that your calling could be fulfilled? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 if you’re not persuaded.) That’s why reading the whole Bible again and again is one of the most important things we can do.
• Sometimes, however, the Bible is hard to understand. That’s why commentaries are so useful. Most commentaries help you understand the technical meaning of each verse. These commentaries do a little of that too, but more than that, they focus on the meaning of each verse for our lives now.
What’s unique about this commentary?

• Most importantly, it helps you to find the meaning for your life now in every section of Exodus 1-20.
• It is written with 21st century everyday people in mind.
• It builds on the scholarship of brilliant theologians and commentaries, but doesn’t focus on the exhausting technicalities that fill most commentaries.

A suggested approach to going through Exodus 1-20

• Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you are full — don’t just snack on the Bible, rather enjoy a solid meal.
• Take your time as you go through James, starting at chapter one. It doesn’t matter if you do the whole Bible in a year, or in five years, just as long as you’re steadily moving through it.
• Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
• Keep these two questions in your mind as you read: 1) Do I understand what these verses mean? 2) What do they mean for my life now? If you can’t find solid answers to either of these two important questions then refer to this commentary.
• Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you.

Main sources used

• David Guzik’s online commentary (www.enduringword.com)
• Michael Eaton’s ‘Preaching through the Bible: Exodus’ (England: Sovereign World, 2002)
• Walter Kraizer’s ‘Hard Sayings of the Bible’ (Illinois, Inter Varsity Press, 1996)
• Today’s New International Version Bible (the updated version of the NIV) - note that footnotes to the Bible text used is listed at the very end of this commentary.

The basic story flow of Exodus 1-20

• God delivers the Israelites from bondage (ch 1-15)
  o 1:1-22: The Israelites are enslaved
Commentary outline of Exodus 1-20

1. experiencing God at work in our difficult times (1:1-2:9)
2. how God prepares us for our destiny (2:10-25)
3. how God’s call comes to us (3:1-10)
4. how God overcomes our reluctance (3:11-4:17)
5. lessons in obedience and trust (4:18-6:13)
6. coming to know God (6:14-7:7)
7. nine powerful judgments, six powerful insights (7:8-10:29)
9. God’s amazing salvation, part 2 (12:7-13)
10. God’s amazing salvation, part 3 (12:14-51)
11. how God leads us (13:1-14:31)
12. something to sing about (15:1-21)
13. the ugliness of unbelief and the beauty of Christ’s grace (15:22-17:7)
14. the ministries of prayer and proclaiming (17:8-18:12)
15. the ministry of practical leadership (18:13-27)
16. the old covenant vs the new covenant (19:1-25)
17. how God transforms us by his Spirit to love God (20:1-11)
18. how God transforms us by his Spirit to love people, part 1 (20:12-15)
19. how God transforms us by his Spirit to love people, part 2 (20:16-17)

**Note to preachers:** As a preacher, I sought to divide Exodus 1-20 up into what I call ‘preachable units’. As you can see, there are 19 in all. These units are enough material to preach an entire content-rich message on. Also, each unit is usually held together by a unifying theme or subject, as is evident by the titles I provide above. If you are a preacher, then this commentary may serve as a helpful resource to you - as it did in our church in 2009 (see [www.commongroundchurch.co.za](http://www.commongroundchurch.co.za), and click on ‘free resources’ for ‘the Journey series’ for these talks).
1) EXPERIENCING GOD AT WORK IN OUR DIFFICULT TIMES  (1:1-2:9)

Exodus 1

The Israelites Oppressed
1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; 3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; 4 Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. 5 The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy [a] in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

6 Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, 7 but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

God keeps his promises.
- Verses 1-7 tell us how God kept his promise to multiply the descendants of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Verses 1-6 reach back some 430 years. The story of the Exodus begins where the Book of Genesis ends: with this large family with a crucial place in God's plan of the ages and their migration to Egypt. Joseph was the remarkable great-grandson of Abraham who saved Egypt from terrible famine because he listened to God's voice speaking through Pharaoh's dream. Because of his wisdom and administration, he was lifted to high and honoured office in Egypt - but eventually, Joseph died and the status his family enjoyed died with him. Then verse 7 tells us of their great numerical growth in Egypt over the centuries. The land was filled with them. Genesis 47:27 says, ‘So Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.’ This family started with five people back in Haran: Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Zilphah, and Bilhah. It grew into a clan of about 100 people in 50 years (the 100 includes the seventy mentioned in verse 5 (which is taken from Genesis 46:27) plus a few wives of the sons not mentioned and grandchildren). This represents a growth rate of just over 6% per year. At that rate there would be a few million descendants by the time of Exodus, 430 years later.
- God made a promise to Abraham hundreds of years before. And God kept his promise to Abraham. Still today, God makes and keeps his promises. He is a faithful God.

8 Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. 9 “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. 10 Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

11 So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the
Egyptians came to dread the Israelites 13 and worked them ruthlessly. 14 They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 “When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” 17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. 18 Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

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

20 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

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

God is in the habit of leading us into difficult times.

- Pharaoh fears them because of how numerous they were. He orchestrates a three-stage persecution on them. First, there is harsh treatment (v11-14). Then there is secret persecution (v15-20). Without publicly declaring it, he orders the killing of boys in order to eliminate them as a nation in the decades to come. Then there is public persecution (v22). He issues a public decree that every newborn boy is to be thrown into the Nile.

- Still today, the people of God can expect to experience persecution. It comes in different forms. We could be under a government that reduces our status in society and treats us badly. We could experience secret persecution, or open ‘legalized’ persecution.

- We must realize that God has brought about this difficulty. It is not random. God has not lost control. God has not forgotten his promises. God has not stopped caring for his people. This is all in God’s great plan. God had, through his sovereign control of circumstances, led the Israelites into Egypt hundreds of years before. God had even told Jacob in a vision not to be afraid of taking his nation into Egypt (see Genesis 46:3). And God has also, through his sovereign control of circumstances, brought about the difficult time the Israelites were experiencing. Hundreds of years before God told Abraham of the terrible time ahead. In Genesis 15:13 God said, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.'
• Even today, when we experience great difficulties, we can rest assured that God is still in control. He still cares. He has not forgotten his promises. In fact he promises that we will face trials of all kinds. Although we don’t like to experience change, like to feel safe, like predictability, God doesn’t seem to share our sentiments. It is just like him to bring about some unexpected changes in our lives and situations. In the next point we will see why he does this.

God is powerfully at work when we face difficult times.

• Why does God allow us to go through difficult time? These verses reveal some answers:

  • God wants to bring us to our knees in dependence on him. In times of prosperity, the people of God tend to become spiritually callous. We don’t pray as much. We don’t seek the things of God. We become complacent. So God brings about adversity, which tends to bring us to our knees. God was bringing the numerous Israelites, who had probably grown very distant from God, to their knees. By 2:23 we will see them calling out to God in prayer like never before.

  • God wants to reveal his miraculous ability to preserve us. ‘The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread’ (v12). Pharaoh’s persecution strategies totally backfired. God is at work preserving the people of God. This is in itself a miracle. God still provides for us in times of need, protects us in times of danger, and preserves us in times of likely disintegration. He faithfully cares for us.

  • God wants his people to reach new levels of courage and obedience. The midwives are the heroes of this story. They fear God more than they fear Pharaoh. They disobey Pharaoh’s evil instructions to kill the boys. God blesses them for this. It is easy to obey God when obedience to God is compatible with the government of our nation. But what happens when the government over us calls us to do things that are in conflict with our faith? At this point, it is difficult to obey God. It calls for new levels of obedience and courage in us. In fact, it is in times of persecution and difficulty that we reach high levels of courage and obedience.

One way that God causes us to overcome our fear of change is by increasing the misery of our current situation.

• God’s plan is that his people would return to the Promised Land (see Genesis 46:4). He had shown Abraham the land his descendants would possess (see Genesis 15:18). Egypt was not their inheritance. Yet, if they had only experienced prosperity there, they would never have returned to their land of promise. It is a fearful thing to leave what you know for what you do not know. Amongst other factors, fear of the unknown held them back from leaving Egypt for the land God had for them.

• Still today, God calls us to pursue the inheritance he has for us. It usually entails letting go of some of our current comforts and overcoming the fear of the unknown. God has a time-tested strategy for helping people overcome their fear. It is to increase their misery so that their misery-levels exceed their fear-levels. God allowed them to become oppressed so that they would want to leave. When a situation is miserable it mobilizes us. When the misery of our current situation exceeds our fear...
of change we eventually embrace change. We still find ourselves settling for less than God’s best because of fear of the unknown. God will often cause our misery-levels (in our current situation) to rise above our fear-levels so that we move towards our inheritance.

- A classic example of this is the addicted person. To leave an addiction is a fearful thing. The fear of life without our ‘drug’ (whether it be a person or a substance or an activity) stops us from leaving the addiction. Very often, it is only once the misery-levels of our addiction exceed the level of fear of change that we embrace change. Another example is when God wants us to do something daring like going to another nation, or exchanging careers, or starting a new ministry. Much like a mother eagle gets the nest increasingly uncomfortable so that baby eagles are willing to ‘jump’ out of the nest into flight, so God will cause our current situation to become increasingly uncomfortable. This makes us more ready to embrace the change God calls us to.

Exodus 2

The Birth of Moses

1 Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, 2 and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket [a] for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. 4 His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

5 Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. 6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

8 “Yes, go,” she answered. And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

God responds to our faith.

- The baby Moses opened his eyes to an unfriendly world. He was born under a superpower of a nation, but was of an alien, oppressed race during a time when all babies such as himself were under a royal death sentence. Nevertheless, Moses had something special in his favour: he was the child of parents who had a vital faith in God. Hebrews 11:23, commenting on these verses, tells us that Moses’ parents demonstrated great faith in God. It says, ‘By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw that he was no ordinary
child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict’. Notice a few aspects of the faith of Moses’ parents:

- **By faith in God, they discerned something of the child’s future destiny.** Moses’ mom ‘saw that he was a fine child’ (v2). Moses’ parents ‘saw that he was no ordinary child’ (Hebrews 11:23). This suggests that God helped them to discern that the boy had an unusual destiny in the purposes of God, and therefore should be protected at all costs. Still today, as we trust in God we will often spiritually discern future destiny on people’s lives. This will make us want to do all we can to direct these people in the direction of their destiny.

- **By faith in God, they actively co-operated with God.** Once they were sure that it was God’s will that this child would outlive the murderous decree of the king, they actively did all they could to spare the child. For three months they hid him. Their faith led them to action. Similarly, when we discern God’s will by faith, we should do all we can to implement God’s will. Faith breaks passivity in our lives.

- **By faith in God, they overcame the fear of the king.** As we trust in God, we overcome fear. Fear and faith are mutually incompatible. They cannot both take root in the same heart. Interestingly, they didn’t entirely disobey the king. The king had ordered that babies be thrown into the Nile. They did put Moses in the Nile – only they made sure that he stayed afloat in a waterproof basket.

- **By faith in God, they let go of their baby.** They did all they could. But eventually they could do nothing else. At three months the boy was too big to hide. They in a sense ‘let go’ of their boy by putting him onto a waterproof basket in the river. Sometimes we have to ‘let go’ of loved ones, ministries and things close to our hearts. We pray, ‘God, I can’t do anything else to preserve this or take it to its next level – it is now in your hands totally.’

- **God rewarded their faith amazingly.** It just happened (by God’s control of course) that the baby in the basket floated directly to Pharaoh’s daughter, who found him in the reeds. And instead of responding to the baby Hebrew boy with the hatred of her father, she responded with compassion. Instead of destroying the boy like her father would have, she adopted him (v10). But she did this in such a way that he was still brought up by his believing mother (v7-9). The parents’ faith had enabled Moses to be rescued from Pharaoh. And one day Moses would rescue millions more people from Pharaoh. This is God’s powerful intervention. This is God honouring the faith of Moses’ parents. Today, as we trust God, we can still expect him to reward our faith in surprising ways.

2) **HOW GOD PREPARES US FOR OUR DESTINY (2:10-25)**

10 When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, [b] saying, “I drew him out of the water.”
God prepares us for our destiny through the circumstances of our upbringing and youth.

- God would eventually use Moses as a powerful deliverer. In his early years, Moses had no idea that his destiny would be one of deliverer of God’s people and author of the first five books of the Bible. Yet God, through his sovereign control of circumstances, prepared him for this task.
- Just think about Moses’ training. Being the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses was in the royal family. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says Moses was heir to the throne of Egypt and that while a young man, Moses led the armies of Egypt in victorious battle against the Ethiopians. Certainly, he was exposed to the science and learning of Egypt. Acts 7:22 says that Moses was trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Egypt was one of the most academic and scientific societies on the earth at that time. It is reasonable to think that Moses was instructed in geography, history, grammar, writing, literature, philosophy, and music.
- Still today, through his sovereign control of our circumstances, God prepares us for our destiny, before we are even aware what our God-given destiny is. He oversees our upbringing, our level of education, the people who have influence over us - and more. When we finally do walk into our destiny we often look back on our life and realize that everything in our lives up till that moment has headed in a straight line to this very point.

Moses Flees to Midian

11 One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. 12 Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

14 The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.” 15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

God prepares us for our destiny by allowing us to experience failure and setbacks.

- Although Moses lived in the palace, he became increasingly concerned about the suffering of the Hebrews - ‘his own people’ (v11). Probably it was beginning to dawn upon him that he, as a secret-Hebrew prince of Egypt, was uniquely positioned to liberate the Hebrews from Egyptian oppression. He probably began to feel a divine compulsion to rescue the Jews. On a certain day he acted. He secretly killed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave (v12). And so the liberation appeared to begin. The next
day he realized that he had acted unwisely: his very own people called him a murderer (v14), and news of his murder had reached Pharaoh who was now determined to kill him (v15). His liberation strategy had backfired. Moses, a failed liberator, fled into the desert.

• We still see this same pattern in the lives of those of us called by God. We legitimately begin to suspect that God wants to use us in a certain way. We feel concern about some issue. But then we act prematurely and presumptuously. We get off to a false start. We head in the right direction, but in the wrong way and time. Instead of experiencing success, we experience failure. And God allows us to experience this disappointing false start to teach us some important lessons:
  • *Failure humbles us.* Moses was not sufficiently humbled to be used by God. All his life he had known power, prestige and fame. He had an inflated sense of himself. God humbled him through failure.
  • *Failure makes us more dependent on God.* Moses, a natural leader and self-starter, assumed he could make things happen in his own strength and way. But he had to learn that the only way to get things done well in God’s kingdom is through great dependence on God. He may use our strengths, but only if those strengths are submitted entirely to him. We need to learn to depend on God’s wisdom, God’s strength, God’s leadings and God’s timing.
  • *Failure deals with presumption in us.* We tend to presume too much about God’s plan and timing for our lives. Acts 7:25 says, ‘Moses thought that his own people would realize God was using him to rescue them but they did not.’
  • *Failure strips us of some of our previous treasures.* People like Moses who are marked with great natural treasure, success, fame and power are difficult for God to use. He tends to first strip them of some of their ‘glory’ before he can use them powerfully. Allowing us to experience failure is one way in which he does this.

15 When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. 16 Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. 17 Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

18 When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

19 They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

20 "And where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."
21 Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. 22 Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, [c] saying, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.”

God prepares us for our destiny by the temperament he gives us.
- Our character changes, but our temperament or basic personality is fixed in us from birth. We are beginning to see Moses’ temperament emerge. He is a born leader. He is an energetic man. He likes to help people who need help. For example, he helps the Hebrew being beaten by the Egyptian (v11). He tries to intervene in the two Hebrews who are fighting (v13). And we see here how Moses ‘came to (the seven daughters’) rescue and watered their flock’ (v17). He is ‘wired’ by God to lead, mobilize, help and rescue people. It is the way God has made him. Although God has much to do in his character and his heart to prepare him for his destiny, his temperament is already in place.
- This story reminds us that God ‘wires’ us for the work he has for us to do. This is greatly encouraging. It also means that we should factor in how we are made, as we try to discern what it is God wants us to give ourselves to do.

God prepares us for our destiny by allowing us to experience delay.
- Acts 7:30 tells us that Moses spent 40 years in Midian. That is a long time. God kindly provided a wife for him. His wife’s father quickly spotted in Moses a man who was worthy of his daughter. God gave him two sons (see Acts 7:29). He also became a shepherd (3:1), a job that seemed to come naturally to him (see v16-17). This was a very difficult season for Moses. He named his first son ‘Gershom’ which means ‘I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.’
- Why was God causing this long delay? He was too self-confident, self-reliant and impetuous to be used by God. God needed to develop in him the character, the humility and the patience he needed before he could be used in the massive work God had for him. He had been schooled in the universities of Egypt. Now he needed to be schooled in the ‘universities’ of the desert. He had been grandfather-ed by Pharaoh. Now he needed to be fathered by Jethro, a great but humble man. He had been a prince of Egypt. Now he needed to be a foreigner in a foreign land. He had ruled over people. Now he was a shepherd of sheep. He had experienced daily prosperity in his youth. Now he was experiencing daily adversity.
- God still has his own ways of dealing with an ungodly self-confidence and impatience in us. He has a way of developing in us the character we need to fulfil our destiny. One of his main tools is time. God simply ‘pushes pause’ on obvious ‘progress’ in our lives. He delays us. In this time our dreams and ambitions tend to die. In this time we become humbler, more patient, more ‘in touch’ with where people really are. In this time God secretly trains us for great things he has for us to do. We may feel overlooked or forgotten. But don’t believe it for a second. God is more active in the shaping of our lives than ever before.
23 During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

God prepares us for our destiny in accordance with his greater plan for the world.

• It is true that God apportions to people unique destinies. But we must not forget that these destinies fit into a larger plan. It is not about us, as much as it is about something bigger that God is doing.
• These verses reveal the bigger thing that God is doing. He is seeking to rescue his people who call out to him in prayer. He is not deaf to their cries or blind to their suffering. And he has not forgotten his promise to Abraham to give his descendants the Promised Land. God wants to liberate his people from bondage into freedom and inheritance. This is the big thing God is doing. And Moses is one part of how he is going to do this.
• Still today, our focus should not just be on ‘my destiny’ but rather on ‘God’s plan to bless his people, and to bless the entire world’. We need to realize that God is sovereignly shaping us to play a specific part in a much greater whole. The New Testament reveals that ‘the greater whole’ is nothing less than the evangelism of the lost, the planting and strengthening of churches, the serving of the poor and powerless, the salting and lighting of society and the discipling of the nations.
• Interestingly, Moses as a young man watched and saw (v11) the suffering of the Israelites. But he could do nothing about it. It is only when God looks (v25) with concern upon the same suffering that something happens. This reminds us that the first priority of someone who is to be used by God, is to pray. We should draw the eyes and ears of God to the situation before we throw ourselves at the situation in response to what we see and hear.

3) HOW GOD’S CALL COMES TO US (3:1-10)

Exodus 3

Moses and the Burning Bush
1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him ...

God’s call comes to us in the midst of our faithfulness in the small things.

• Moses was faithful with the sheep entrusted to him by Jethro. It was not a very esteemed task, but he gave himself to it with all his heart. And while he was at work, God met with him.
Similarly, we may sometimes worry that God is unable to reach us with his call if we are too involved in life’s responsibilities. We may wrongly think that God calls those who are passive and have much space in their lives. This story shows us that God is able to reach us with his call while we are in the midst of life’s responsibilities. In fact, our very faithfulness in small things is part of what shows God we will be faithful in more significant things.

Interestingly, Mount Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. It is called ‘the mountain of God’ because of how important it would prove to be in the years to come. It would be at Mount Horeb / Sinai that God would give the Israelites the law.

2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

3 So Moses thought, ”I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ”Moses! Moses!”
   And Moses said, ”Here I am.”

5 ”Do not come any closer,” God said. ”Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, ”I am the God of your father, [a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

God’s call comes to us as we encounter him for who he is.

- Moses learns much about God in this encounter. We too learn much about God:
  - God is able to manifest himself using a representing angel. Who is ‘the angel of the LORD’ that appears to Moses? He is spoken of elsewhere (see Genesis 16:7-13, Judges 2:1-5, Judges 6:11-24, Judges 13:3-22). The angel of the LORD is God himself visibly manifested as an angel. God himself is invisible so he uses the angel to represent himself. The actual ‘matter’ that is seen is an angel. Hebrews 1:7, for example, tells us that God makes his angels flames of fire.
  - God is blazing holiness. Throughout the events of the Exodus, God reveals himself as fire. The fire speaks of his purity and holiness. It lights up our lives, revealing all our sin. It burns up the impurities it finds in our lives. God is holy. We are sinful.
  - God is able to manifest his extraordinary presence through that which is ordinary. God manifests his presence through an ordinary bush. Ultimately, he manifested his presence through Jesus, the God-man (John 1:14,18). But he is able to manifest his presence through believers too. The burning bush is an inspiring picture of how God can fill a believer with his presence in such a way that onlookers may notice
something curiosity-provoking about us. They may be exposed to us, as was Moses to the bush and equally surprised to encounter God.

- **God is not to be flippantly or carelessly approached.** God’s instruction to him to take off his shoes before he comes any closer (v5) lets him know that God is approached on his terms not ours. God decides the conditions that make it acceptable for us to draw near to him. In the New Covenant, for example, we approach God on the basis of the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf.

- **God is totally self-sustaining.** The bush burns with the presence of God but does not burn up. All flames need fuel to keep going. In fact everything in creation needs input or outside energy to be sustained. The greatest star burns on exhaustible gas. It will eventually burn away. But God does not need fuel to keep going. He is self-sustaining. ‘He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else’ (Acts 17:25).

- **God is unchanging.** “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. (v6)” When we encounter God we encounter a God who others have encountered before. Through the centuries, though our culture has evolved significantly, God has remained perfect, and perfectly faithful. He cannot change. Yes, he will deal with us in surprising ways and is free to deal with each situation and person uniquely, but there is no change within him. And there is no change within his larger purposes for the world.

- **An encounter with God can be overwhelming.** Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look. He was overwhelmed that he, a creature, was encountering the Creator; he a not-so-mighty person was encountering the Almighty; he a sinful man was encountering the Holy One. (How his past failures in those decades in the desert must have rung through his conscience). Be warned, that as wonderful as it is to encounter God, it is not a comfortable experience, it can be quite overwhelming.

7 The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

**God’s call comes to us as an insight into his compassion.**

- **Moses had all these years carried a burden for his people, oppressed in Egypt. He may have felt alone in carrying this terrible burden. But he then discovered that he was not alone in his concern (v7). He also discovered that his level of concern was dwarfed by God’s far greater concern. God revealed to Moses his compassionate heart for the Israelite**
slaves. This would no doubt have intensified Moses’ own levels of concern.

- It is still common for God to reveal his heart to us regarding some specific area of need. He may give us a glimpse into his concern for unreached nations of people, for exploited poor people, for those suffering with HIV, for a particular group of people that need to be reached for Christ, for a segment of the church that is in trouble and much more. It is always amazing how God seems to reveal different concerns of his heart (and there are so many) to different people. Until our hearts have felt some of his level of concern we are not ready to act.

God’s call comes to us as an invitation to partnership with him.

- God said, ‘So I have come down to rescue them … and bring them up into a spacious land’. Then he said, ‘So, now go, I am sending you.’ God is on a mission. God himself is at work. God is involved. God is doing something, but he invites Moses to join him. Although God certainly doesn’t need human instrumentality, for some mysterious reason he chooses to partner with us.

- There is a saying that many people have come to live by: ‘Find out what God is doing, and then join him.’ This is far better than the futile attempt of trying to get God to join us in what we are doing. The best use of our life is to ask God to reveal to us what he is doing and what he wants us to give ourselves to, then join him in that!

God’s call comes to us as an instruction to do the impossible.

- Moses is just one man: a failed prince and an 80-year old shepherd who doesn’t even own his own sheep. And yet God calls him to take on Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world. God gives him an impossible instruction: ‘So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’ (v10).

- There is a saying, ‘If what you believe God has called you to do is humanly possible then it isn’t God.’ When God calls us to something, he calls us to do something impossible, something that can only be done in his strength. A similar saying comes to mind, ‘If what God has told you to do, doesn’t scare the pants off you, it isn’t God calling you.’

- It is just like God to reveal himself to us, to put his burden in us, to invite us to partner him and to give us an impossible instruction! This may happen in one powerful encounter (as Moses here experienced), or more likely, over a period of time through God’s many means of guidance.

4) HOW GOD OVERCOMES OUR RELUCTANCE (3:11-4:17)

Moses responds to God’s call by saying ‘no’. He gives five reasons for his ‘no’ - lack of special qualities, lack of knowledge, lack of power, lack of skill, and lack of willingness - and God responds to each reason by overcoming his reluctance. The person called by God will very often tend to say ‘no’ to God. But God will usually respond by persistently overcoming our reluctance. He doesn’t take no for an answer.
11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

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

Firstly, we tend to refuse God’s call by focusing on our lack of special qualities.

- ‘But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”’ (v11).
- Moses used to feel really special: he was the Prince of Egypt. At that time he was sure that God could use him. He was one of a kind. But over the decades in the desert he no longer felt there to be anything special about him. God had called Moses to liberate the Hebrews from Egypt. But Moses refused because he didn’t feel that he was particularly special or significant. He didn’t feel worthy of or adequate for the task. His life felt so undirected. After all, he was just a shepherd wondering around a remote desert.
- Today, we still tend to refuse God’s call by focusing on our lack of worth or our inadequacies. We say to God, ‘Who am I that you should use me? There is nothing special about me.’ But focusing on our feelings of not being significant or special enough is a really lame excuse, as we shall see...

God deals with our perceived lack of special qualities by affirming his presence with us, and his hand in the details of our lives.

- God responds to Moses’ refusal by saying two things. Firstly, he promises his presence. It is as if he says to Moses: ‘There may not be anything special about you. You are an ordinary person. But what will make you special is that I will be with you. That is where your confidence and worth and adequacy will come from. That is what makes you significant.’ Secondly he promises that it will be on this very mountain (Mount Horeb / Sinai) that all the Hebrews will be brought to meet with God. It is as if he is saying to Moses: ‘There may not be anything special about you, but I am still going to use you in a special way. My hand has been in the details of your life. You have just met with me on this Mountain at this time. This is no accident. You are a front-runner. You will lead millions to meet with me on this very mountain. Your many years in this desert, near this mountain, may have felt undirected but in fact I have had my hand on you. This is the very place where all my people will come.’
- God still urges us to find our sense of ‘special-ness’ and significance not in who we are as people, but rather in the fact that God is with us and working in the details of our lives. Whatever God does in us he very often intends doing through us to impact on others. The placing and details of our lives may seem random, but God’s hand is on us. He will use us as front-runners. Our life-path thus far is significant. God’s hand has been on it.
13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

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

15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, [d] the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.'
   "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. 17 And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

21 "And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. 22 Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

Secondly, we tend to refuse God’s call by focusing on our lack of knowledge.

• ‘Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?’” (v13). In this verse, Moses tries to avoid God’s call on his life by arguing that he does not know enough. He argues that if he were to tell people that he is a messenger of ‘the god of your fathers’ that people would want to know more about this God. And he would have nothing to say.

• When God places a call on our lives to represent him in the world, we quickly realize that we can’t do this with integrity, since we don’t know him very well. We may even use this as an excuse to avoid God’s call.
Wonderfully, we learn that God doesn’t take this as an excuse. In these verses, we see that God doesn’t call the knowledgeable. Rather he gives knowledge to the one he calls...

God deals with our lack of knowledge by giving us knowledge of himself, and knowledge of the future.

- In these verses, we see that God doesn’t call the knowledgeable. Rather he gives knowledge to the one he calls. To Moses, he reveals who he is. He also reveals some details of the future.
- *First, God reveals who he is.* The name of God refers to something in God’s inner nature. His name is ‘I am who I am’ (v14). This is a bit long so God himself immediately shortens it to ‘I am’ (v14). Then he modifies the name ‘I am’ to ‘LORD’ (v15) or ‘Yahweh’ (modern translations put the word LORD in capitals whenever it refers to ‘Yahweh’ in the original languages). The word ‘Yahweh’ means ‘To be’. In other words God’s name is ‘I am who I am’, which is summarized as ‘I am’, which is modified to ‘Yahweh’ (which is the main name of God, used 6000 times in the Old Testament).
- But what does the name ‘Yahweh’ mean? The confusing thing is that the name ‘Yahweh’ is used of God before Exodus 3:14. Why does God place special emphasis on it now? Why does he make it ‘my name forever, the name you will call me from generation to generation’? Two other verses in the Bible help us come to an answer. Exodus 6:2,3 says, ‘I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name The LORD I did not make myself known to them’. And Nehemiah 9:9-10 says, ‘When you took them out of Egypt you got for yourself a name, which we use to this day’. These verses highlight why God brings emphasis to the name Yahweh. He is at this point in history going to reveal its meaning to Moses and the Israelites. Before this time it was a name that had no meaning. But now the meaning of Yahweh emerges: the name Yahweh captures what God does in the Exodus events. Here is the important insight: LORD must not be primarily understood as a metaphysical description (eg ‘self-sufficient one’), but as a name that captures what he was about to do in the Exodus, a new phase of salvation history. We must look at the Exodus for the meaning of the name, LORD. Michael Eaton says that we can summarize the Exodus-revealed meaning of the name LORD to be: 1) The God who takes slaves out of bondage. 2) The God who redeems through the blood of a lamb. 3) The God who chooses and adopts these undeserving slaves as his own people. *Whenever the name ‘Yahweh’ or LORD is used we are to remind ourselves that he is the God of the Exodus, the God who sets people free by the blood of a lamb.* In Biblical times, names tell us of a person’s essence. If LORD is God’s inner name, then at the heart of God is a redeemer, deliverer and saviour. It is not merely something he does once in history - it is an expression of his deepest being.
- The wonderful thing is that the name Yahweh comes to full expression in the coming of Christ. Jesus used the same name to describe himself (see John 8:58). Jesus’ name is a combination name ‘Jehovah-Sus’. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Exodus. Whenever we use the name LORD or Jesus
we speak of a God who ‘sets undeserving slaves free, by the blood of a lamb, to enjoy the privilege of becoming part of God’s special people’.

- God gives Moses a revelation of himself. He still gives those he calls a revelation of himself. Moses just needed to see how God would act to liberate people in the Exodus. Similarly, we need to reflect on the events of Jesus Christ, the second, and far more powerful Exodus, where God sets millions free through the blood of the lamb, Jesus Christ. As we reflect on who God is, and as God opens our hearts to a growing revelation of God, so we are emboldened to obey his call.

- Secondly, God reveals some details about the future. There is another answer to Moses’ anxiety about his shortage of knowledge. In verses 16-22, God gives him direct knowledge of the future. The elders will receive him (v16-18a). He must ask for a short time of leave for the Israelites (v18b). Pharaoh will refuse (v19). God will work wonders (v20). The people will be released (v21) and be provided for (v22). God gives Moses glimpses of where his life is going. Although this is an unusual thing for God to do, God still gives his servants supernatural knowledge of things present and future. This greatly increases their confidence that God knows all things, and therefore his call should be whole-heartedly obeyed.

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Exodus 4

Signs for Moses

1 Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you?’”

2 Then the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?”
   “A staff,” he replied.

3 The LORD said, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.”
   So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

4 Then the LORD said to him, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.”
   So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand.

5 “This,” said the LORD, “is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.”

6 Then the LORD said, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous [a]—it had become as white as snow.

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

8 Then the LORD said, “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. 9 But if they do not believe these
two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the
dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the
ground.”

Thirdly, we tend to refuse God’s call by focusing on our lack of power.
• Moses answered, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say,
‘The LORD did not appear to you?’ (v1). This is Moses’ third excuse. He is
just an ordinary person. Why would people believe that he has
encountered the Living God?
• Still today, when God calls us to do something, we tend to focus on our
ordinariness, our lack of power. But God has a wonderful response to this
excuse too...

God deals with our lack of power by giving us experiences and promises
of his power.
• God doesn’t accept Moses’ excuse about lacking power. He does this by
giving Moses four miracles, all of them symbolic. God is speaking to
Moses in pictures. The interpretation of symbolic actions in the Bible is
not an exact science, but a little bit of thought into their likely meaning
reveals some wonderful insights.
• In the first miracle, Moses’ stick becomes a snake and then a stick again
(v2-5). The stick becomes a snake (v2-3). What does this symbolize?
Moses is like the stick. He may feel like a powerless piece of dead wood.
But when he throws himself down in courageous obedience before God,
God will make something dangerous of him. He may be harmless to
Pharaoh in his own ordinary humanity, but God will make him into
something that even Pharaoh will fear. We too may feel like a d
ead stick, so harmless to the kingdom of darkness, but God promises that if
we throw ourselves down before him in courageous obedience, he will
make us dangerous. Darkness and the devil will fear us. We will be
agents of God’s power. We may seem harmless, but in God’s power we
will be dangerous. Then the snake becomes a stick (v4-5). Snakes are
dangerous. It is very dangerous to grab them by the tail, because they
are free to bite. Yet God tells Moses to do just that. As he does, the
dangerous snake turns into a harmless snake again. What God is saying
through this picture is, ‘There may be things (such as Pharaoh) that
appear dangerous, and bring great fear to you - but you need not fear
them. By my power, they will not be able to harm you.’ Still today, God
says the same to us. There may be things that terrify us from giving
ourselves to God’s call, but by God’s power these things will be rendered
powerless.
• In the second miracle, Moses’ hand becomes leprous and then healthy
again (v6-7). As Moses puts his hand under his cloak near his heart, it
becomes diseased. God seems to be saying, ‘You may appear healthy,
but in fact you are diseased within.’ Then Moses puts his hand under his
cloak again and it becomes healthy. God seems to be saying, ‘Though
you are diseased, yet I will make you healthy within.’ God still reveals to
us our hearts when they are in an unhealthy state and then transforms
and restores them to health.
In the third miracle, God promises to turn water from the Nile into blood. The Nile was worshipped in Egypt as a source of life, but God promised to mock this false god by turning it to blood, which symbolizes death. Today, God still says to us that we should not be intimidated by the ‘false gods’ of the people we’re sent to. Through us God will overcome these false Gods.

Moses felt powerless, but God revealed his power to him. This is still how God often works in us to overcome a sense of lack of power. For examples of this in the early church see Acts 1:8 and 4:31. Outpourings of the Spirit’s power are given by God to us to embolden us for the work he has for us to do! We are ordinary, powerless people indeed. But we are like a stick in the hands of an extraordinarily powerful God. The power does not come from us, but from God who holds and uses us. He can restore our hearts. He can make a mockery of the false gods that intimidate us. He can make us dangerous to the devil and to darkness.

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

11 The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

Fourthly, we tend to refuse God’s call by focusing on our lack of ability.

‘Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”’ (v10).

Moses, though having many natural abilities that God could use (such as gifts of leadership), focuses on the one thing that he battles with - namely his difficulty with public speaking. We also tend to disqualify ourselves from God’s call by our lack of natural ability. But this does not legitimately disqualify us from God’s call at all...

God deals with our lack of ability by reminding us that our abilities are from him.

God doesn’t accept Moses’ excuse. Instead he reminds Moses that he himself gives people their abilities to speak, to hear, to see - and he gives people varying degrees of these abilities. He is sovereign over abilities and skills. He also encourages Moses by saying that he can grow in these abilities and skills, and that God will help him to do so.

Our natural abilities are God-given. He knows what we can and can’t do. He is not surprised by our lack of ability. Wonderfully he does not call the equipped, but he promises to equip the called! Our inabilities don’t disqualify us from anything God calls us to do. God will, by his grace, and through our determination to develop, make sure we have the abilities we need to succeed.
Lastly, lack of willingness can make us excuse ourselves from God’s call.

- ‘But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”’ (v13). Moses has run out of excuses. His last avoidance of God’s call is plain unwillingness. He doesn’t want to do this. He would prefer God to call someone else to do this.
- Tragically, we sometimes avoid God’s call on our lives simply because we are stubborn, unconcerned, disobedient or unwilling. We would prefer God to call someone else. God deals with this in a terrifying way...

God deals with our persistent lack of willingness by shrinking our call.

- God patiently deals with the previous four excuses (i.e. lack of specialness, lack of knowledge, lack of power, lack of ability) but the last excuse causes God to become angry - plain lack of willingness.
- When we persist in unwillingness we lose part of our call. God had wanted Moses to do something - and it was a great privilege - but God now gives part of it to Aaron instead. Moses will still be used by God, but not to the same degree he would have been used if he had responded with a willing heart. His call shrank slightly. And our call, the degree to which God intends on using us, also shrinks when we are persistently unwilling to be used by God. Our reluctance diminishes us.

5) LESSONS IN OBEDIENCE AND TRUST (4:18-6:13)

Moses Returns to Egypt

18 Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me return to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive." Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."

19 Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all those who wanted to kill you are dead." 20 So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

21 The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do.
But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' “

God tends to reward obedience with some encouragement.

- ‘Then Moses went’. God refused all five of Moses’ excuses. God did not take ‘no’ for an answer, but instead overcame Moses’ reluctance. And Moses decided to obey. His obedience was delayed (which is a form of disobedience), but it came eventually.
- God immediately encouraged him. God gave him favour with Jethro, his father-in-law, who let him take leave. And God gave him further revelation - firstly that it was safe to take his wife and boys (v19-20), and secondly some more clarity about what would happen in Egypt (v21-23).
- Similarly, when we obey God, we usually experience an initial flood of encouragement from God. It is as though obedience brings God’s smile over our lives.

God doesn’t tolerate selective obedience.

- ‘The Lord met Moses and was about to kill him.’ This is a mysterious event; but it seems that God is confronting Moses - in the strongest possible way - because Moses had not circumcised his son. God had clearly instructed all of Abraham’s descendants to circumcise their children (Genesis 17:10,14). Yet Moses was lax about this. God demands that this be set right before Moses enter Egypt and begin to fulfil the call of God. Moses must understand that his ministry is ultimately a fulfilment of God’s covenant to Abraham (see 2:24). Moses must learn total obedience, not selective obedience, if God is to use him.
- Similarly, there is often a point of confrontation in the life of the leader where God demands that they lay aside some area of compromise. He will not allow them to progress until they do.
- His wife intervenes by circumcising her son. She calls Moses ‘a bridegroom of blood’. This is probably her way of saying, ‘I’ll never forget this experience. Your disobedience nearly cost us your life - it took blood to save you.’

The LORD said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the signs he had commanded him to perform.
29 Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

Once we respond to God’s discipline, he restores us.

- Moses responded to God’s discipline by being circumcised (v24-26). Immediately, he experiences God’s smile over him again. Aaron, his brother, responds warmly to him and partners him (v27-28), just as God said he would (see verse 14). And the Israelites immediately received Moses as their God-sent liberator. Instead of rejecting him as they once had (see 2:13-14), they receive him and worship God for answering their prayers.
- Similarly, God’s discipline may seem harsh, but if we respond positively and obediently to it, learning whatever God is trying to teach us, we will experience God’s restoration and smile over our lives and ministry.

Exodus 5

Bricks Without Straw

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

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

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

4 But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" 5 Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working."

6 That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people: 7 "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. 8 But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' 9 Make the work harder for them so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies."

10 Then the slave drivers and the overseers went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I will not give you any more straw. 11
Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all." 12 So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. 13 The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw." 14 And Pharaoh's slave drivers beat the Israelite overseers they had appointed, demanding, "Why haven't you met your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?"

15 Then the Israelite overseers went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your servants this way? 16 Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, 'Make bricks!' Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people."

17 Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' 18 Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks."

19 The Israelite overseers realized they were in trouble when they were told, "You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day." 20 When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, 21 and they said, "May the LORD look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Lack of total obedience to God’s instructions backfires.

- The story runs clearly enough. Moses asks Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go to the wilderness to worship (v1-3). Pharaoh refuses Moses’ request and increases the burden of the Israelites (v4-9). The Egyptian taskmasters carry out Pharaoh's orders (v10-14). The Israelites complain to Pharaoh who rebukes them (v15-19). The people blame Moses for their new levels of suffering (v20-21).

- A superficial reading of these verses misses the most important detail: God had told Moses exactly how to approach Pharaoh (see 3:18), but Moses, in his opening words to Pharaoh (v1), had not been faithful with God’s instructions. In 3:18 we see that Moses was meant to take the elders with him to Pharaoh, but instead he just took Aaron (v1). In 3:18 we see he was to explain that Yahweh was the God of the Hebrews (Pharaoh knew this name), but instead he spoke of Yahweh as the God of Israel (v1) (Pharaoh did not know this name). In 3:18 we see that Moses was to politely ask that his people could go. But instead he declared that God himself demanded it (v1). They were to ask for a three-day trip (3:18), but they immediately asked for a total release (v1). No wonder Pharaoh was angered. If Moses had explicitly followed God’s instructions, Pharaoh would still have said no, but it is unlikely that he would have lashed out with such resolve by doubling the sufferings of the Hebrews. Moses was learning an important lesson: lack of precise obedience backfires. Later Moses would learn ‘to do everything just as the LORD
commanded him to’ (see 40:16), but this kind of obedience needed to be learned the painful way.

- Still today, we need to do exactly what God tells us to. Whenever we take it upon ourselves to interpret what we feel God wants us to do, and don’t make an effort to be faithful to exactly what God has told us, we cause problems. Partial obedience backfires.

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**God Promises Deliverance**

22 Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? 23 Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

---

**Our mistakes should drive us to prayer.**

- Moses, a discouraged and broken man, calls out to God in prayer. This is what distinguishes him from the Israelites. When they were in trouble they don’t call out to God - they call out to Pharaoh (v15,16) and then to Moses and Aaron (v20,21). We should follow Moses’ example, and reject the example of the Israelites in this regard. We should make sure that our mistakes drive us to God in prayer.

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**Exodus 6**

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

2 God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, [a] but by my name the LORD [b] I did not make myself known to them. [c] 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

6 "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.'"

---

When our mistakes drive us to prayer, God re-affirms his promises to us.

- Although God does not answer Moses’ question (v22,23), he does re-affirm his promise to liberate the Hebrews from Egypt.
- In seven separate ‘I will’ promises, God says, "I'm going to do it. You can count on me." The promises are glorious: 1) I will bring you out, 2) I will
rescue you from their bondage, 3) I will redeem you, 4) I will take you as my people, 5) I will be your God, 6) I will bring you into the land and 7) I will give it to you as a heritage.

• He reveals why he is so committed to keeping his promises to liberate them:
  1) God liberates them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v2,3,8). The covenant is that anyone who curses the Jews will be cursed (Genesis 12:3). The covenant is that they will have their own land (Genesis 12:7). Still today, God does what he does in the world because of his promise to Abraham. The church of Jesus Christ is grafted into the promise to Abraham. God has plans to bless us, and use us. He will keep his promise.
  2) God liberates them because of his compassion (v5). God cares about people’s needs - especially, but not exclusively, their spiritual needs.
  3) God liberates them because of his desire for self-revelation. He reveals himself as ‘the LORD’ or ‘Yahweh’. In the past he revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in a certain way, but through the events of the Exodus he wants to reveal himself in even greater detail (v3). God works in our lives to reveal himself increasingly to us. (For more insight into the significance of the name ‘Yahweh’ see commentary of 3:12-22.)
• When we are discouraged by our failures, or by God’s apparent lack of keeping his promise, we should seek God who renews his promises to us. When we doubt his promise, we should remind ourselves why God is so committed to keeping his promises. There are three reasons: his covenant, his compassion, and his desire to increasingly reveal himself.

9 Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labor.

10 Then the LORD said to Moses, 11 "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country."

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

Family Record of Moses and Aaron

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

We are to beware of fleeting trust.
• Moses was slow to trust and obey God at first (3:11-4:13). God had to patiently overcome his reluctance to trust and obey him. On the other hand, the Israelites seemed to trust and obey God immediately (4:31).
• But then trouble came - and the Israelites instantly lost their faith. They struggled to believe again. ‘Moses reported this to the Israelites, but
they did not listen to him because of their discouragement’ (v9). But Moses’ faith and obedience, with God’s encouragement, prevailed.

- We are still to make sure that our faith is not short-lived and fleeting. Jesus told a parable about this tendency to believe at first, but then, the moment trouble comes, to stop believing. It speaks of those who heard God’s word of promise and ‘at once received it with joy. But since they have no root, it only lasted a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away’ (Mark 4:16-17).
- Although Moses experienced a setback in his faith, (5:22-23) it and his obedience were restored and prevailed. Like Moses, we need to seek a faith that lasts and overcomes, one that stands firm when surrounded by those who have stopped trusting God and remains even in the face of persecution and trouble.

6) COMING TO KNOW GOD (6:14-7:7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>These were the heads of their families [e]: The sons of Reuben the firstborn son of Israel were Hanok and Pallu, Hezron and Karmi. These were the clans of Reuben.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. These were the clans of Simeon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their records: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived 137 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The sons of Gershon, by clans, were Libni and Shimei.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived 133 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi according to their records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived 137 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg and Zikri.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25 Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas.

These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan.

26 It was this Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, “Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.” 27 They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt—this same Moses and Aaron.

We know who God is because he has acted in history.

• ‘It was this Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, ‘Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions’ (v26). The whole point of this long genealogy is to show us that Moses and Aaron were real people. The Exodus really happened. Moses and Aaron were the ones God used. They were ordinary human beings, with forefathers and descendants from the tribe of Levi. We must remember that God acts in history. Our faith in God and Jesus are not an idea, a philosophy, a theory, or a made-up religion or ideology. Although God has given revelations to people such as the prophets and writers of Scripture, it is more than just some ‘revelation’ that came to someone at some time. No, we know who God is because he has acted in history, in real events, through real people. If he had not intervened in history, and if the historical events were not recorded for us to read, we would not know who God is. God is a living God. He still acts in history, although the events are unique of the Exodus 3300 years ago and the events of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago.

• Further commentary on the genealogy follows:
• See verses 14-16: Jacob, grandson of Abraham, had twelve sons who went into Egypt. These sons became the heads of twelve tribes. Each tribe consisted of many clans. This genealogy draws attention to just three of these heads of tribes: Reuben, Simeon and Levi. But the rest of the genealogy focuses only on the growth of the tribe of Levi ...
• See verses 17-19: Levi had three sons who became the heads of sections within the growing tribe of Levi. Later the Levites would be the tribe that would oversee the functioning of the tabernacle and sacrificial system, which would be soon formed. But, the rest of the genealogy focuses only on the subsection of Kohath...
• See verses 20-22: Kohath, a descendent of Levi had four sons (see verse 18). These verses mention some of the grandsons of Kohath. These verses become really important later in the story because they introduce many characters that will be prominent:
  o Moses and Aaron are Amran’s sons, or possibly his later descendants (it is common for ancient genealogies to skip generations).
  o Uzziel’s descendants brought up the ark to Jerusalem in the days of David (see 1 Chronicles 15:10).
  o Korah, cousin to Moses, would later rebel against Moses (see Numbers 16-17).
Verse 20 is the main verse in this genealogy. It locates Aaron and Moses in Levi’s family tree. In verses 26-27, the writer will draw attention primarily to Moses and Aaron. The rest of the genealogy focuses only on the subsection of Aaron and his descendants...

See verses 23-25: Although the main point of the genealogy is to show where Moses and Aaron fit together (see v26-27), the writer introduces us briefly to the sons of Aaron. Later in the story these sons will come to the fore:

- Aaron’s sons would become priests in the tabernacle, which was later built.
- Nadab and Abihu would later be killed by offering unholy fire (see Leviticus 10).
- Eleazer would later head up the Levites. It would be the descendents of Eleazer that would, in the main, be the clan from where the high priests were chosen.
- Ithamar would become treasurer of the offerings for the tabernacle.
- Elzaphan would later help clear the corpses of people who were killed in the judgment described in Leviticus 10.
- Phineas would become famous for his resisting of apostasy (Numbers 25).

Aaron to Speak for Moses
28 Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, 29 he said to him, "I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you."

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

Exodus 7
1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. 2 You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. 3 But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, 4 he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites.

We know who God is because he tells us what he will do in the future, and then fulfils his promises.

- Once again, God tells Moses in advance what will happen. The events of the Exodus are first promised and then fulfilled.
- The events of Jesus are like a second Exodus: in the first Exodus, God liberates Israel from Egypt through Moses, in the second Exodus, God liberates all those who trust in Christ from sin and judgment. He does this through Jesus. Interestingly the events of the second Exodus are also prophesied (see Isaiah 53 for example).
• The point is this: not only does God act in history through real people, and in real events, but he foretells what he will do. He also reveals the meaning of his intervention. He promises what he will do and then he does it. This is what makes Christianity distinct from every other faith.

5 And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

6 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. 7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

We only really know who God is when we personally trust him.
• God promised that the Egyptians would ‘know that (God) is the LORD’ (v5) through his actions. This means that through the events of the Exodus, the Egyptians would simply give mental assent to the reality that the God of the Hebrews was real and powerful. But, as we shall see, they did not put their trust in this God. They knew about God, but did not know him. They acknowledged his reality but did not submit their lives to his leadership. This is unlike Moses and Aaron who entrusted their lives to God and ‘did just as the LORD commanded them’ (v6).
• Many still come to believe that the God of the Bible is a real God. They come to know about God. But this is not enough. We need to know God personally. The Egyptians, who knew about God, experienced judgment without salvation. The Hebrews on the other hand, who came to know God, experienced salvation. Mental assent is not enough. We need to personally entrust our lives to the God of the Bible.

7) NINE POWERFUL JUDGMENTS, SIX POWERFUL INSIGHTS (7:8-10:29)

• Instead of providing commentary on just a few verses at a time, uncharacteristically, I will provide commentary on a very lengthy section of the Bible – almost four full chapters (7:8-10:29). In this section, through Moses and Aaron, God brings nine miraculous judgments against Pharaoh and Egypt. (I will focus on the tenth judgment separately because it is very different from the first nine). These judgments are designed to force Pharaoh to let Israel go. The reason I comment on the first nine judgments together is that they reveal a pattern of six insights.

Aaron's Staff Becomes a Snake
8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 9 ‘When Pharaoh says to you, “Perform a miracle,” then say to Aaron, “Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,” and it will become a snake.’

10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. 11 Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their
secret arts: 12 Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. 13 Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

First Judgment: The Plague of Blood

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. 16 Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. 17 This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. 18 The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.' "

19 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.' Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars."

20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. 21 The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

22 But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said. 23 Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians dug a long the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

Second Judgment: The Plague of Frogs

25 Seven days passed after the LORD struck the Nile.

Exodus 8

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 2 If you refuse to let them go, I will send a plague of frogs on your whole country. 3 The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. 4 The frogs will come up on you and your people and all your officials.' "
5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.'"

6 So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. 7 But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

8 Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD."

9 Moses said to Pharaoh, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile."

10 "Tomorrow," Pharaoh said.

Moses replied, "It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God. 11 The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people; they will remain only in the Nile."

12 After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the LORD about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. 13 And the LORD did what Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the fields. 14 They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them. 15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

Third Judgment: The Plague of Gnats

16 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,' and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats." 17 They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came on people and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. 18 But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not.

Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, 19 the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

Fourth Judgment: The Plague of Flies

20 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the river and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 21 If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your
people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies; even the ground will be covered with them.

22 "'But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. 23 I will make a distinction [c] between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow.'"

24 And the LORD did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials; throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.

25 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land."

26 But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the LORD our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? 27 We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, as he commands us."

28 Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the wilderness, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me."

29 Moses answered, "As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only let Pharaoh be sure that he does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD."

30 Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD, 31 and the LORD did what Moses asked. The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. 32 But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

Exodus 9

Fifth Judgment: The Plague on Livestock

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." 2 If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, 3 the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field—on your horses, donkeys and camels and on your cattle, sheep and goats. 4 But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.'"

5 The LORD set a time and said, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this in the land." 6 And the next day the LORD did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. 7 Pharaoh
investigated and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

Sixth Judgment: The Plague of Boils

8 Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. 9 It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on people and animals throughout the land."

10 So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on people and animals. 11 The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians. 12 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

Seventh Judgment: The Plague of Hail

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, 14 or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. 16 But I have raised you up [a] for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. 17 You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go. 18 Therefore, at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. 19 Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every person and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.' "

20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. 21 But those who ignored the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the field.

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt—on people and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt." 23 When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. 25 Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields—both people and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. 26 The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.
27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the LORD, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don't have to stay any longer."

29 Moses replied, "When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. 30 But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God."

31 (The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom. 32 The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later.)

33 Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. 34 When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. 35 So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.

Exodus 10

Eighth Judgment: The Plague of Locusts

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these signs of mine among them 2 that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD."

3 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me. 4 If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. 5 They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. 6 They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians—something neither your parents nor your ancestors have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.' " Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.

7 Pharaoh’s officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?"

8 Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. "Go, worship the LORD your God," he said. "But tell me who will be going."
9 Moses answered, "We will go with our young and our old, with our sons and our daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a festival to the LORD."

10 Pharaoh said, "The LORD be with you—if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. [a] 11 No! Have only the men go and worship the LORD, since that's what you have been asking for." Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh's presence.

12 And the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over Egypt so that locusts swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the fields, everything left by the hail."

13 So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the LORD made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; 14 they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. 15 They covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail—everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.

16 Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. 17 Now forgive my sin once more and pray to the LORD your God to take this deadly plague away from me."

18 Moses then left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. 19 And the LORD changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. [b] Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt. 20 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

**Tenth Judgment: The Plague of Darkness**

21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. 23 No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

24 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind."

25 But Moses said, "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. 26 Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in
worshiping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD."

27 But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28 Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die."

29 "Just as you say," Moses replied. "I will never appear before you again."

We learn six main things from these first nine plagues.
• The details of these nine miraculous judgments against Egypt (7:8-10:29) in the form of nine plagues (water to blood, frogs, gnats (or mosquitoes), flies, the plagues on the livestock, boils, hail, locusts and darkness over the land (probably a windstorm that darkens the sky with sand)) reveal six truths. Each truth comes through repeatedly in the various plagues:

Firstly, we learn that God sometimes reveals himself in miraculous judgments.
• God reveals himself to the world in many ways. The most obvious way he reveals himself is through creation. Romans 1:21 reminds us that creation clearly points to the existence of a Creator, and that people will intuitively realize this.
• But the Bible also speaks of God revealing himself in mighty works. In other words, he does powerful things in history that reveal some more of himself to people.
• In these nine plagues, God does miracles. The miracles are mighty acts of judgment. Throughout the account of the plagues we find verses that show how God is seeking to reveal himself to Egypt, and in particular to Pharaoh. Pharaoh had asked, ‘Who is the LORD (or Yahweh)?’ (5:2) when Moses first came to him. The nine plagues reveal the answer. Through God’s miraculous plagues, God reveals himself:
  o The LORD is real. ‘And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it’ (7:5).
  o The LORD is all-powerful. ‘By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood’ (7:17).
  o The LORD is unique. ‘Moses replied, “It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God” (8:10).
  o The LORD has a special relationship with his people. ‘But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. 23 I will make a distinction [c] between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow’ (8:22,23).
  o The LORD is the one-and-only God of all the earth. ‘I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials..."
and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in
eall the earth’ (9:14).

- The LORD possesses the earth. ‘Moses replied, “When I have gone
out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The
thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may
know that the earth is the LORD’s’ (9:29).

• Through these mighty works, we also learn that God is more powerful
than the so-called ‘gods’ of Egypt. In the final judgment God explicitly
reveals his intention: ‘I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt’
(12:12). Egypt worshipped many different gods. God revealed that he is
far more powerful than these false gods. Let me give some examples of
how God, through these miraculous acts of judgment mocks the gods:
• By turning the Nile into blood, God mocked the gods ‘Khnum’,
‘Hapi’ and ‘Osiris’. The Egyptian god Khnum was said to be the
guardian of the Nile, and this showed he was unable to protect his
territory. The god Hapi was said to be the spirit of the Nile,
and was dealt a defeat. The great god Osiris was thought to have the
Nile as his bloodstream - now, he is truly bleeding!
• By filling the land with frogs, God mocked the frog-goddess
‘Heqt’. Egyptians worshipped the frog as a female goddess
because frogs were common around the Nile, because they
reproduced rapidly, and because being amphibians they are part
of two worlds, creatures of both land and water.
• In the plague of incurable boils, God mocked the god ‘Imhotep’
who was said to be the god of medicine; even those who would be
thought of as closest to the Egyptian gods (the court magicians)
were stricken with this plague.
• In the hailstorm, God mocked several Egyptian gods. Notable
among them would was Nut, the sky goddess.
• In the plague on the livestock, God showed he was greater than
the Hathor (a cow-like mother goddess).
• In Isaiah 41:24 God reveals his feelings about the false ‘gods’ that
humanity tends to worship: ‘You are less than nothing - and utterly
worthless!’ These plagues show that God is far more powerful over the
false gods. Nowadays, in secular countries, our ‘gods’ are whatever we
ascribe the greatest value to - they may be pleasure, money, fame,
certain ideologies, our children etc. Although these are not bad in
themselves, when we worship them, we attract God’s judgment. God
will reveal the powerlessness of these gods. He alone, greater than all
false gods, deserves to worshipped.

Secondly, we learn about the dangers of a refusal to repent.
• We must not be like Pharaoh, who refused to repent. Pharaoh is a case
study in someone who gets to know the truth about God, who reluctantly
seems to submit to God, but in the end refuses to submit to God. He
knows the truth about God, but he suppresses the truth. He knows about
God, but refuses to know God personally. He recognizes the greatness of
God, but refuses to submit to or respect God. His heart is so full of self-
worship that there is no space for God-worship. He is addicted to his own
power. He has lived his life doing whatever he wishes, answering to no
And he refuses to start doing what God wants, and living accountably to God. Still today, millions of people are privileged to learn about God, but tragically instead of trusting and repenting, they harden their hearts in unbelief. Like Pharaoh, they may know about God, but they don’t know God personally!

- Interestingly, the court magicians who encountered Moses (see 7:11-12) are named and spoken of in the New Testament. They are described as men who are ‘always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.’ (2 Timothy 3:7-9). They are just like Pharaoh.

- The main problem with Pharaoh is that he has a hard heart. A heart that is hard with disbelief, and non-submission. In the Bible, the ‘heart’ is the inner personality. It is the place where we allow God to speak within. It is with our hearts that we believe and submit to God (see Romans 10:9-10). But it is with our hearts that we can also refuse to listen to God, believe him or refuse to submit to him. Pharaoh knew in his heart that what Moses said about God was true. But he rejected the truth. It didn’t suit him. Hebrews 3:12 describes him well: ‘See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.’

- Consider this question: who hardened Pharaoh’s heart? Was it God, or was it himself? In 7:13, we see that it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart. ‘Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them’. But then in 9:12 we see that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. ‘But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron.’ How do we make sense of this? We must note the progression. Before God did anything, Pharaoh hardened his heart. God did not create the hardness of heart. He simply allowed Pharaoh to harden his heart. He was allowing Pharaoh to have his own way. It is much like Romans 1:28.29, which tells us how God, instead of resisting our hard hearts, sometimes simply hands us over to our sinfulness: ‘Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity.’

- Sometimes it seemed as if Pharaoh was repenting. This happened as his suffering grew more intense. He would partially cooperate with Moses. But then the moment his suffering was alleviated, his hard heart would surface again. And he would pull back towards his refusal to repent. This is similar to 2 Corinthians 7:10 which tells us that there is a seeming repentance, but over time it becomes clear that the repentance is not real. It is worldly (i.e. in response to circumstances) instead of godly (i.e. in response to God): ‘Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.’

Thirdly, we learn that God can even use human wickedness to accomplish his purposes.
• ‘For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ (9:15-16).

• Pharaoh resisted God. But he could not resist God’s over-all purpose. Just because some people resist God, does not mean God’s hands are tied. In fact, God sometimes - and mysteriously - even uses wicked people to reveal himself, and accomplish his purposes. He could have destroyed Pharaoh but he did not. He uses Pharaoh’s will to accomplish not Pharaoh’s will but his own. Although God does not create the rebellion in Pharaoh, he seems to rouse it to full pitch. In this way, he controls even the heart of the wicked.

• But how does God use evil for good? The answer is, ‘in his own mysterious ways’. Each situation is different. In the Exodus events, God powerfully revealed himself through a miraculous liberation of Israel. But what if Pharaoh had simply let God’s people go without resistance. Then no demonstrations of power would have been needed. God would have received less glory in the Exodus. And the people of God would have had less of a testimony of God’s greatness. But because Pharaoh resisted, God was given the opportunity to reveal his power. He used Pharaoh’s hard heart for his own glory. Similarly, we’re told in the second Exodus, the death and resurrection of Christ, that God used the wickedness of human beings (who unjustly crucified him) to accomplish the salvation of all humanity (see Acts 2:23-24: ‘This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.’) One of the most wonderful promises in the Bible is Romans 8:28: ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.’ If we love God, then he promises that no matter what suffering we experience at the hands of evil men, that God is able to use this evil for good. In fact, some of the greatest things God does in and through our lives will only be possible because of the experience of wickedness against us. This is true of the first Exodus through Moses, the second Exodus through Jesus, and in our personal exoduses as well! No matter what happens to us, we can rest assured that, if we keep on loving God, he will turn this for our good and his glory in some way, partially in this life, and fully in the next life.

Fourthly, we learn about miracles.

• ‘Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs’ (7:10-12).

• God sometimes gives his people miracle-working power (see Acts 2:43). This happens especially when God is invading, so to speak, a new culture that is very hard towards him. This can of course be very exciting.
But we must remember that not all miracles come from God. Pharaoh’s magicians could imitate, to a degree, the miracles of God. This was obviously demonic power at work. We must remember that miracles are part of Satan’s arsenal. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 reminds us that Satan, through deceived people, works with ‘all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they may be saved’. Today, with the explosion of interest in the occult in the Western world, access to supernatural demonic knowledge and powers is becoming more and more common. However, as impressive as these miracles are, they are counterfeit miracles. Satan is attempting to lure people away from God through them. We must never believe a teaching just because it is accompanied by miracles. Rather, we test the teaching against God’s Word.

Although Satan can try to ‘copy’ God by performing miracles, in the final analysis they are not as powerful as God’s miracles. It is only in the first two miraculous judgments that the magicians could imitate God’s miracles (see 7:22 and 8:7) but later they could not (see 8:10 for example). Even the magicians began to understand that the power associated with the ministry of Moses and Aaron was ‘the finger of God’ (8:19), and was far greater than theirs. Interestingly, the magicians could initially only imitate destructive miracles (like turning the water to blood), but unlike Moses, could not reverse the miracle (by turning the blood back to water). Still today, the power of God in an authentic signs and wonders ministry will exceed the powers available in the occult (see Acts 8:4-18 for example).

As exciting as miracles are, they are limited in their ability to change people. Miracles never softened Pharaoh’s heart. (If anything did soften his heart, at least temporarily, it was suffering.) The question to be asked is, ‘What eventually freed the Israelites from Egypt?’ The answer is not miracles. The answer is ‘the blood of the lamb’ (see chapters 11-12). Similarly, in the early church, the main mission of the apostles as they sought to advance the kingdom of God was to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, and his sacrificial death. It was the gospel that God used to change the world. It is true that miracles often (but not always) accompanied the gospel message and thereby gave it greater credibility. But ultimately it is the gospel message preached in the power of the Spirit, and not signs and wonders, that has the power to change the world.

Fifthly, we learn about God’s judgment.

God is slow to anger. He does not execute judgment the moment he detects hardness of heart in our lives. Pharaoh received much warning. God patiently gave him nine opportunities to repent. Each time God even gave him a warning (see 8:1-2 for example) of what he was about to do.

Shockingly, Pharaoh ignores God. It is a great mistake to resist and ignore the voice of God. At first, he was willing to meet with Moses and Aaron. But eventually he tells them to never speak to him again. By doing this he finally shuts out the voice of God completely (see 10:28-
29). This reminds us that every sinner has a final opportunity to repent. Christ may knock on the door of our hearts (see Revelations 3:20) for a long time. But if we harden our hearts to the knocking eventually he will stop knocking.

- As we read the nine miraculous judgments, there is a sense that they are becoming increasingly severe. There is a sense that God’s anger is growing. It reminds us of God’s warning to us: ‘But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart, you are storing up God’s wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when the righteous judgment will be revealed’ (Romans 2:5).

- The first nine judgments were warning judgments. They were designed to bring about repentance so as to protect Pharaoh and Egypt from the fierceness of the tenth judgment (chapters 11-12). Still today, God acts in judgment to bring about repentance. Romans 1:18 tells us that God’s wrath is currently being revealed. History is full of evidence of God’s righteous judgments against sin. But we must be careful to too quickly assume that any calamity is the wrath of God being revealed. However, we can say two things about present calamities: 1) every calamity (such as the nine plagues here) has the power to make us freshly soften our hearts before God, and 2) every calamity is a foreshadowing of ultimate judgment, on Judgment Day, when God’s wrath will finally and fully be revealed against sin and hardness of heart (see Luke 13:1-5).

Sixthly, we learn about God’s favour on his people.

- Although God’s people at first experienced some of the same suffering as the Egyptians, from the fourth judgment God began to shield his people from the suffering of the Egyptians. Let me give two examples:
  - ‘But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This sign will occur tomorrow’ (8:22-23).
  - ‘No one could see anyone else or move about for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived’ (10:23).

- We see that God revealed his power not only by judging sin, but also by protecting his own people from suffering. Although God does not promise to protect his people from all suffering, God is able to protect us from some suffering. Part of the way God sometimes chooses to confirm the gospel message is by giving supernatural favour to the gospel messengers. This may come in the form of protection (from disease and danger) and provision. Amazingly (and as 10:23 puts it), God is able to make the sun shine on us even when the land we live in is covered by darkness.

8) GOD’S AMAZING SALVATION, PART 1 (11:1-12:6)

The salvation of Israel vividly foreshadows the salvation of the world through Jesus.
• Chapters 11-12 describe how God released the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt in 1300 BC. He saves them from oppression and sets them free. As amazing as these events are in themselves, they are more amazing when we consider that they prophetically foreshadow something far greater - Christ’s saving work accomplished in AD 33. Said another way, they are early echoes of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the salvation he accomplished.

• The original Exodus, through Moses, foreshadows the ultimate Exodus, through Jesus. The Exodus described in chapters 11-12 stunningly parallels the Exodus recorded in the New Testament.

• In the original Exodus, God rescues the Hebrews from bondage to Egypt. In the ultimate Exodus, God rescues everyone who trusts in Jesus from bondage to sin, Satan and death.

• The original Exodus was short-lived, and applied to one generation. The ultimate Exodus still continues. Every time someone experiences salvation through faith in Jesus Christ’s death the Exodus continues. One way of thinking of this is that Christ’s great Exodus intervention, 2000 years ago, is causing millions of personal Exoduses today.

• Let us explore the parallels between God’s salvation of the Hebrews from Egypt, and God’s salvation of the person who trusts in Christ today.

Exodus 11

Tenth Judgment: The Plague on the Firstborn

1 Now the LORD had said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely. 2 Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbours for articles of silver and gold.” 3 (The LORD made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh’s officials and by the people.)

God saves us radically.

• Through the Exodus God would liberate the Hebrews from Egypt entirely (v1). He was not just upgrading their social status in Egypt or moving them into a nicer suburb in Egypt. Nor was he taking them out Egypt, and into another territory, Canaan. They were to be transferred from one kingdom to another.

• Similarly, when God saves a person who trusts in Jesus, the change is radical. He does not change us geographically. He changes us spiritually. He does not just improve our morality or our circumstances. Rather he transfers us into an entirely new kingdom. ‘He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of his people in the kingdom of light. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins’ (Colossians 1:12-14). Salvation is radical!
4 So Moses said, “This is what the LORD says: ‘About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. 5 Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. 6 There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again.

God saves us from terrible, universal judgment.
• Egypt was about to experience a terrible, universal judgment. It would be far worse than the previous nine judgments. Those judgments were merely warnings about this judgment. They were opportunities to repent so that this judgment could be averted. In this judgment every firstborn son in Egypt would die, including Pharaoh’s firstborn son, who was heir to the throne. Pharaoh and Egypt had refused to let go of God’s firstborn son, Israel (see Hosea 11:1 which describes Israel as God’s firstborn son) and now God would punish Pharaoh and Egypt by killing their firstborn sons. This would result in ‘loud wailing throughout Egypt—worse than there has ever been or ever will be again’ (v6).
• Although God has released his judgments on the earth in part (see Romans 1:18), there awaits a universal, terrible judgment (see Romans 2:5). Our sin-hardened world is on a collision course with a Holy God on Judgment Day.
• Israel would be spared from this judgment (v7). Similarly, those who trust in Jesus will ultimately be spared from judgment too. John 5:24 says that if we trust in Jesus we will ‘not be judged’ because we have ‘crossed over from death to life.’ God would save Israel from his own judgment. And still today, God seeks to save us from his own judgment.

7 But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.’ Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. 8 All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will leave.” Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.

9 The LORD had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt." 10 Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.

God saves us by sheer grace.
• ‘Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel’ (v7). What was so special about Israel that God would save them from his judgment on Egypt? Was is their devotion to God? Was it their godliness? Not at all, as we shall see in the chapters to come, they were as corrupt as Egypt. This verse tells us that it is the LORD that makes the distinction. They did not distinguish themselves from Egypt by their beliefs, or devotion, or good behaviour. Rather, God by sheer undeserved grace distinguished them.
Similarly, God still saves people by sheer grace. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, ‘God saved us, and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.’ Ephesians 1:8-9 says, ‘For it is by grace that you have been saved, by faith - and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.’

God saves us without any effort on our behalf.
- In 2:23 the Israelites had been groaning in their slavery. But now not even a dog will bark at them or their animals (v7). It would be a complete change of fate for them. And it would require no effort on their behalf. It would all result from God's work.
- Moses prophesied to Pharaoh: ‘All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, ‘Go, you and all the people who follow you!’ The Hebrews would not need to fight, or trick, or sneak their way out of Egypt. They would literally march out with the permission of the officials of Egypt. It would be an effortless salvation on their part.
- Similarly, we do not need to earn salvation. Salvation is given to us undeservedly. Salvation is something God does to us and for us. We merely receive and enjoy it by faith. When it comes to growing as a Christian, some effort is required. But when it comes to being saved initially, it costs us no effort. We simply hear the gospel and, by God’s grace, we respond with faith. And we are saved.
- Amazingly, the nine previous miraculous judgments were all accomplished through Moses’ and Aaron’s staff (see 7:21 for example), but this final miraculous judgment would not happen with any involvement from Moses. It would be the direct, unassisted work of God.

Exodus 12

The Passover

1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb [a] for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.

God saves us by the sacrificial death of a lamb.
- We are now looking at some of the most significant verses in the entire Bible. On the one hand we see how God is setting the ancient Israelites free from bondage to Egypt by the death of a lamb, but on the other
hand we clearly see that this event, with a lot of detail, parallels an event that would come 1300 years later by the death of God's lamb, Jesus Christ. Look at these verses that speak of Christ: ‘The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’’ (John 1:29), ‘Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed’ (1 Corinthians 6:7) and ‘He (the Messiah) was led like a lamb to the slaughter’ (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus is the fulfilment of the lamb. He is God's way of setting the world free from its bondage to sin.

- ‘You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat’ (v4). There was enough lamb to go round to feed everyone. In the same way, the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to save the entire world. There is enough of Jesus' salvation to be experienced by everyone who ever has lived, who now lives, and who ever will live!
- ‘The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect’ (v5). The lamb was without defect. It had to be perfect. It was young, which speaks of innocence. Jesus, too, was without defect. He was entirely innocent. One sinner cannot save another sinner from their sin. No, it would take a sinless Saviour to save us from our sin. This is what Jesus was - sinless!
- ‘Do not break any of the bones’ (v46). This detail was given later. Christ was crucified, but none of his bones were broken (see John 19:31-37 for how this came to pass in Jesus' crucifixion, although crucifixion would usually result in some broken bones).
- ‘This month is to be for you the first month of your year’ (v2). The death of the lamb was the great turning point in the history of Israel. It would even mark the beginning of a new year. Still today the Jewish people celebrate Pesach (or Passover) to remember this day. It still marks the beginning of a new year. The symbolic significance is that the death of Christ the lamb marks the turning point in human history - and in the lives of those who trust in him. This was God’s way of saying, ‘Never forget how I liberated you by the blood of a lamb. It is the most important moment in your history.’ Similarly, the Christian and the church today need to keep the cross of Christ central in their lives. It needs to be regularly remembered and celebrated. The New Testament emphasises the cross. The four Gospels give most of their attention to the events building up to the cross. The apostle Paul makes radical comments about the central importance of the cross: ‘For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified’ (1 Corinthians 2:2), ‘Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified’ (Galatians 3:1) and ‘May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 6:14).

9) GOD’S AMAZING SALVATION, PART 2 (12:7-13)

7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. 8 That same
night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. 9 Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. 10 Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

• These seven verses are loaded with insight into our salvation through Christ. We learn six things why and how God saves us:

Because God is holy, he must punish our sin.
• ‘On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment’ (v12). God’s judgment was upon Egypt. The ‘firstborn’ of each family represented the entire family. God was going to kill the firstborn of every family in Egypt as a way of saying, ‘the wages of sin is death’ (see Romans 3:23). Still today, the wages of sin is death. God promises to punish us for our sin. No one gets away with anything in God’s world. The Holy God sees all our wickedness of heart, thought, word and deed. And he promises to punish us for our sin. Judgment is real. Death is the consequence for our sin. God’s holiness demands death.

• Notice that God said he would judge every firstborn. This includes even the firstborns of the Israelites. The Israelites are no more godly or devoted than the Egyptians are. They too have sinned against God.

Because God is merciful, he provided a substitute.
• ‘They are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs’ (v7). The lamb’s blood represents the lamb’s sacrificial death. Mysteriously, God transferred the sin of the Israelites to the lamb. And then he punished those sins in the lamb. The innocent lamb, carrying their sins, took their punishment. God provided a substitute. The Israelites, though guilty, escaped God’s judgment. The lamb, though innocent, took their judgment instead.

• Similarly, though Jesus was sinless, God transferred the sin of the world onto Christ who took our punishment upon himself. His sacrificial death, evidenced by his blood, allows us to escape God’s judgment against sin. Truly he is the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Isaiah 53:5-7 makes this point so powerfully: ‘But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed
and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to
the slaughter.' ‘God demonstrated his love for us like this: while we still
sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8). Amazingly, instead of
demanding our blood for our sin, he offered his own.

- Here is an illustration of the wonderful way that Christ takes the
  judgment we deserve, so that if we trust in him we don’t need to be
  judged ourselves: “Many years ago, a father and his daughter were
  walking through the grass on the Canadian prairie. In the distance, they
  saw a prairie fire, and they realized that it would soon engulf them. The
  father knew there was only one way of escape: They would quickly begin
  a fire right where they were and burn a large patch of grass. When the
  huge fire drew near, they then would stand on the section that had
  already burned. When the flames did approach them, the girl was
terrified but her father assured her, ‘The flames can’t get to us. We are
standing where the fire has already been.’” When Christ died on the
  cross, he experienced the fire of God’s judgment. Now, we can stand on
Christ, the place where the fire of judgment has already burnt. Right
now, if we shelter under the blood, we are free from God’s wrath. We
are not under God’s wrath but under his grace and acceptance. And one
day, when the flames of judgment come upon everyone everywhere on
the great and terrible day of Judgment, we too will be safe from
judgment. The wrath of God will pass over us. We will be safe because
of the blood of the lamb.

Because God is wise, he came up with a solution to our sin.
- God’s holiness demands that our sin gets punished. But God’s love
  provided a substitute, who was punished on our behalf. However, God’s
love needed assistance by God’s wisdom. God had found himself in a
predicament. He loved us and wanted to be with us. But he hated our sin
and had to punish us. Wonderfully, God came up with the idea of a
substitute. This was God’s own idea. It reconciled within himself both his
holy promise to punish sin, and his loving promise to free us.
- In a previous story in the Bible, God also provides a lamb. it was not
Abraham’s idea to save his son Isaac by providing a substitute. ‘Abraham
told Isaac, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my
son.” Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by
its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt
offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will
Provide.’ (Genesis 22:8,14). The provision of a substitute was God’s
idea. Similarly, it was not Moses’ idea or the people’s idea to turn away
the anger of God by the offering of a substitute. It was God’s idea to
punish a lamb rather than the people, for the sin of the people.
- Similarly, it was God’s idea to reconcile the human race to himself
through the sacrificial death of Jesus. ‘All this is from God, who
reconciled us to himself through Christ ... 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 5:18,21). What a wise God! In the words of Paul,
who, reflecting on the wonders of God’s mercy toward sinners,
exclaimed ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of
God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing
out!’ (Romans 11:33). Apt words when we consider that God found a way to reconcile death-sentenced sinners to himself.

Because God is loving, he urges (but doesn’t force) us to shelter under the blood.

- ‘Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs’ (v7). ‘When I see the blood, I will pass over you’ (v13).
- God instructed Moses to instruct the people to apply the blood to their homes. For the Israelites to experience protection from God’s judgment, they needed to shelter under the blood of the lamb. They were to put it on the tops and sides of the doorframes of their houses. And they were to shelter in that house. If there were any firstborn Israelites that refused to shelter under the blood of the lamb, they too would have died. The only protection from judgment was the blood. They had to shelter under it. But they were not forced to shelter under it. The choice was theirs.
- Still today, the only protection from God’s wrath is the blood of Christ. We are privileged to shelter under the blood of Christ. When God sees the blood, his judgment passes over us. But the question is, ‘Will we receive God’s provision?’ Will we trust in Christ’s death on our behalf? Or will we make light of the death of Christ, or perhaps reject it entirely. If so, there is no way to escape the judgment of God. Either we pay the price for our sin, or we allow Christ to pay the price for our sin. There is no other choice. Let us make sure that we shelter under the blood. God will not force us to. If we love people, we too will urge others to shelter under the blood. ‘Christ’s love compels us … we are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God’ (2 Corinthians 5:14,20).
- How is it that we shelter under Christ’s blood? The answer is that we do it by simple trust. Our nationality, our levels of godliness, our intellectual comprehension cannot save us. Imagine an Israelite firstborn thinking to himself, ‘I will not bother sheltering under the blood - I am a Jew by birth. Surely God will not judge me.’ But how wrong he would have been! Imagine another firstborn Israelite thinking to himself, ‘I am a good person, so I don’t need to shelter under the blood. Surely God will not judge me.’ How wrong he too would have been. Consider yet another firstborn Israelite thinking to himself, ‘I don’t understand the concept of the blood of the lamb. It doesn’t make sense to me. So I won’t bother to shelter under it. Surely, God wouldn’t expect me to submit myself to something that I can’t fully understand.’ Again, how wrong he would have been. The only protection from judgment was to simply and trustingly shelter under the blood. Simple trust in God’s provision of the blood is how we are saved.

Because God is powerful, he saves us quickly.

- ‘That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast ... this is how you are to
eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste’ (v8,11).

• There are three symbols in the way they ate the lamb that emphasise the speediness of their salvation. Firstly, there are the bitter herbs, which represent the long years of suffering in Egypt. Secondly, there is the bread without yeast. Yeast would slow down the cooking of the bread. Bread without yeast cooks quickly. Thirdly, they had to eat with cloak tucked into their belt, with sandals on and staff in hand. This emphasises a readiness to move. They will be eating briefly, and then they will be set free quickly!

• For years they had suffered. Prayers had apparently gone unanswered. The nine deliverances had not worked. But whatever they did, they were trapped in Egypt. Then suddenly, the death of a lamb changes everything. Now, they cannot stay. Things happen quickly.

• Similarly, things happen quickly as we put our trust in Christ’s death on our behalf. Instantly, we are transferred from the dominion of darkness to light. We are forgiven. We are justified. We receive the Holy Spirit. We are given citizenship in heaven. We are adopted as God’s child. God is powerful, which is why when he saves us, some things happen really quickly!

Because God is faithful, he energizes our saved lives.

• God was sending them out on a journey. They would need strength. They were to draw their strength from the lamb that they had eaten. This is amazing - not only did the death of the lamb accomplish their salvation, but the death of the life became their source of strength and energy.

• In the same way, Christ’s death on our behalf is not just our source of salvation, but also our source of strength. We draw ongoing vitality from Christ’s sacrificial death. As inspiring as the example of Christ’s earthly life (as recorded in the Gospels) is, and as insightful as Christ’s teachings (as recorded in the Gospels) are - yet they cannot provide us with supernatural strength and vitality. They can inspire us, but not vitalize us. The death of Christ is the source of life for the Christian. Let us continue to feast on Christ’s death. It is our source of life, energy, strength and vitality. God is so faithful. He does not just set us free and send us on our way into the saved life. He is faithful in sustaining us in that freedom and salvation. We can say, ‘The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). We are saved by his death, but we also live by his death. His death sustains us with spiritual life.

10) GOD’S AMAZING SALVATION, PART 3 (12:14-51)

14 “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance. 15 For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. 16 On the first day
hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat; that is all you may do.

17 "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 18 In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. 19 For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And anyone, whether foreigner or native-born, who eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel. 20 Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread."

God’s salvation calls for a break from the past life.

• God tells Moses that in the future the Israelites would need to celebrate their exodus that came from God’s provision of a lamb’s blood. On the fourteenth day in first month of the year (this month was called the month of Nisan) they would need to eat the lamb. This was Passover-day. Then for the whole of the following week (fourteenth to twenty-first day) they were to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread (which is ‘bread without yeast’). Both the lamb and the bread pointed to the single day in which God set them free from Egypt by the blood of a lamb (see v17).

• What does the un-yeasted bread symbolize? It was a reminder of how at the time of the original liberation from Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to eat hastily (v11). They were to eat bread without yeast (v8) because this was far quicker to cook than bread with yeast. Later in this chapter we see that ‘with the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves’ (v39).

• In other words, the bread without yeast symbolized ‘a rapid break from their past life in Egypt’. This is how it came to be understood that yeast represented their past, ungodly life in Egypt. Once God had taken them out of Egypt, they were to remember that their ungodly life in Egypt was a thing of the past! Un-yeasted bread stood for un-compromised lives.

• In the New Testament yeast or leaven stands for compromise and impurity in our lives. We are warned to get rid of legalism in our lives because ‘a little yeast goes through the whole lump’ (Galatians 5:9). 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 speaks of the ungodliness in our lives. ‘Your boasting (about sin) is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.’

• The lamb was to be eaten along with unleavened bread. If the lamb stood for God’s provision of blood, and the unleavened bread for a break
from past ungodliness, what does this tell us today? It reminds us that salvation calls for a break from the past life. We experience salvation first, but then it immediately connects to a new freedom from sin in our lives - whether that sin is legalism (as in Galatians 5:9), or the sin of immorality (as in 1 Corinthians 5:6). Peter reminds us that ‘it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect’ (1 Peter 1:19). The blood of the lamb (salvation) sets us free from ‘the empty way of life’ (yeast) we used to give ourselves to.

21 Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. 23 When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

24 “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. 25 When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. 26 And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ 27 then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ ” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. 28 The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

29 At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. 30 Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

The Exodus

31 During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. 32 Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

33 The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!”

God’s salvation is powerful.
• Everything that God told Moses would happen, happened. ‘When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer (an angel representing God) to enter your houses and strike you down’ (v23). ‘At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt’ (v29). The result: Egypt experienced God’s painful judgment, whereas the Israelites experienced freedom. Pharaoh, who had just lost his heir, commanded them to go (v31-32), as did all the Egyptians (v33). Previously, they could not leave Egypt - now they could not stay. They were not permitted to. God is a powerful deliverer. When God saves us, his salvation is great.

34 So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. 35 The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. 36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. 38 Many other people went up with them, and also large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. 39 With the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

40 Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt [b] was 430 years. 41 At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD’s divisions left Egypt.

God’s salvation is connected to the fulfilment of his promises.
• God had promised Moses that he would cause the Egyptians to provide for their journey. ‘And I will make the Egyptians favourably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbour and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.’ (3:21-22). And this is exactly what he did (v35,36).
• God had promised Abraham that his descendants would multiply. ‘God took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be”’ (Genesis 15:5). And this is what happened - 600,000 men excluding women and children (v37), totalling two million people. (Some translators believe that the translation of 1000 can also mean 600 ‘clans’ or ‘groups’, in which case their were 600 groups of men excluding women and children, which would make the figure considerably less than 2 million). Either way, Abraham’s descendants had multiplied amazingly
just like God promised, despite the genocide attempts of a previous Pharaoh (see 1:8-10).

- God had promised Abraham that his descendents would be a blessing to the world (see 12:3). This is what happened - ‘many other people went up with them’ (v38). How fascinating. Many Egyptians decided to join the Israelites as they left Egypt. They too decided to trust in God. This reminds us that it was not nationality that saved the Israelites, but rather faith in God’s word. Similarly, whenever anyone trusts in Christ, regardless of their background or nationality, they can also experience salvation.
- God had promised Abraham that his descendents would be captive for about 400 years and then would be set free. Centuries before God had told Abraham: ‘Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions’ (Genesis 15:13-14). And this is what happened (v40-41).
- The point is this: God is faithful! He keeps his promises! His promises are connected to our salvation. ‘For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ’ (2 Corinthians 1:20). If God brought so many of his promises to fulfilment in the first Exodus through Moses, how much more will he bring all his promises to fulfilment through the second Exodus through Christ!

42 Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honour the LORD for the generations to come.

Passover Restrictions

43 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “These are the regulations for the Passover:

“No foreigner is to eat of it. 44 Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, 45 but a temporary resident or a hired worker may not eat of it.

46 "It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. 47 The whole community of Israel must celebrate it.

48 "A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. 49 The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you."
All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

God’s salvation is available to all who trust in the historical sacrificial death of the Lamb.

- See my commentary of 12:7-13 because those verses cover similar content to these verses. I make the point that the Passover meal was a way of celebrating and remembering God’s means of salvation, the sacrificial death of a lamb. In the same way, for those who trust in Christ, the cross is central because the cross of Christ is the means of salvation. Let me draw out a new insight from these verses ...

- What happens in the future, when new people join in the nation of Israel, even though they never lived in Egypt, and never experienced the Exodus themselves? Can they still celebrate salvation? These verses let us know that the answer is yes - but on one condition. It says, ‘any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him’ (v44) and ‘a foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you.’ (v48,49). These verses reveal that there was one condition on which salvation could be celebrated – circumcision. Circumcision meant that a person trusted in God’s promises to Abraham, since circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God called upon Abraham and his descendants to embrace (see Genesis 17:9-14). Circumcision was a sign that a person trusted in God’s word, in God’s grace, in God’s promise.

- Though Christ was crucified 2000 years ago, can we now celebrate salvation? Yes, but there is a condition. Still today, the way to become a Christian is to trust in God’s word (called the gospel), in God’s grace, in God’s promise. ‘The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile’ (Romans 1:16). We don’t need to be circumcised literally, but as we trust in Christ a spiritual circumcision of the heart happens. ‘In Christ you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your sinful nature was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead’ (Colossians 2:11-12).

- As we trust in Christ, the saving grace of the cross begins to work in our lives. Though the events of the cross happened 2000 years ago, we are still able to enjoy its power in our lives millennia later, simply by trusting in Christ. We begin to celebrate and remember the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God.
Consecration of the Firstborn

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal."

3 Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. 4 Today, in the month of Aviv, you are leaving. 5 When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month: 6 For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. 7 Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. 8 On that day tell your children, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that this law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. 10 You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.

11 "After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your ancestors, 12 you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. 13 Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

14 "In days to come, when your children ask you, 'What does this mean?' say to them, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' 16 And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

God's salvation calls us to offer ourselves to the God who owns us.

• Over and above the Passover Feast, these verses speak of two more institutions in the life of Israel: the annual seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread (v3-10), and the ceremony of the consecration of every firstborn male (v1-2 and v11-16).
• See my second point of commentary of 12:14-20 because those verses cover similar content to these verses. I make the point that the Feast of Unleavened Bread reminds people that God’s salvation calls for a break from the past life. The bread without yeast symbolizes a life without compromise. Since I have already made a point about the significance of
the Unleavened Bread, I won’t comment on verses 3-10, but rather on the significance of the consecration of the firstborn male ...

- The nation of Israel was to have a dedication ceremony offering to God their firstborn sons, and their firstborn male animals. Why did they do this? Since this was a multi-meaning dedication, they did it for three reasons:
  1) It reminded them that the whole nation of Israel was God’s firstborn son. Moses was instructed to say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son. Let my son go, so he may worship me. But if you refuse to let him go; I will kill your firstborn son’ (4:22-23). Since Egypt withheld God’s firstborn son, God took the life of Egypt’s firstborn sons (v15). God’s salvation of the Israelites was God’s way of getting a son for himself. Similarly, we become God’s sons and daughters when we trust in Christ (see John 1:12).
  2) It reminded them that since they were God’s firstborn son, bought at the price of a lamb’s blood, they belonged to God himself. What God rescues, God owns. God had redeemed Israel from slavery. God had provided the blood that set them free. God had acted in power to liberate them. And since God had saved them, God now owned them. Similarly, Paul reminds us Christians, ‘You are not your own; you were bought at a price’ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Elsewhere he reminds us that God ‘bought the church with his own blood’ (Acts 20:28).
  3) It reminded them that since they belonged to God, they needed to offer themselves to God. God owned the Israelites. He owned their livestock (which was their wealth). The human and animal firstborn represented the entire family. Although in the dedication ceremony they only offered to God the firstborn, everyone understood that the firstborn represented everyone and everything. Since it all belonged to God, it was all to be offered up to God. If the firstborn was unacceptable to sacrifice (an unclean animal, like a donkey or a human) a substitute was offered to redeem the firstborn from God. If the firstborn was an animal the substitute was a clean animal. If the firstborn was a human, the substitute was money. Although, as Christians, we don’t need to do this dedication ceremony, we are meant to offer up to God that which is already his. ‘Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness’ (Romans 6:13). From time to time we should freshly offer ourselves to the God who owns us!

God’s salvation can be portrayed in the form of symbolic institutions.
- God gave the Israelites two festivals (the Passover Lamb, and the Unleavened Bread) and one ceremony (the Dedication of the Firstborn) that was to become part of the life of Israel. God emphasised that it was to provoke the curiosity of the children. ‘And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians’’ (12:26-27). ‘In days to come, when your children ask you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to them, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery’ (13:14). As the
questions from the children would come, so the parents would be able to answer their questions by highlighting God’s salvation.

- As Christians we are also given two symbolic institutions that give us fresh opportunity to explain the gospel of salvation to curious onlookers: baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism, a once-only ceremony, symbolises God’s dramatic and once-and-for-all salvation of our lives through the death and resurrection of Christ. The Lord’s Supper, which is repeatedly practised, depicts the way the cross of Christ progressively transforms us. Christian leaders should give a good explanation for why these are done when curious onlookers, such as children and spiritual seekers, are present. They provide a great opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

11) HOW GOD LEADS US (13:17-14:31)

Crossing the Sea

17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” 18 So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. [a] The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle.

God leads us from bondage to obedience and then to inheritance.

- When we speak of God’s leadership, is there some kind of blueprint for where God takes us? Yes there is. We see it in how he led the Israelites. Where was God taking them? Ultimately (as we shall see in the rest of Exodus and the book of Numbers), God was leading them from Egypt (the place of bondage) to Sinai (the place of obedience) to Canaan (the place of inheritance).

- This is still God’s pattern with our lives. First he takes us out if Egypt. He saves us from our bondage to sin, death and Satan. He then leads us to Sinai. This is where God gave the Israelites the law of Moses, which they needed to obey. As Christians, however, we are not under the law of Moses, but rather under the law (or leadership) of Christ. Then God takes us to the Promised Land of inheritance. There are wonderful things that God has for us to achieve, experience, and receive. There are ‘good works planned in advance for us to do’ (Ephesians 2:10). That is still God’s blueprint journey for every Christian life: from bondage to obedience to inheritance.

God leads us in a direction that doesn’t always make sense to us.

- The Hebrews were to go to Canaan, which is North East of Egypt. There was a well known road called the Via Maris. But instead God told them to go South, to Sukkoth (see verse 20). God was taking them on a long, winding route rather than in a straight line. Still today, God seldom leads our lives in a straight line towards our destiny. God doesn’t seem to
battle with impatience like we do. He tends to take us on a roundabout journey. It may not make sense at all while we are on the journey, but in hindsight it usually does.

- Kindly, God gives Moses a reason for the long route: “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt” (v17). In other words, the short cut may seem better, but God knows things that they don’t. It is in fact more dangerous. Today, we can still draw comfort when God seems to take us on a longer path. He is not being cruel to us. He is sparing us from all kinds of spiritual dangers that we wouldn’t be ready to face. Jesus teaches us to pray, ‘Lead us not into evil’. This means that we ask God to spare us from those trials that we are not yet ready to face. As we see in this story, God will kindly answer that prayer.

19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”

God leads us towards the fulfilment of his promises to us.
- In a great act of faith Joseph asked that his bones be taken from Egypt. He did this because he knew that Egypt was not their final resting place, but that God had a Promised Land for them. Genesis 50:25-26 says specifically that Joseph was never buried. His burial box laid above ground for the four hundred or so years until it was taken back to Canaan. It was a silent witness all those years that Israel was going back to the Promised Land, just as God had said - now the promise was being fulfilled.
- Still today, God keeps all his promises. Though it may take a long time, God intends to keep them. We are led towards the fulfilment of his promises to us.

20 After leaving Sukkoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. 21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

God promises to lead us and sustain us.
- Amazingly, God showed himself in the form of a column of cloud by day and a column of fire by night. Throughout the book of Exodus we see God manifesting himself in the form of a cloud (19:9, 34:5) and fire (3:2, 19:8). These guided the Israelites. God told them which direction to go, what pace to move at, and when to stop and rest. Although God does not lead us as the church in the same way, this is a powerful picture of how God promises to lead and guide us. God generally does not lead us in such predictable and obvious ways today, but nonetheless leads us through his Scriptures; common sense; counsel from spiritually wise
people; the internal promptings of the Spirit; and through the opening and closing of doors.

- God did more than guide them. He also cared for them. They were in the desert. Desert conditions are harsh. They can be extreme - too hot by day, and bitterly cold by night. Yet God kindly provided for them a fire by night to light the way, and to warm them. And he provided a cloud by day to shadow them from the fierce desert sunlight. This is just like God—he not only guides us, he also provides for us. He not only leads us, he also sustains us. Isaiah 58:11 makes this promise: ‘The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.’

**Exodus 14**

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, 2 “Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. 3 Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’ 4 And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” So the Israelites did this.

5 When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” 6 So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. 7 He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. 8 The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. 9 The Egyptians—all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, horsemen [c] and troops—pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. 11 They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?’ It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

God leads us away from our past, yet often our past tends to hold us back.

- When the Israelites left Egypt, they did so boldly (v8). They believed that they were never to encounter their oppressor, Pharaoh again. What happens next is fascinating. God first led them Southwards to Sukkoth (13:20). Now he suddenly leads them Northwards again (v2). He leads
them directly to a cul-de-sac, right on the edge of a great body of water (v2,9). Their closeness to Pharaoh encourages him to pursue them (v5-9). The Israelites, thinking they had escaped for good, were terrified by the sight of Pharaoh’s army. Pharaoh sought to defeat and reclaim them (v10). First terror came over them (v10), then despair (v11), then a willingness to go back to Egypt (v12).

• Today, this still tends to happen in the life of a Christian who seeks to move forward in God. This especially happens to those who are just starting out as followers of Christ. Christ saves them and begins to lead them. At first, there is a wonderful sense of freedom. They march out boldly, thinking that they will arrive fairly soon at wherever God is taking them. But progress seems to come slowly. Then it happens: the sins and bondages and masters of the past (such as past relationships, past addictions, past sins, past allegiances, past belief systems) suddenly make a powerful pull on their lives. The temptation to give in is very powerful. The optimism of the initial freedom is replaced with despair. The determination to obey and follow God falters. This is normal. Although it may surprise the new Christian or the newly recommitted Christian, it does not surprise God. God is ready to rescue us once again, if we will let him.

13 Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. 17 I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

God leads us into challenging situations in the hope that we will trust him.

• God led the defenceless Hebrews into a very challenging situation. They were trapped between the Egyptian army on one side and a body of water on the other side. They panicked, they despaired, they were willing to surrender to the Egyptians once again. But Moses, their leader, spoke God’s word into the situation: “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” There are still challenges that we will face and this is exactly what God wants us to hear. He wants us to shake off the fear and instead to trust in God, who promises to intervene on our behalf. He wants us to know that he will fight for us. We are only to ‘be still’. This is often the Lord’s direction to the believer in a time of
crisis. Despair will cast us down, keeping us from standing. Fear will tell us to retreat. Impatience will tell us to do something now. Presumption will tell us to take the situation into our own hands. We may be tempted to jump into the Red Sea before it is parted. But as God told Israel he often tells us to simply stand still as he reveals his plan.

• ‘Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground’ (v15,16). Although Moses had a brave front when addressing the Israelites (v13,14), he was panicking himself. He was personally crying out to God. God speaks to him and reminds him that this is not a time to panic but to pray. This is a time to keep moving forward, trusting God to be with him. Today when there are challenging times we may tend to pray in a panic. But God’s instruction to us is to proceed as he has directed us, confident that he will make a way where there seems to be no way.

19 Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

23 The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. 24 During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. 25 He jammed [d] the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

26 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." 27 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward [e] it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. 28 The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

29 But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 30 That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. 31 And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD
displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

God leads us into challenging situations so that we can experience his protection, provision and power.

- Amazingly, God performs a miracle. First God shields them from the Egyptian army (v19-20). Then he causes a strong wind to cause the Reed Sea (as it should more accurately be called) to dry up in front of them (v21-22). Then he threw the Egyptian army into confusion (v23-25). Lastly, those of the Egyptian army that pursued them into the sea were drowned (v26-28). In all this, the people of God ‘saw the great power the LORD’ (v31). Still today, God leads us into challenging situations so that we can experience his protection, provision and power. God’s tests are what result in our testimonies. If we face no tests, then we will have no testimonies of God’s intervention and goodness.

- Interestingly, The Hebrew phrase for Red Sea is ‘yam suph’ which clearly means ‘Reed Sea.’ This is not the modern-day ‘Red Sea’. Archaeologists have attempted for years to identify this body of water. Probably, the Reed Sea refers to the lake region north of the Gulf of Suez comprising the Bitter Lakes and Lake Sirbonis. Some believe this is simply an ancient legend and did not actually happen. However, modern research has demonstrated that it was completely plausible, according to a study by Thomas Maugh titled “Research Supports Bible’s Account of Red Sea Parting” (Los Angeles Times, 3/14/92): ‘Calculations indicate that the biblical parting of the Red Sea, said to have allowed Moses and the Israelites to escape from bondage in Egypt, could have occurred precisely as the Bible describes it. Because of the peculiar geography of the northern end of the Red Sea, researchers report Sunday in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, a moderate wind blowing constantly for about 10 hours could have caused the sea to recede about a mile and the water level to drop 10 feet, leaving dry land in the area where many biblical scholars believe the crossing occurred. An abrupt change in the wind would have allowed the waters to come crashing back into the area in a few moments, a phenomenon that the Bible says inundated the Israelites’ pursuers.’

12) SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT (15:1-25)

Exodus 15

The Song of Moses and Miriam
1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
   “I will sing to the LORD,
      for he is highly exalted.
      Both horse and driver
      he has hurled into the sea.

When we’ve got something to sing about, we should sing.
• ‘Moses and the Israelites sang this song’ (v1). We’re singing creatures. We’re not just rational and logical beings. We have feeling. We know what it is like to have a heart that is full of joy. We know what it is like to celebrate, rejoice and sing. Sometimes our experience of something is so wonderful, that to not sing is to feel like a blocked volcano head. We just can’t hold it in. We need to sing. We need to shout. We need to jump. We need to laugh. For this reason, when we’ve got something to sing about, we should sing. These verses remind us that we have something wonderful to sing about.

• They sang this song ‘to the LORD’ (v1). God likes to hear us singing. Singing can be a form of prayer. We can sing to God on our own. We can sing to God together with others. God is worthy of our deepest song. Let’s not hold back. Let us sing.

• The early church, just recently saved, would make a real party of singing. Instead of singing with the help of alcohol, they sing with the intoxicating influence of the Holy Spirit. ‘Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Ephesians 5:18-20).

We can sing about God’s double-miracle salvation of his people.

• They were singing because God had just delivered Israel from bondage to Egypt by two great miracles. Firstly, by the sacrificial blood of a lamb, then secondly, by the crossing of the Red Sea. Two miracles were needed to save God’s people. The second miracle especially would be Israel’s main testimony to God’s goodness and power in the centuries to come. For example, the Psalmist wrote a song with these lyrics: ‘When our ancestors were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name’s sake, to make his mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived’ (Psalm 106:7-12). God’s goodness and power demonstrated in their exodus from Egypt was worth singing about!

• The first Exodus led by Moses points to the second Exodus led by Jesus. Think of the significance for us of this double-miracle deliverance. The first miracle of the lamb’s sacrificial death points to God saving us through Christ’s death on a cross. The second miracle of the passing through the Red Sea points to God saving us through Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Through Christ’s resurrection, God has opened up a way through death. ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade’ (2 Peter 1:3,4). As Christians, no matter how difficult our current situation is, we have something to sing
about. We can sing about how God, in his goodness and power, saved us through the double-miracle of the death and resurrection of Christ!

2 “The LORD is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

3 The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. [g]

5 The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.

6 Your right hand, LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, LORD, shattered the enemy.

7 “In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.

8 By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’

10 But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 Who among the gods is like you, LORD?
We can sing about what God means to us personally.

- “The LORD is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him (v2). God is not just strong. As we get to know him, he becomes ‘my strength’. God does not just make us want to sing. As we get to know him, he becomes the song in our hearts. He is ‘my song’. God does not just save us. As we experience his salvation, he himself becomes ‘my salvation’. He is not just God. As we get to know him, he becomes ‘my God’. And when we know him this intimately we cannot help but want to ‘praise him’ and ‘exalt him’. Listen to how The Amplified Bible expresses this passion for knowing God personally: ‘Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]’ (Philippians 3:8). We can sing about what God means to us personally.

We can sing about God’s ability to overcome whatever opposes him.

- We can sing about how God is able to overcome every obstacle, how God is able to eliminate every enemy, how even though he seems to take his time, eventually he moves in unquestionable and victorious power. Our God is able to bring down the proud and the powerful. See how these verses (v4-5, 9-10, 12) do just that: ‘Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’ But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies.’
- In the first exodus God overcame the power of Egypt. In the second exodus, through Christ’s death and resurrection, God overcame far greater and more universal enemies: sin, Satan and death! ‘Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death’ (Hebrews 2:14,15). ‘Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the
imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). This is something to sing about!

We can sing about what a great and good God we have.

• ‘I will sing because God is highly exalted’ (v1). The greater God is, the louder and more deeply we should sing. Since God is infinitely exalted, we should hold nothing back as we celebrate his greatness and goodness.

• ‘The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name’ (v3). God is a warrior. He is fierce in battle. God is not just kind. He is dangerous. If you resist him, you will come to regret that. It is true that the devil can fight against us. But if, through embracing darkness, we side with the devil, then God will fight against us. Much better to have all the hoards of hell marching against you than the God of the universe! His name is the LORD, which means Yahweh, which means ‘the God who saves powerfully by the blood of a lamb’ (see commentary on 3:13-21).

• ‘Your right hand, LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, LORD, shattered the enemy (v6)’ God’s right hand is reference to God’s action, authority and power. God is a God who acts. He may delay, but eventually he will act. God has all authority. God has all power. No one and nothing can resist him. He acts with majestic power. He is the king of all kings.

• ‘In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble’ (v7). God is great. God is majestic. God is angered by persistent sin. Pharaoh had hardened his heart towards God, though God had warned him and reached out to him. Pharaoh exploited the weak. He brought great suffering to God’s people. Now God’s anger burnt against him and his army. God is a God who burns with anger against persistent hardness of heart, and against the powerful when they exploit the weak. Eventually his anger will be unleashed. There is a day coming, Judgment Day, when God’s anger will erupt like a volcano against all rebellion. God’s anger is a sight to behold in itself.

• ‘Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders (v11)?’ God had mocked the gods of Egypt in the nine plagues. God showed that he was the only true God. He showed that he is unique. He revealed that his holiness, his purity, his distinctness, his hatred for sin, his love for what is good is majestic. He is a God who reveals his awesome glory. He allows us, from time to time, to catch a glimpse of the sheer brightness that shines off his magnificent worthiness. And he works wonders. God does miracles, and he does them with ease. He does them by merely breathing – ‘with the breath of his nostrils (v8)’. Even God’s most powerful acts don’t use up his energy. He has unlimited power. He is inexhaustible. We should sing about God’s greatness and goodness!
13 In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.

14 The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.

15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people [h] of Canaan will melt away;

16 terror and dread will fall on them.
By the power of your arm
they will be as still as a stone—
until your people pass by, LORD,
until the people you bought [i] pass by.

17 You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance—
the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.

18 "The LORD reigns
for ever and ever."

We can sing with faith about God’s future goodness to us.

- The song up till now (v1-12) has been singing about God’s goodness to them in the recent past. But now the song (v13-18) turns to the future. It speaks of what ‘will’ still happen. Notice that the future tense word ‘will’ is used ten times in verses 13-17. God’s goodness to them in the past is a signpost to God’s goodness to them in the future. God’s past goodness to us causes us to trust in his ongoing future goodness to us!

- God has powerfully redeemed (v13) them through the double-miracle of a death of a lamb, and the parting of the Red Sea. And this great act of salvation assures them that God will still do so much more for them. If God is able and willing to act in such goodness to them with such a great demonstration of grace and power, then surely he will demonstrate grace and power to them in the future. Their reasoning is perfect. Similarly, as Christians we should ponder how God’s great demonstration of grace and power through the double-miracle of Christ’s death and resurrection should assure us that God’s goodness will still be ours to enjoy in the future. ‘If God gave us his Son, how much more will he give us every good thing’ (Romans 8:32). When we’re uncertain about how God will treat us in the future, we need to just ponder on how God treated us in the past. If he treated us with unfailing love (v13) in the past, then he will treat us with unfailing love in the future.

- So what is it that God promises us in the future? This second part of the song (v13-18) tells us of a few things we can sing about:
• We can sing about God’s guidance in the future (v13). ‘In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling’ (v13). God promises to lead us and guide us. This is an act of ‘unfailing love’ and an act of ‘strength’. God promises to demonstrate his love and strength to us by leading and guiding us. He will not abandon us to our own instincts or circumstances. He will continue to lead us and guide us. This is something to sing about!

• We can sing about God overcoming our enemies in the future. God had promised them land in Canaan. But many nations would inevitably resist them from entering and possessing what was theirs. For example, there were the people of Philistia, Moab, Edom and Canaan. But if God had given them victory over the superpower of Egypt, how much more easily would it be for him to give them victory over these lesser powers. They knew that because God’s powerful arm was with them (v16), that fear would immobilize their enemies (v14-16). Interestingly, this is exactly what God did for them against these nations (see Joshua 5:1 and 9:9 for example). In the same way, God promises to assist us in overcoming whatever tries to bar us from moving forward into all God has for us to possess, and into all God has for us to achieve. ‘If God is for you, who can be against you?’ (Romans 8:31). This is something to sing about.

• We can sing about God leading us into our inheritance in the future. ‘You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance’ (v17). God promised to give them their own land. He would bring them in, and plant them there. Still today, God promises inheritance to us. Our inheritance is not physical land. It is all that God wants us to possess, and all that God wants us to achieve both in this life, and in the next. We will see in Numbers 13 and 14 that although God wants to lead Israel into the land, it requires persistent faith and obedience on their part. Similarly, God promises so much to us, over and above salvation and heaven. This is our inheritance. God will lead us strongly in this direction, but we will need to persistently trust and obey him. This is something to sing about.

• We can sing about God powerfully abiding by us in the future. Verse 17 speaks of ‘the mountain of your inheritance— the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established’. The land would not only be the inheritance of Israel. It would be God’s own inheritance. God himself would dwell there. It would be his sanctuary. This is an amazing truth. Although God is present everywhere, he is not present in the same degree. It is God’s intention to make his presence more evident and permanent in certain place. In the Old Testament this was the land, and the tabernacle / temple (as the rest of Exodus will explain). But, since Christ has come God’s new inheritance / land is the temple of the church, as well as the body of every Christian. ‘Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?’ (1 Corinthians 3:16) ‘And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit’ (Ephesians 2:22). We can look to the future with the wonderful certainty that we will experience God’s permanent, indwelling presence with us. This is something to sing about.
• **We can sing about God’s eternal, benevolent rule over us as king in the future.** ‘The LORD reigns for ever and ever’ (v18). God himself would be the king of Israel. He had rescued them. He now owned them. And he would rule over them with his benevolent reign. We can still sing this song – God will be our king forever! We are in the safe, strong hands of King Jesus! This is something to sing about.

19 When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen [j] went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.”

Join in as others sing about God’s goodness, and lead others into singing when they fail to sing.

• Verses 1-18 reveals the song that the nation sang. Verses 19-21 tell us how this singing started in the first place: Moses’ sister Miriam, soon after the LORD defeated the Egyptian army, started the song. She held a timbrel in her hand. She started to sing. Then all the women started to follow her, also with timbrels and dancing. Their song was an encouragement to sing: ‘Sing to the LORD ... (v21)’ Then everyone – men and children included started to sing too ‘I will sing to the LORD’ (v1).

• The point we can take out of this is that, though we may have plenty of reason to sing, we don’t necessarily sing. We often need to be led into singing. Singing is contagious. When someone starts to sing about God’s goodness, let us follow them. When no one is singing about God’s singing, let us be the first voice. Soon enough a whole choir will follow.

God is able to turn our mourning into dancing.

• A few months before the people had been groaning in distress. They had been bowed over with the heavy weight and whip of oppression on their back. Now they were singing and dancing. That is what God can do in our lives. He gives us something to sing and dance about. Though weeping may last for a while, yet an eternal season of singing and celebration is coming!

13) **THE UGLINESS OF UNBELIEF AND THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST’S GRACE**
*(15:22-17:7)*

_The Waters of Marah and Elim_

22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was
bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah. [k]) 24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

25 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. 26 He said, "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Exodus 16

Manna and Quail
1 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. 2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" 8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

9 Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.' "

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.
11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

Our faith will be tested.
• These verses show how God led them into very practical problems. First, he allows them to become really thirsty (15:22), and three days in the desert without water is dangerous. Then a few weeks later he allows them to become really hungry (16:3), and a few weeks in the desert without a proper meal is dangerous too. Why does God allow them to experience these problems? The answer is given: he was putting them to a test (15:25). It was a test designed to reveal the quality of the Israelites’ faith. It would become evident to God and to themselves, whether they really trusted in God. They had previously trusted in the sacrificial blood of the lamb. They had previously trusted in the parting of the Red Sea (see Hebrews 11:29). Faith had allowed them to experience salvation from Egypt’s oppression. But now would they have faith in God to meet their daily practical problems?
• To this day, God allows our faith to be tested. We may have trusted in Christ’s death and resurrection to save us. But will we now trust him in the daily challenges that come our way?
• This point is especially applicable to new Christians. They may have just been saved and be on an emotional, spiritual high. They may, too, have sung joyously of God’s goodness. But then God leads them straight into the desert where their faith is challenged. This is God’s way of training them to not only trust him for salvation, but also for his daily care.

Unbelief is an ugly thing.
• The Israelites fail to trust God to look after them. They become self-pitiful and begin to complain and grumble. That is what the Israelites did when they got thirsty in the desert of Shur (15:24) and when they got hungry in the desert of Sin (16:3). They begin to lash out at their leaders, as though it was Moses and Aaron’s idea to leave Egypt. They forgot all about God’s recent goodness to them and began to glorify their past - longing to be back in Egypt, eating some good food (16:3). In the same way, we are in danger of unbelief. If we fail to trust God when we face difficult situations this may manifest itself in such things as grumbling, self-pity, attacking our spiritual leaders, and exaggerating how good things were in the past.
• God deals with their unbelief and grumbling in an interesting way: he reveals his glory to them (16:7,10); he lets them know that their
grumbling against their leaders is in reality a sin against himself (16:8); and he mercifully promises to provide for them anyway (16:8,12). Still today, when we distrust God and self-pitifully complain, God deals with us. He wants us to know that it is a sin against his glory and grace. But thank God, that he does not back down from his promises to us.

• When we look at the goodness and graciousness of God, we see that unbelief is an ugly thing. Yet we will see that unbelief is not only ugly, it is also unnecessary ...

God graciously provides in his own time and way.

• How unnecessary it was for the Israelites to lose faith and to grumble. God had planned to provide for them and in spite of their lack of patience and trust, God satisfied their thirst and hunger.

• In response to their thirst, God makes the bitter water drinkable (15:25); he promises to keep them healthy and healed (15:26); and he leads them to an oasis (15:27). Let us look at these in more detail ...
  o ‘When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter … Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet’ (15:23,25). Although the NIV translation is a ‘piece of wood’ it is better translated as ‘a tree’. Whether by a miracle, or by natural processes (it is possible that a certain kind of wood could have caused a reaction in the water to remove the bitter taste), God made the water drinkable.
  o ‘I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you’ (15:26). God promised them, that if they trusted and obeyed him, he would look after them in the most practical ways - even keeping them healthy. The Hebrew for ‘LORD who heals you’ is ‘Yahweh Rapha’. It is one of the names of God. Healing is not merely something God does from time to time. It is who he is. Healing is part of God’s nature.
  o ‘Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water’ (15:27). Just a few miles away was an oasis. God was leading them towards it. But since they could not see it and did not know about it, they did not trust God. Yet God was trustworthy the whole time. Just because God delays in his provision and seldom tells us how he will provide, does not mean he won’t provide. Let us trust God to look after us as we follow his leading. He will graciously provide in his own time and in his own way.

• In response to their hunger, God feeds them quail in the evening (16:13) and a frost-like bread in the morning (16:15). Interestingly, the quail mentioned here migrate regularly between south Europe and Arabia across the Sinai Peninsula. They are small, bullet-headed birds, with a strong but low flight, usually roosting on the ground or in low bushes at nightfall. When exhausted, they are easy to catch. They also taste good. I will speak about the ‘manna’ God feeds them in the next point. God is able to meet our practical, daily needs when we follow him.
God had done such a massive thing in saving them by the double-act of Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea. Yet, he still did more in providing for their basic needs. Similarly, God has saved us by the double-act salvation of Jesus’ death and resurrection. ‘Will he who gave you his Son, not along with him, graciously give you all good things?’ (Romans 8:32). And that is exactly what he does. Our unbelief is ugly, but Christ’s grace is beautiful and bountiful.

16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer [l] for each person you have in your tent.'

17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.

18 And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Each one had gathered just as much as they needed.

19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers [m] for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'"

24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you [n] refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 The people of Israel called the bread manna. [o] It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. 32 Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for
the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’"

33 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come."

34 As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. 35 The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

36 (An omer is one-tenth of an ephah.)

Let us daily feed on God’s Word and on Christ.

- ‘The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey’ (v31). ‘The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a land that was settled’ (v35). For forty years in the desert God provided, almost every morning, something which came to be called ‘manna’ which means ‘what is this?’ It was a mysterious, nutrient-rich, sweet, bread-like substance that needed to be picked up off the ground before it disappeared. Manna sustained them for the journey - a journey that lasted a full forty years!
- Elsewhere the Scriptures tell us what feeding on manna symbolized: it symbolized ‘feeding on God’s Word’ and it symbolized ‘relying on Christ’s grace’. Let us explore these two symbols:
- First, feeding on manna is likened to feeding on God’s Word. ‘He ... fed you on manna so that you might know that man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from God’s mouth’ (Deuteronomy 8:3). God’s Word sustains and nourishes our souls like bread nourishes and sustains our body. We need to take it in, absorb it, metabolize it. When looking at these verses about manna in this way we learn what to do with God’s Word:
  - ‘Each one is to gather as much as they need’ (v15). Everyone needs to feed on God’s Word for themselves. We must not rely on other people to feed us God’s Word. We must take responsibility for our own spiritual nourishment.
  - ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning’ (v19). We need to take in God’s Word every day. We cannot be nourished today by yesterday’s revelation.
  - ‘Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away’ (v21). Although it is not a rule, it is generally wise to feed on God’s Word first thing every day, before the heat of the day’s demands make it impossible to meaningfully focus on God’s Word.
  - ‘It tasted like wafers made with honey’ (v31). Feeding on God’s Word, though hard work at times, often proves to be very pleasurable. ‘Your word tastes like honey to my mouth’ (Psalm 119:103).
‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt’ (v32). Amazingly, they kept a jar of manna (see Hebrews 9:4) in the tabernacle for the centuries to come. It stayed fresh. This is a picture of the Bible itself. The Bible is a record of thousands of years of God speaking to people. Although God said much to people that was not recorded in the Bible, yet the Bible is a primary sample of God speaking. The Bible records everything God wants us to know about himself, about his salvation, and his plan for his people.

Second, feeding on manna is likened to trusting in Christ. Jesus said, ‘The bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world’ (John 6:33). Jesus came from heaven. His coming was completely miraculous. Jesus also said, ‘I am the bread of life. The person who comes to me will never hunger’ (John 6:35). In the same way that the Israelites lived daily on manna, we are to ‘live’ daily on Jesus. As we trust in and rely on Jesus he will nourish, satisfy and sustain us. ‘On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much’ (v22). There will be times when we need a double portion of Christ’s grace. Christ will also give us unusual portions of his strength, peace and wisdom when we need it. Christ is enough to satisfy and sustain us. Let us every day nourish ourselves on him through prayer, faith, meditating on his Word, and on a spirit of reliance. In the same way the Israelites gathered manna daily, and could not keep yesterday’s manna for today, so let us seek God for a fresh revelation of Christ! Later Jewish legend has it that one only had to desire a certain dish, and no sooner had he thought of it, then manna had the flavour of the dish desired. The same food had a different taste to everyone who partook of it, according to his age; to the little children, it tasted like milk, to the strong youths like bread, to the old men like honey, to the sick like barley steeped in oil and honey. In the same way, Christ will nourish us in fresh and different ways. We will never grow tired of his grace, his presence, his strength and his character. Every different situation will give opportunity for a fresh taste of Christ’s grace.

Exodus 17

Water From the Rock

1 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"
4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

5 The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the place Massah [p] and Meribah [q] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Let us drink from Christ.
• Aren’t we just like these Israelites? We so easily forget God’s grace and faithfulness. God had done so much for them. He rescued them from Egypt. He gave them drink. He led them to an oasis. He fed them quail and manna. And yet, the moment their thirst returns, they lose faith and begin to grumble (v3). They quarrel and test God, and that’s why the place is called ‘Massah’ (which means ‘test’) and ‘Meribah’ (which means ‘quarrel’). Yet again, God mercifully provides water. Moses is to strike a rock that turns out to be a fountainhead of an underground spring (v6).

• The New Testament tells us that this was a highly symbolic moment: ‘For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ’ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). In the same way Christ accompanies us. He is like that rock that Moses struck. When he was struck in his crucifixion, he became a fountainhead of eternal life to all who trust in him. Jesus himself said, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (John 4:13-14). Though we live in a spiritually sun-scorched world, yet Christ can supernaturally sustain and refresh us. What a privilege it is to trust in Christ, the rock!

14) THE MINISTRIES OF PRAYER AND PROCLAMING (17:8-18:12)

• So far the book of Exodus has swung from God’s dealing with Israel (1:1-22), to God’s dealing with Moses (2:1-4:31) then to God’s dealing with both Egypt and Israel (7:8-14:31). Then again with Israel (15:1-17:7). Next, God deals with Moses (17:8-18:27). In this section of God’s dealing with Moses, we see three different stories centring around Moses. Each story beautifully illustrates a different ministry of a Christian. We are called and saved to serve. We are meant to make a contribution and an impact in the church and in the world. We have certain ministries God
calls us to. Every Christian is meant to be a minister. Three of these ministries are 1) the ministry of praying for others (17:8-16), 2) the ministry of proclaiming God’s amazing salvation to others (18:1-12) and 3) the ministry of practical leadership of others (18:13-27). In this section we will look at the first two ministries: 1) the ministry of prayer (which is speaking to God on behalf of people) and 2) the ministry of proclaiming (which is speaking to people on behalf of God)...

The Amalekites Defeated

8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. 11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. 12 When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. 13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

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

15 Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. 16 He said, “Because hands were lifted up against [r] the throne of the LORD, [s] the LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

Let us minister to others through prayer.
• ‘The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites’ (v8). The Amalekites constantly warred against God’s people. We can expect to experience war - a spiritual war. ‘For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds’ (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). The sinful nature, the devil, and his agents will resist and undermine our efforts to trust and obey Christ, and to move forward in God. The battle continues day after day. This is not peace-time. This is war-time.
• ‘I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands’ (v9). Moses prayed to God. The way to win the spiritual war and to overcome the resistance to what it is God calls us to do, is to pray. Moses prayed with faith. God had already used the staff in powerful ways, most amazingly in the parting of the Red Sea. Lifting the staff was his way of saying, ‘God, you’ve moved in power on our behalf before. Do it again!’ Moses as a younger man used to try to fight his battles in his own
strength (and this backfired horribly) (see 2:11-15), but now he had learnt that ‘the battle belongs to the Lord’ (14:13-14).

- ‘So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill’ (v10). Moses prayed, while Joshua fought. Nowadays, the way to deal with the many problems that we will face as Christians and as churches is to deal with them on two levels at the same time: prayerfully and practically. Too many Christians only deal with challenging situations by prayer and without practicality. Other Christians do the opposite. But both are needed at the same time.

- ‘As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning’ (v11). As long as Moses prayed, Joshua was winning. But when Moses, through tiredness or distraction, failed to pray, Joshua began to be defeated. What a powerful picture of the importance of prayer. One wonders how many spiritual battles we as Christians and as churches have lost because of lack of prayer?

- ‘When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset’ (v12). Moses needed support to keep on praying. Praying for ourselves is hard work. Praying for others is even harder work, but it is a work of love. Jesus told us to keep on praying and not to give up (Luke 18:1). We need to learn to persevere in prayer.

- ‘The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation’ (v16). ‘I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven’ (v14). God warned Moses and Joshua that they would need to fight the Amalekites many more times, but ultimately the war would be won. As we pray, there will be some things that seem impossible to overcome, but let us draw encouragement - the day will come when the battle will be finally won.

- ‘Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner’ (v15). As Joshua fought, he could look up to the hilltop and see Moses in prayer, like a banner of hope. Now Moses draws the parallel: by calling God ‘Yahweh-Nissi’ (which means ‘the LORD-my banner’) he is saying, ‘God stands on the hill top watching over you. He intercedes for you. Let this fill you with hope.’ Interestingly, a prophecy about Jesus compares him to a banner of hope: ‘In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the nations shall seek him, and His resting place shall be glorious’ (Isaiah 11:10). Wonderfully, Jesus intercedes on our behalf. When we are in the heat of battle, we just need to lift our eyes to Christ who stands between us and the Father, and who intercedes on our behalf. ‘He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them’ (Hebrews 7:25). When we struggle to pray with faith, let us look to Christ, our banner of hope. The battle shall be won. As we pray for others, we can expect Christ to guide and energize our prayers.

Exodus 18
Jethro Visits Moses

1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, [t] for Moses said, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land"; 4 and the other was named Eliezer, [u] for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God. 6 Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. 8 Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

Let us minister to others by proclaiming God's amazing salvation.

- This story is out of chronological order. It flashes forward to when the Israelites would be camping 'near the mountain of God' (v5). This is a story that shows that some people, unlike the Amalekites (17:8-16), respond really positively to God's people. In the same way, we as the church can expect some people to respond positively to us, even when others reject us (see Acts 18:6-8 as an example).
- Moses, while in Egypt, had sent his wife and his two sons to his father-in-law, Jethro, during the dangerous plagues of Egypt. Now, while at Sinai, he calls for them to come to him, and they do (v5-6). Something happens to Jethro in this time. He converts. We learn three things about how to help others find faith in Christ in these verses:
- **People need to hear rumours of God's goodness.** Jethro, a Midianite priest (v1) was not a worshipper of Yahweh. Although Moses may have had conversations with him during his forty years in Midian, Jethro had remain unconvinced that Yahweh was the real God. But then he started
to hear rumours of what God had done for Moses and the Hebrews (v1). This is still how God tends to reach out to someone. He allows them to hear rumours of his goodness. This is designed to provoke curiosity and openness. This is the impact the church is meant to have on people in an area: ‘The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere’ (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

- **We should share the gospel and stories of God’s goodness with people.** Moses tells Jethro ‘about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them’ (v8). Still today, God will give us opportunities to share with people how God has saved us through Jesus Christ; how he has been so good to us, especially in the midst of life’s difficulties. We should be unashamed in sharing the gospel message, especially with friends and family and those who know us well. ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes’ (Romans 1:16). We should tell others the gospel and our experiences of God’s goodness. It should spill over in our conversations in natural, attractive ways. ‘Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect’ (1 Peter 3:15).

- **We can expect some people to respond to our words.** Jethro responded with delight to the good news (v9). He praised God (v10) and affirmed that Yahweh was unrivalled (v11). Then he made an offering to Yahweh, and joined the people of God by ‘eating bread in the Lord’s presence’ along with Aaron and the elders of Israel (v12). Today, when people here the gospel and our testimonies many people still delight in the message. Like the Thessalonians, they ‘welcome the message … with the joy given by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Thessalonians 1:6). They confess Christ as Lord, unrivalled by any other power or so-called ‘god’. They declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead, and because of this they receive salvation (Romans 10:9). They entrust their lives to Christ. They trust in Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf. Once they are reconciled to God, they join the people of God. They are amongst those who are added to the people of God (see Acts 2:47). Every time a person is saved it is because of the wonderful work of God! If it happened for Moses, it will happen for us. Some people close to us might seem to resist the gospel for decades (like Jethro did) but there will come a time when God will open their hearts to the message. Let us not stop praying for them, and looking for opportunities for invited spiritual conversation with them.

15) THE MINISTRY OF PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP (18:13-27)

13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are
doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

15 Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions.”

17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. 21 But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

Let us minister to others through practical leadership.

- Moses was a very ‘spiritual’ leader. He followed God’s leading and commands intently, and gave himself to prayer (17:8-16). But then God needed to teach him that part of spiritual leadership has a very practical dimension. Jethro gave very practical advice to Moses - and yet he rightfully acknowledged that this was also spiritual advice by referring to God as the source: ‘Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you’ (v19). ‘If you do this, and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain’ (v23).
- Still today, a desperate need in God's kingdom is that Christians who oversee other people will not only respond to situations prayerfully, but also very practically. Being practical is not the opposite of being spiritual, but rather one aspect of it. Let us learn five lessons from Jethro’s advice to Moses as we seek to be more practical in our leadership of others. (As we listen to this advice let us be ready to apply it in whatever spheres of leadership we find ourselves: whether in leading a family, an event of some kind, a team at work, a company, a
department within a company, an organization, a home group, or a
ministry or a church.)

1) We need to avoid an unsustainable pace of life and ministry.
   • Moses had a high work ethic, which was wonderful. But he did not
temper his work ethic with wisdom. He made himself available to
everyone. He would be involved in the emotionally taxing work of giving
counsel and arbitrating between conflicting parties all day long (v13-16).
This was wearing him out physically and spiritually (v17). He was
carrying too much. He was giving himself to an unsustainable pace of life
and ministry. He may be able to continue for a few days, or maybe a few
weeks, but any longer than that would burn him out, and then he would
be no good to anyone.
   • We still need to avoid an unsustainable pace of life and ministry. If our
output exceeds our input, the shortfall will prove to be our downfall. We
will not be ‘able to stand the strain’ (v23). Even Jesus coached his
disciples to ‘come with (him) to a quiet
place and get some rest’ because they were so busy, with people coming and going, that they did
not even have time to eat (Mark 6:30-31).

2) We need to focus on what only we can do.
   • Moses was so busy doing everything that he neglected to do what he was
meant to do. Instead of spending all his energies dealing with situations
one-by-one, he should rather have spent his energies teaching everyone
God’s wisdom and commands. In this way they could apply God’s wisdom
themselves (v20).
   • Still today, we are in danger of doing whatever needs to be done. This
forces us to be generalists, giving ourselves to whatever needs and
demands arise. But a better approach is to find out what it is that we are
meant to do, and what it is that only we can do - and then to do that.
We should give the main portion of our focus, in terms of time and
energy, to those things that we are gifted at, and those things that only
we can do. Amazingly, God bestows gifts on different people to do
different things. ‘We have different gifts, according to the grace given to
each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with
your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it
is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give
generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it
cheerfully’ (Romans 12:6-8). Let us do what we’re meant to do, and
encourage others to do what it is they are meant to do.

3) We need to multiply workers and leaders.
   • The essence of Jethro’s wisdom to Moses was that he should multiply
himself into other trusted and capable leaders, and delegate
responsibilities to them (v21-22). This would give them a chance to
thrive and grow. And it would free Moses up to specialize on his calling
and gifting.
   • The early church learnt the same lesson. As God’s work went forward so
new capable and trustworthy leaders needed to be recognized, raised up
and released. For example, look at the situation as the Jerusalem church
grew: ‘In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented them to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:1-7).

- Still today, we need to multiply workers and leaders. Every leader should seek to build away from themselves by raising up others. This will accelerate the overall growth of people, and of the church. Multiplying workers and leaders multiplies the ease of ministry (‘that will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you’ (v22)) and the effectiveness of ministry (‘all these people will go home satisfied’ (v23)).

4) We need to create strategies and structures that serve us.
- ‘You must be the people’s representative’ (v19) is better translated ‘You must be the people’s organizer’. Moses ‘made leaders … over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens … The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves’ (v25-26). He divided Israel into groups and subgroups. He appointed various leaders to oversee various groups. He created a hierarchy of lesser and higher courts. This was a complex, intelligent strategy and structure to deal with a complex set of challenges.
- Today, one of the tasks of leadership is to create strategies and structure to deal with a complex set of challenges. Certainly we want to err on the side of simplicity, but we must not oversimplify things either. Too many Christian leaders somehow see strategic and structural leadership as unspiritual, but it is a God-ordained dimension to accomplishing the God-given objectives of God’s people. It is true that God’s people are a family of people, not a factory of people. This means that it is not correct to think or speak of the church as an organization, but as a family with specific roles, and therefore an organized structure. Just as riverbanks direct a river, so we need to create structures and select strategies that ease the flow of life in the church and from the church into the world.

5) We need to humbly seek feedback from trusted people.
- Jethro was a brand-new convert. But God wanted to use his perspective and gift of wisdom to help Moses. So he had a difficult conversation with Moses: ‘What you are doing is not good’ (v17). It required humility for Moses to hear God’s voice in this feedback. Though Moses had been so diligent in his leading of God’s people, he still had a blind spot. God
brought Moses’ attention to this blind spot through simple feedback from Jethro.

• Still today, everyone who seeks to serve God or lead others has blind spots. There are things we do, or approaches we take, that are unhelpful or unwise. We lack skill and wisdom in many areas. We have formed some ministry habits that actually prevent God from using us more effectively. God still has a simple way of helping us. He wants us to seek feedback from trusted people. Even people less experienced than us can see things that we can’t. We must regularly ask people for feedback, and apply any insights we receive. ‘Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said’ (v24). As difficult as it is to hear feedback, we should take it as an expression of God’s kindness to us. There is a better way of doing things. And God wants us to know this. Of course, we should be discerning, since not all feedback will be equally helpful to us, but even badly motivated feedback from an unloving critic will provide a seed of truth that can help us to identify a blind spot, if indeed we have the humility to find that seed.


Introductory thought: we need to understand the difference between the old covenant (through Moses) and the new covenant (through Jesus).

• The word ‘covenant’ simply means ‘arrangement’. When two parties enter into a covenant, it means they agree on an arrangement. They know where they stand with each other. They understand what is expected of, or promised by each other.

• There are three main kinds of covenant.

1) There is the covenant between two equal parties, where both agree to protect and provide for the other. A marriage covenant is an example of this. This is a mutual covenant. In a mutual covenant there is neither a senior nor junior partner. It is a covenant of equality. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever make a mutual covenant with people, because God is not equal to us. He has seniority.

2) There is a covenant between a senior and a junior partner, where the emphasis is on the generosity of the senior partner toward the junior partner. The covenant God makes with Noah (Genesis 9:1) and then Abraham (Genesis 22:15-18) are examples of this. The new covenant that God makes with the believers through Christ is also an example of this. This is called a covenant of grace. Covenants of grace are largely unconditional. The senior partner blesses the junior partner because the senior partner sovereignly chooses to out of the riches of their grace.

3) There is a covenant between a senior and a junior partner, where the emphasis is on the required behaviour of the junior partner. This is a covenant of imposed-obligation or of law. Covenants of law are highly conditional. The senior partner blesses the junior partner primarily because they fulfil the behaviour conditions.

• In Exodus 19-24 we see God making a covenant with Israel, at Mount Sinai, through Moses, God’s chosen mediator. Theologians speak of this as the Mosaic covenant or the Sinai covenant. What type of covenant is
it? Answer: it is a covenant of law, in which God makes some serious demands on Israel, and promises that if they obey then he will continue to bless them. It is a highly conditional covenant. Although God makes this covenant in a kind, gracious way, the emphasis, nonetheless, is on the required behaviour of Israel.

- The New Testament spends much time helping us make sense of this Mosaic covenant. It explains that the new covenant that God has made with believers through Christ, has replaced the Mosaic covenant, and calls it the old covenant (see Hebrews 8:6-13).
- In this section, we will explore three ways that the new covenant through Christ is similar to the old covenant, and three ways that the new covenant is superior to the new covenant. As we do, we can rejoice! If you have entered into the new covenant, through faith in Christ, it is the very best thing that could ever have happened to you! It is a covenant of grace, where the emphasis is on the generosity of our senior partner, God. We are the recipients of his generosity!

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Exodus 19

At Mount Sinai

1 On [the first day of] the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. 2 After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

In both the old and new covenant, we see that God has a pattern for our lives.

- God had taken the people out of Egypt. He had promised Moses that he would take them to the land of the Canaanites, a land flowing with milk and honey (see Exodus 3:8). But, three months into the journey, God takes them deep South into the Sinai Peninsula to ‘the mountain’ (v2). This is Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai. They are far away from the Promised Land. Amazingly, they camp there for about a year. In fact, it is only in Numbers 10 that they leave Sinai. (A full 57 chapters of the Bible describes their stay in Sinai).
- But, if God had promised to take them to the Promised Land, why this stop over in Sinai? The first clue to answering this question is that God had promised Moses that he would return to Sinai. ‘And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain”’ (Exodus 2:13). This was the very mountain where Moses had encountered God in the burning bush! The second insight in answering this question is that God was teaching us a pattern here. The pattern is this: God moves his people from Egypt to Sinai and then to the Promised Land. Egypt is the place of bondage. Sinai is the place of worship and obedience. The Promised Land is the place of inheritance. Before God can take his people into their inheritance, he first needs to help them become obedient worshippers. God had taken them out of
Egypt, but before he could take them into all he had for them, he needed to take Egypt out of them. So the pattern of the old covenant was 1) deliverance from Egypt, then 2) transformation at Sinai, then 3) inheritance of the Promised land.

• Amazingly, the new covenant leads to a similar pattern in the life of a believer. Now, however, it is spiritual not geographical. 1) In the new covenant, God saves us and rescues us from sin, Satan and death. This is the equivalent of deliverance from Egypt. 2) In the new covenant, God then begins to transform our lives that we become more and more like Jesus. This is the equivalent of the way God sought to teach the Israelites obedience at Sinai. 3) In the new covenant, God has an inheritance for us. It is all that he wants us to receive and achieve now that we are saved. It is his wonderful plan for our lives. It is God equipping us, and using us, in ministry to others. This is the equivalent of the way God sought to ready the Israelites for the Promised Land. And the order is still the same: salvation, transformation, and ministry. Firstly he saves us. Then he begins to transform us. And the more he transforms us, the more he can use us in ministry.

3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 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, 6 you [v] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

In both the old and new covenant, we see that God has a wonderful plan for our lives.

• These verses capture one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible. Notice how God first reminds us of his past goodness to us (v4). Then he speaks of his future plan for our lives (v5-6). Let us look at this in some more detail.

• God’s past goodness to us. ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself’ (v4). They had experienced God’s deliverance from Egypt, received his guidance on which way to go; seen his glorious victory at the Red Sea; enjoyed God’s miraculous provision of food and water and experienced a victory won over the Amalekites. God had been so good to them. In the ancient world, eagles were known for their strength, agility, vision, invulnerability and care for their young. Similarly, God showed them his strength, agility, vision and amazing protection and care. Similarly, when God saves us, we experience his strength and agility as he rescues us, protects us and cares for us. We are weak but he is strong. Like an eagle, Jesus Christ sweeps in to save us. He takes hold of us with his
talons of grace, and lets us rest on the wings of his strong care. We are secure. How good God has been to us.

- **God’s future plan for our lives.** We are not just saved from sin. We are saved for a purpose. Christ ‘gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good’ (Titus 2:14). In the old covenant, God had a plan for the Israelites. And in the new covenant, God has a plan for our lives. Verses 5-6 poetically capture three aspects of God’s plan for their lives and our lives:

  1) **God plans to make us his treasured possession.** In the ancient world, ‘treasured possession’ refers to all the personal treasury of the king. Although the king owned everything in his empire, there were some very prized things that he took into his own treasury. These were his alone. Similarly, in the new covenant, it is God’s plan that we would experience the joy of being prized, honoured and cherished by him. Although God is the God of the entire universe, he wants us to experience his relating very intimately and personally to us. Because he so cares for us, he will guard and protect us. He will also not take well to our attempts to break away from being his possession. We do not belong to ourselves. We belong to him.

  2) **God plans to make us a kingdom of priests.** This was an amazing promise to the Israelites. A priest was someone who would mediate between God and people. They would represent God to the world in their teaching and the world to God in sacrifices. They would intercede on behalf of people before God. In the new covenant of Christ, we are also called priests. ‘To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!’ (Revelations 1:5-6). Every believer is made a priest. It is God’s plan to make us powerful representatives of God in this world. We have a message, the gospel. God wants us to speak with authority and conviction to this world. It is also God’s plan to make us powerful intercessors. We bring people and situations to God in prayer, and he is attentive to our prayers and answers them.

  3) **God plans to make us a holy nation.** At this stage Israel was just a very large family of people who had descended from Abraham. But God wanted to make them into a nation. But not any nation - a holy nation. The word ‘holy’ here means ‘specially set aside for God’s use’. Of all the nations in the world, God wanted to make them his own, special nation. He would relate to them differently. It was his plan to use this nation to bless all nations with the knowledge of God. They were chosen to be a shining light into a dark world. Amazingly, in the new covenant, we too become part of God’s special people, who can be described as a ‘holy nation’. ‘But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy’ (1 Peter 2:9-10).
In both the old and new covenant, we see that God uses a mediator.

• Moses was the mediator between God and Israel in this now ‘old’ covenant. In the new covenant, ‘there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all people’ (1 Timothy 2:5-6). God is a holy God. And we are sinful. The only way that it is possible for us to be in relationship with him is through some kind of mediator. This was true in 1300BC (the time of this event) and it is still true now. Moses was their mediator. Jesus is our mediator. ‘No one comes to the Father, except through me’ (John 14:6).

• What is the difference between Moses and Jesus? Moses was a mere man. Jesus was divine. No wonder the new covenant is superior to the old covenant! Listen to how the New Testament makes this point: ‘Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory’ (Hebrews 3:3-6).

The new covenant we can now enter into is superior to the old covenant because in it our new identity is received by grace not earned by obedience.

• As we have seen, the old covenant is similar in some ways to the new covenant God has made with those who trust in Christ. However, it is also inferior in many ways. ‘The covenant of which he (Christ) is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises’ (Hebrews 8:6).

• One way that it is inferior is that in the Mosaic covenant Israel had to earn their identity through obedience: ‘If you obey me fully ... then you will be my treasured possession’ (v5). Israel never actually experienced this new identity as ‘a holy nation’ and a ‘kingdom of priests’. The history of Israel is one, primarily of disobedience, not obedience. They never fulfilled the condition of obedience, so they never achieved the identity God had for them.

• But in the new covenant, we are given a new identity by sheer grace: ‘But you are ... God’s special possession ... you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy’ (1 Peter 2:9-10). The moment we put our trust in Christ, we become God’s treasured possession, part of the kingdom of priests, part of God’s holy nation. Before we even start out in a life of obedience to God, this wonderful new identity is secured. It is
true that we then need to obey God, but not in order to earn our new identity, but rather to manifest the identity we already have been given.

- The old covenant says, ‘Obey, then you’ll be my treasured possession’. The new covenant says, ‘You are my treasured possession, now obey.’ Very different kinds of obedience! The New Testament does not say, ‘Act like a child of God, then you will become a child of God.’ Rather it affirms who we already are in Christ and then urges us to now start displaying this identity in how we live. The new covenant is a covenant of wonderful, undeserved grace.

9 The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

10 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes 11 and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. 13 They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. Whether people or animals, they shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain."

14 After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. 15 Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations."

The new covenant we can now enter into is superior to the old covenant because in it God himself makes us acceptable to himself.

- God is in the process of making a covenant with Israel via Moses. These verses describe Israel preparing for a powerful encounter with God. They are to prepare by washing their clothes (v10). This is a symbolic act. Dirty clothing represents dirty character and deeds. They are to clean up their lives. They are also to abstain from sex (v15). Although sex in marriage is not wrong, it seems that God wants them to temporarily abstain from earthly pleasures in order to focus on God alone. The message that is sent to them is this: ‘in order to approach God you must first make yourself more acceptable to him’.

- But think how different the new covenant through Christ is! God makes us acceptable in Christ. Christ becomes our righteousness. We are accepted by God, not on the basis of our character or deeds, but on the basis of Christ’s grace. ‘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). God clothed us with his own righteousness in Christ. ‘I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me
with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness’ (Isaiah 61:10).

- This does not mean that unforsaken sinful character and deeds do not hurt or negatively affect our relationship with God. They do. But it means that they don’t disqualify us from having a relationship with God. We start the relationship with God by sheer grace. And sin does not terminate the relationship.

16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain [w] trembled violently. 19 As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. [x]

20 The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up 21 and the LORD said to him, "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. 22 Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them."

23 Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'"

24 The LORD replied, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them."

25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

The new covenant we can now enter into is superior to the old covenant because in it we are invited to come as close as possible to God.

- On the third day, the whole mountain turns into a vibrating furnace (v16-19). God’s majestic sin-hating holiness and awesome power becomes evident to all. The main emphasis is that no one is allowed to come close except Moses (and later Aaron). To come too close to God is deserving of the death penalty (v12-13). God repeatedly and emphatically warns everyone not to come too close (v20-24). Not that anyone wants to approach God - they’re terrified (v16). The message they’re getting from God in this covenant through Moses is this: ‘Come towards the mountain but don’t come too close’.

- Think how different the message is that we get from God in the covenant through Jesus! ‘Let us then approach God’s 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). ‘Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God’ (Hebrews 10:19-22).

• In Christ we do not approach a mountain of fear, but rather a mountain of joy. Listen to how vivid the contrast is portrayed in the poetic words of Hebrews 12:18-24: ‘You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’. In the new covenant, we are invited to come as close as we possibly can! And, instead of trembling with fear, we can pulsate with joy in his presence!

• Interestingly, we, in the new covenant, also wait for a trumpet-blast from heaven. It will mark the return of Christ. ‘For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, … and so we will be with the Lord forever’ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Because of the new covenant, we will forever be as close to Christ as we can possibly be.

• Praise God for the new covenant he has entered into with those who trust in his Son. It is a covenant that should fill us with profound confidence, security and joy! Just think, the wealthiest, most powerful being in the universe (God) has chosen undeserving, sinful, weak people like ourselves and has entered into an eternal covenant of grace with us, where the emphasis is not on our ability to behave (which is what the covenant of law emphasized), but rather on his undeserved generosity towards us! Once we put our trust in Christ, it is so good to know where we stand with God. And it is so good to know that our standing with God is as good as it can possibly be - all because of his gracious covenant with us, through his Son! ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ’ (Ephesians 1:3).

17) HOW GOD TRANSFORMS US BY HIS SPIRIT TO LOVE GOD (20:1-11)

First introductory insight: The first four commands have to do with our relationship with God.

• In this section, and in the next, we will explore God giving the Israelites the now-famous Ten Commandments.
• The first four commands have to do with our relationship to God, while the last six have to do with our relationship with people. It is no coincidence that Jesus summarized the law in two ways: Firstly, we are to love God with all our hearts, souls, mind and strength. Secondly, we are to love our neighbour. Jesus said that the whole law of Moses could be summarized like this (Matthew 22:37-40).
• In this section, we explore the first four commands. We will see how God wants to transform us to love him more deeply.

Second introductory insight: The giving of the law in the old covenant foreshadows the giving of the Spirit in the new covenant.
• God rescued Israel from Egypt through the blood of the lamb. This event has been commemorated through the centuries in the annual Passover feast. Then he took them through the desert. Fifty days later, they arrived at Sinai where God entered into a covenant with them. In this covenant, God gave them the law. The core of this ‘law’ is the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments. This event (God’s giving of the law) has been commemorated through the centuries in the annual Pentecost festival. Pentecost came fifty days after Passover.
• Now notice the striking parallels: Jesus died to save the world during the Passover feast. And fifty days later, God gave his Spirit to the newly saved church. Can you see the significance? This is the major insight: The giving of the law in the old covenant foreshadows the giving of the Spirit in the new covenant.
• Now for the big question. As Christians, are we meant to live by the Ten Commandments? The answer may surprise you: No, we’re not under the law as Christians. We’re meant to live by the Spirit of Christ not by the law of Moses. The Ten Commandments are too low a standard for Christians. Once we’re regenerated by the Spirit, it becomes totally obvious that murder, lying and stealing are wrong. As we live in the Spirit intentionally, we fulfil the Ten Commandments accidentally. Paul makes this point like this: ‘Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the sinful nature ... If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:16-23)’. In other words, life in the Spirit outclasses life under the law. Elsewhere, Paul says it like this: ‘Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit’ (Romans 8:2-5).

Third introductory insight: The law tries to change us from the outside-in, while the Spirit changes us from the inside-out.
• One obvious difference between the law of Moses and life in the Spirit is that while the law was an external list, written on stone, the Spirit
writes onto our regenerated hearts the standards of Christ. In fact, hundreds of years before Christ came, Jeremiah prophesied the coming of the new covenant like this: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts” Jeremiah 31:33. The law of Moses is external. But the Spirit helps us to experience the energizing, internalized standards of Christ. The law tries to change us from the outside in, whereas the Spirit changes us from the inside out. The Spirit gives us a new heart, with a God-given new desire and capacity for God’s ways.

- Paul describes the difference between the law’s inability to transform us through an external list with the Spirit’s ability to transform us in our hearts like this: Christ’s standards are ‘written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts … He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (2 Corinthians 3:3,6).
- Life under the Ten Commandments merely foreshadowed a far greater possibility and privilege: life in the Spirit of Christ. As we explore each of the Ten Commandments, we will also explore how this particular command foreshadows life led by the Spirit. In each case, we will see how life in the Spirit outstrips life under the law of Moses.

**Exodus 20**

*The Ten Commandments*

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Fourth introductory insight: When we understand God’s word, God’s character and God’s salvation we will understand how to live.

- Before God instructed them how to live, he reaffirmed three things: 1) He is a God who speaks (‘And God spoke all these words’), 2) He is a God who has revealed himself (‘I am the LORD your God’), and 3) He has acted in history to save (‘I … brought you out of … slavery’).
- Ethics is the study of what is right and wrong. It is the study of how to live morally. But this verse reminds us that before we can even grapple with the question, ‘What is the best way to live?’ we need to understand three things:
  1) *That God has spoken to us.* If God had not spoken to us, we would not know what is right and wrong. We have the Bible, which is God’s word. The more we read and understand what God has said, the more sensitized we become to what is right or wrong.
  2) *That God has revealed himself to us.* Essentially, as Christians, we’re meant to reflect God’s character to the world. If we don’t know what God is like, we will not know how to live.
• 3) That God has redeemed us. The God who has saved us, is the God who owns us. He has redeemer-rights over our lives. ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body’ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Only when we understand that we are free because of God’s grace to us in the death of Jesus, will our hearts be won over by God. Only when our hearts are won over by God’s grace, will we want to obey him.
• Ethics - the science of morals in human conduct is a by-product of an understanding of God’s word, character and salvation.

| 3 (First command) | “You shall have no other gods before [y] me. |

The Spirit energizes us to love God supremely.
• Almost the entire ancient world was polytheistic (they believed in many gods). But Yahweh revealed himself to Israel as the one true God. All other gods were so-called gods. They were not worthy of worship.
• Whenever we worship false gods, it is called idolatry. Some commonly worshipped gods at that time included Baal, the god of weather and financial success, and Ashtoreth, the goddess of sex, romance, and reproduction. Although our culture doesn’t tend to worship literal gods, we still practice disguised idolatry. For example, most people in our culture do not centre their lives around God, but rather around materialism (a kind of modern day ‘Baal’ worship) or pleasure (a kind of modern day ‘Ashtoreth’ worship).
• Once the Spirit regenerates us, the sin of idolatry becomes obviously wrong. The Spirit energizes us to start loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37). We start to centre our lives around God. We find our primary identity, security and joy in him, not in the things he has created.
• Interestingly, although the Ten Commandments were given to an entire nation of people, the word ‘You’ here is singular, not plural. It reads, ‘Each one of you should have no other gods before you.’ On the day of Pentecost, we’re told that the Spirit filled every person in the room (Acts 2:1-3). Still today, the Spirit helps each and every one of us to change. Although he can transform a community, he does so by changing us personally.

| 4 (Second command) | “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. |

The Spirit empowers us to eliminate idols in our hearts.
The second command is an extension of the first command. In the ancient world and in parts of the world today, people used to make statues and images of the false gods they worshipped. False gods would be represented in these images by various birds ‘in the heaven above’, animals and people ‘on the earth beneath’, and sea creatures ‘in the waters below’. There is something about the sinful heart that not only goes after false gods, but also seeks to make material depictions of those false gods (v4), so as to worship the image itself (v5).

Notice that the worship of false gods, or God’s rivals in our hearts, makes God jealous (v5). God’s jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because he is selfish and wants us all for himself, but because He knows that our well-being depends upon that loyalty to him. God is not jealous of us: He is jealous for us. Since God saved us to love and worship him, he is grieved and angered by our tendency to love false gods. There is nothing more self-destructive than idolatry in our heart! Although, in the modern world, we don’t generally worship statues, we still have idols in our hearts. Part of our sinful nature means that our hearts become idol factories. We tend to find our identity, joy, meaning, security and worth in things rather than in God. Things such as our career, hobbies, wealth, pleasure, achievement, our children and more. Not that these things are bad in themselves, they are just very poor God-substitutes. Only God is worthy of being the centre of our identity, meaning, security, joy and worth.

Our idols will always let us down in at least two ways. Firstly, when we disappoint our idols, they don’t forgive us. Our idols make huge demands on our lives. It takes hard work to trust in an idol. For example, if our idol is a certain sport, then when we perform poorly, we are doomed to ‘beat up’ on ourselves. There is no grace. Only God offers grace. Secondly, all our idols will eventually disappoint us. They will be torn from us. They are so uncertain. For example, if our idol is our own attractiveness, eventually our looks will fade. No idol can say, ‘Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you.’ Only God can say that to us, and actually keep the promise.

When, as Christians, we submit to idols in our hearts, it grieves the Spirit within us. ‘Do not grieve the Spirit’ (Ephesians 4:31). Listen to how James puts it: ‘You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?’ (James 4:4-5).

As we live responsibly to the Spirit, he deals with the misplaced affections of our hearts. He overcomes the idols in our hearts: whether they be a relationship, an activity, an ambition, a passion or whatever. The Spirit sets us free to love God first and foremost. Then every other affection in our heart is set in its proper place. God promises to shower his affection upon us, as we love him (v6).

Lastly, does verse 5 (‘I am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me’) teach that children are punished for the idolatry of their parents?
No, it doesn’t. The important words are ‘of those who hate me’ - it is only if they continue the idolatry of their parents that they are punished.

7 (Third command) “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

The Spirit helps us to honour God’s name.
• In the ancient world, the name stands for the character and reputation of the person who owns that name. Therefore, ‘God’s name’ refers to God’s awesome and radiating worth. So when Israel was commanded to not misuse God’s name it was a call to avoid profanity (using the name of God in blasphemy and cursing), frivolity (using the name of God in a superficial, stupid, meaningless way), and hypocrisy (claiming the name of God but acting in a way that doesn’t reflect his character).
• The Spirit helps us to highly honour the name of God. Not only does the Spirit help overcome profanity, frivolity and hypocrisy with regard to God’s name, but he also helps us to lift up the name of God. Jesus’ taught us to pray, ‘Hallowed be your name’ (Matthew 6:9). The Spirit-generated passion of our heart increasingly is that people will know God as he really is; that they will see how awesome and wonderful and worthy he is. We exist for the fame of God’s name in our generation. Through our prayers, our lifestyles, our message to the world, our worship, we send a strong message to people around us that God is awesome, and his character is breathtakingly beautiful. He is worthy of our worship and devotion.
• The name of God is ‘Yahweh’. In the New Testament, God places the stress on the name of his Son: Jesus, which is derived from ‘Yahweh-sus’, which means ‘God saves’. ‘Therefore God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Philippians 2:9-11). We exist for the fame of the name of Jesus.

8 (Fourth command) “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Spirit enables us to enjoy all that God has done for us.
• Many denominations (such as the Seventh Day Adventists) insist that Christians should keep the Sabbath day. Some believe it must be on a Saturday. Others believe that it must be on a Sunday. But are they right?
• The answer is no. We must remember that the law of the Sabbath was only introduced under the Mosaic covenant. But, as Christians we are not under the law of Moses at all (Romans 10:4 says, ‘Christ is the end of the law’). The law of Moses merely foreshadowed the giving the Spirit.

• Although Jesus practiced the Sabbath, he did so because he was culturally a Jew. However, he didn’t treat the Sabbath in a legalistic manner. And his coming prepared for the abolition of the Sabbath altogether.

• The early church quickly stopped practising the Sabbath. No New Testament letter even hints at the Sabbath being obligatory for Gentile Christians. In fact, there is much teaching that tells us that the keeping of special, holy days (of which the Sabbath is the main example) are now not important (Galatians 4:10, Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:6). It is not wrong to make one day more special than others. It is just not obligatory. In fact, the early church disassociated from the Sabbath by starting to meet on Sundays (Acts 20:7), the day that Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 16:9). They were not switching the Sabbath from a Saturday to a Sunday in doing this. They were merely breaking free from Sabbath-keeping altogether.

• How does the Sabbath-law foreshadow life in Christ and in the Spirit? To answer this question, we must remember that Sabbath-keeping under Moses highlighted God’s own Sabbath in creation. On the seventh day God rested from creation, and begun to enjoy all that he had already done (see Genesis 2:2-3). The job of creating the universe was complete. Hebrews 4:1-11 tells us that God’s Sabbath after establishing creation points to yet another Sabbath: God’s Sabbath after establishing salvation for humanity through Jesus Christ’s coming. In Christ, God has achieved salvation. The job is complete. And now he enjoys all that he has done. As Christians, we are invited to keep the Sabbath not literally, but figuratively, by ‘entering God’s rest’ ‘There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also rest from their own work, just as God did from his’ (Hebrews 4:9-10). Since God has accomplished salvation for us, we ‘enter God’s rest’ by simply receiving that salvation. Every day (not just one day a week) is an opportunity to reflect on what God has done for us in Christ, and to rejoice and rest in it. The Spirit helps us to enjoy all that God has done for us in creation (what a wonderful world we live in!), in salvation (‘praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ’ (Ephesians 1:3), and in our own journey thus far! The Spirit deepens our ability to pause and ponder God’s goodness to us, and to rest and rejoice in God’s grace towards us.

• One more insight into this command: Although we’re not under the Sabbath law, we certainly can apply some of its wisdom to our lives, by developing a rhythm of work and rest. Today, much of the world is burnt out by an unsustainable life pace. Jesus encouraged his disciples, and us, to get some rest from time to time (Mark 6:31). As we live led by the Spirit, he will help us build into our lifestyles times of rest and restoration.
18) HOW GOD TRANSFORMS US BY HIS SPIRIT TO LOVE PEOPLE, part 1 (20:12-15)

Introduction: God wants to transform us to love people by his Spirit.

- Christians often tend to think of the Ten Commandments as the essence of God’s moral requirements for our lives. Yet we are mis-informed. We forget that, as those in Christ, we don’t live under the law of Moses, but rather we live under Christ, and we live empowered by the Spirit of Christ.

- The giving of law to Israel merely foreshadowed the giving of the Spirit to believers. In Acts 2:1-4 we see God pouring out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the very day which commemorated the giving of the law 1300 years before. The law sought to change the Israelites from the outside in, with an emphasis on external behaviour. But the Spirit changes believers from the inside-out, with an emphasis on internal transformation, flowing over into external behaviour. Said simply, life in the Spirit radically outclasses life under the law. That is why we are looking at each of the ten commandments as foreshadowing something so much grander: life in the Spirit.

- The Spirit, like a great river, leads the redeemed heart in a certain direction. The Spirit enables in us the character of Christ. Yet we must learn to ‘go with the river’. It is possible for Christian to resist the movements and leadership of the Spirit in our lives, and instead to cling to the reeds of sinful habits. But we are to say no to the temptations and the sins, and say yes to the Spirit, as he seeks to transform us. We need to intentionally do all we can to ‘keep in step with the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:25).

- The previous four commandments had to do with how we relate to God. The last six commandments all have to do with how we relate to people. We will look at how the Spirit transforms us to love people more deeply.

12 (Fifth command) “Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

The Spirit equips us to honour our parents.

- In the law of Moses, children were to honour their parents. To honour means to respect, to take seriously and to cherish. The Israelite child was to obey their parent. The adult was to stay in touch with their parent, and protect and provide for them if need be. Also, we note that both father and mother were to be obeyed. Father and mother, together as a team, were to lead the children. God promised that if children respected their parents, generally it would bring blessing to the entire nation: ‘that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you’. This is self-evident: the stronger the family unit, the stronger the entire nation.

- But what if we’re Christians who are no longer under the law of Moses? After all, life in the Spirit calls us to far more than the law of Moses ever
could. Interestingly, this is the only command that needs very little upgrading. It is the only one of the ten commands that gets specifically quoted in the New Testament epistles. Paul writes: “Honour your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 4:2-3). We remember that as a Christian we fulfil the law accidentally as we follow the Spirit deliberately. This verse in Ephesians 6:2-3 flows out of the teaching of life in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Paul is teaching that life in the Spirit overflows into a strong family unit, where Christian children are enabled by the Spirit to truly honour and obey their parents. Sometimes there is an equivalent of the Mosaic law in the life of a Christian, but it is never exactly the law taken at face value. In this case we are not exactly applying the law of Moses, but drawing on the equivalent of it. If we were to exactly apply the law it would not apply to Gentiles, and the consequence of disobedience in a child was potentially death. Also, Moses actually misquotes the verse. He says it will ‘go well for you in all the earth’ rather than as Exodus actually has it: ‘go well for you in the land’. ‘Land’ refers to the Promised Land in Canaan. But, Paul applies it to all Christians everywhere.

• As we honour our parents, we are taught that it leads to great benefit. It strengthens the whole family. And a strong family positively impacts every individual in the family, as well as the larger culture that the family is in.

• There is another application of this call to honour our parents. It is to honour all people who have played a shaping role in our lives and in our faith. We should find ways to honour all those people who have put energy into developing us into the people we now are. We must find ways to bring honour to them. We should seek to honour them in our hearts, and in our speech about them, even when we may have disagreed with some ways they went about building into our lives. The Spirit of God will help us to do this.

13 (Sixth command) “You shall not murder.

The Spirit empowers us to overcome ungodly anger, contempt, and verbal insult.

• Human life is created by God and is sacred. Humans are made in the image of God. That is why murder is wrong. (See Genesis 9:5-6). Every human being is very valuable to God.

• Elsewhere in the law of Moses, we see a difference between murder and killing. Capital punishment was commanded in some situations. Animals were sacrificed. War was at times necessary. These did not constitute a breaking of the sixth command.

• Jesus radically upgraded this sixth command in Matthew 5:21-22: ‘‘You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to
judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell'.

- Jesus calls us to so much more in our relationships than merely avoiding murder. He calls us to avoid ungodly anger, being contemptuous toward someone, and verbally insulting someone - all of which the law of Moses has nothing to say!

- ‘Anyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment.’ The rest of the Bible tells us that not all anger is sin (see Ephesians 4:26). For example, it is possible to have a righteous anger toward injustice (see Nehemiah 5:6) and toward the people of God who poorly represent God to the world (see Matthew 21:12-13), and toward those who betray our trust, and so doing, wound us deeply. But there is a sinful anger too. For example, sometimes we’re frustrated with someone because they get in the way of what we want (see Esther 1:12). In this case our pride is wounded. Sometimes we feel we’ve been treated unjustly, but what really gets us incensed is the wounding of our pride. Sometimes it is an anger that is connected to jealousy - we’re jealous of another person (see 1 Samuel 18:8). The sinful kind of anger is usually associated with feelings of hatred, irritation, animosity, bitterness and offence. Jesus tells us that God will judge this kind of anger.

- ‘Anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca' is answerable to the Sanhedrin’. The accurate translation of this is that we will be answerable to ‘the council’. This refers to God’s council of judgment. The word ‘Raca’ was an Aramaic word that expressed contempt towards someone. It was like saying, ‘You’re worthless - I am not even going to bother with you.’ Contempt is worse than anger, because in anger you can still affirm a person’s worth - whereas contempt is a denial of a person’s worth. To show contempt is to make a person feel worthless, as well as unworthy of belonging.

- ‘Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.’ Jesus refers to the destructive power of words, especially when coming from a bitter, angry attitude. In our anger we tend to openly insult people - and this can be very damaging. Interestingly, Jesus called the Pharisees ‘blind fools’ (Matthew 23:17) but it was not words connected to abusive, vindictive anger.

- Here is the point: the Spirit of Christ in us seeks a far deeper transformation of our lives than merely our ability to avoid murdering someone. It is possible to not murder someone literally, but to ‘kill them slowly’ with our ungodly anger, insults and contempt. The Spirit helps us to love all people, even our enemies. Someone may appear to be obeying the sixth commandment because they lack the courage to kill someone, but if their heart is nevertheless filled with hatred, they show their deeper disobedience. But the Spirit helps us to overcome the hatred within. Once again, we see how life under Christ, life in the Spirit of Christ, outclasses life under the law of Moses.
The Spirit helps us to be sexually pure in how we relate to people.

- The law of Moses forbade adultery with another married Israelite woman. Incidentally it did not forbid having a concubine or sleeping with a single woman - this goes to show how limited the law of Moses was in helping people become more godly.

- Again, we see how life under Christ, and life empowered by the Spirit of Christ, outclasses life under the law of Moses. In Matthew 5:27-30 we see Jesus calling us to so much more than merely avoiding adultery. ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.’ Let us explore this teaching of Christ...

- Jesus calls us to so much more than avoiding adultery. He calls us to sexual purity in our hearts, and in our way of relating to the opposite sex. When Jesus speaks of looking at a women lustfully he does not mean that we cannot observe and appreciate the beauty or handsome-ness of an attractive person. He rather speaks of looking at someone in such a way that feeds sexual desire for the person. Note however that he is not condemning the temptation to be sexually attracted to someone, but rather indulging ourselves in the temptation until it becomes a sin. In the words of Luther, ‘We can’t stop a bird from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from nesting in our hair.’ We may not be able to avoid temptations (such as noticing a sexually attractive person) but we can avoid sin (which in this case would be staring at the person).

- But many commentators (such as Eaton and Carson) say that the better translation here is that we shouldn’t look at someone in a way that evokes lust in that person. If this translation is correct, then Jesus is speaking about a man’s attempt to seduce a woman. Long before the actual sin of physical adultery, there is the sin of intended and hoped-for adultery. This applies to our general way of relating to people that we find sexually attractive. We need to relate to them purely.

- Jesus tells us to cut out our eyes, or even our hands if they cause us to sin. He is not being literal here - although Origen, one of the early church fathers, as a young man, mutilated himself because he took Jesus literally. Jesus is in effect saying, ‘Based on a knowledge of your own sexual vulnerabilities, take whatever radical action is needed to proactively avoid sexual sin in your life.’ This may include such things as avoiding certain places, certain websites, certain literature, certain people or certain thoughts. It may include setting up accountability relationships or ending a relationship. Jesus doesn’t give the details but leaves it to us to work out. But whatever the cost of avoiding sexual sin, it is worth it!
• What does Jesus mean by our whole bodies being thrown into hell (v30)? In this passage, being thrown into hell refers to the compromised believer experiencing 'salvation through fire' (as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 3:15). This is where the punishing, purifying fire of God seriously deprives them of their reward. God has rewards for us in this life, and in the next — and one major way to lose these rewards, and to experience judgment instead, is to refuse to take the necessary proactive action to avoid sexual sin. Rather experience the cost of avoiding sin then the fire of judgment.

• The Spirit of Christ enables us to do far more than the law of Moses ever could. Avoiding adultery is good, but avoiding adultery of the heart is even better. The Spirit alone can transform us in our depths.

15 (Eighth command) "You shall not steal.

The Spirit enables us to live as Christ’s possession, and generously.
• Stealing was wrong under the law of Moses. Stealing has always been wrong. Although nothing is truly ours (‘The earth and everything in it is mine’, says the LORD’ (Psalm 24:1)) God has ordained the sanctity of private property.
• Under Christ, stealing is also wrong (see Luke 3:14 and Titus 2:10 for example). Of course, the Spirit of Christ helps us to overcome the temptation to steal. But the Spirit does more than just help us overcome the temptation to take another person’s property.
• For example, under Christ we refuse to try to steal back ourselves from Christ by acting independently of him. ‘You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ’ (1 Peter 1:18-19); ‘You are not your own for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s (1 Corinthians 6:20). The Spirit enables us to not steal ourselves back from Christ. We rightfully belong to him. He bought us with his blood. He is our Redeemer-Owner. We are not our own. We are his. It is sobering to think that every time we live independently of Christ, and in disobedience to him, we steal ourselves back. Wonderfully, the Spirit empowers us to live as Christ’s possession.
• Another example is that, under Christ we do more than just avoid stealing. We become generous. ‘Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him work, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need’ (Ephesians 4:28). The Spirit enables us to work hard, rather than steal. The Spirit enables us to not only care about ourselves, but other people too. Interestingly, when the Israelites failed to give a portion of their income to the priests for the upkeep of the Temple (as the law of Moses had commanded them to), they were accused of stealing from God (see Malachi 3:8-10). Similarly, under Christ, the Spirit enables financial generosity in us toward God’s work in the world. The law of Moses taught people not to steal. But life in the Spirit teaches us to do far more than not steal. He teaches us to give generously. Here’s an example of the way the Spirit can enable
generosity in the very people who would be more likely to steal, from a natural perspective, that is: ‘And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will’ (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

19) HOW GOD TRANSFORMS US BY HIS SPIRIT TO LOVE PEOPLE, part 2 (20:16-17)

16 (Ninth command) “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

The Spirit energizes us to be witnesses to the truth.
• In this command, the Israelites were instructed to not give false testimony in court cases. Nowhere in the law of Moses, however, were they forbidden from lying outside of a court of law. Once again, life under Christ goes much further than life under Moses. The Spirit of Christ transforms us in ways that the law of Moses never could.
• For example, in contrast to ‘the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming’, the Spirit of Christ leads us ‘to speak the truth in love’ (Ephesians 4:14-15). As we depend of the Spirit, our lives and communities are increasingly pervaded with sincerity, honesty, truthfulness and transparency. Having said that, we must be careful of being naïve: we are not obliged to tell everyone everything. There is such a thing as private information.
• Another example is of how the Spirit makes us witnesses to the most important truth in the world. ‘But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”’ (Acts 1:8). For the Christians the court room is the entire world. The truth about Jesus, who described himself as ‘the Truth’ (John 14:6) is on trial. And we are witnesses to this truth. The apostles were witnesses to the physical resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:26). Although we were not privileged to experience seeing the physically Resurrected Jesus, we are privileged to have experienced the power of the Resurrected Jesus at work in our lives. Along with the apostles we can say, ‘We are witnesses and so is the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 5:32). It is so important that we do step forward and speak up about the truthfulness of Christ. So many people are ready to denounce the reality of Jesus based on false claims (see Matthew 26:59-60 for example). Yet ‘a truthful witness saves lives’ (Proverbs 14:25). As we witness or testify to the truthfulness about Jesus, many people will trust in Christ for themselves, and, after experiencing his reality in their lives, will be ready to testify too. Think of how this
happened to the woman at the well: ‘Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.” (John 4:39-42). The Spirit emboldens us to be truthful people, and to testify to the Truth himself. Oh, how this deceived world desperately needs to know the Truth about Jesus!

17 (Tenth command) “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

The Spirit changes us from the inside out.

- This tenth command is different to all the other commands. The others have to do with words and actions. They have to do with externals. Some people, through sheer self-discipline, are able to keep the first nine commands. We think of the apostle Paul who claimed that he achieved legalistic faultlessness before he trusted in Christ (Philippians 3:6). But the tenth command was a command of the heart. And this command, no matter how self-disciplined a person was, could not be kept. Paul said this was the one command he just could not keep before he became a Christian (see Romans 7:7-8). Self-disciplined people can behave according to all the rules, but they are not in control of their own hearts!

- Why did God include this command to the Israelites? It was to persuade them that they were sinners, in desperate need of a Saviour. The law of Moses was not enough. It was a temporary law, given to the Israelites until such time as Jesus the Saviour would come. All are sinners, and the source of sin is our hearts. As Jesus said, ‘What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’ (Mark 7:20-23). Notice that the sinful heart covets. ‘The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart’. That is why any external attempts at changing people - education, politics, social-engineering, etc - is doomed to fail, unless people are given a new heart. And that is exactly what Jesus and the Spirit alone can do.

- Listen to two amazing prophecies about how Jesus and the Spirit in the new covenant would change people’s hearts: First, there is a prophecy by Jeremiah: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts’ (Jeremiah 31:33). Then, there is a prophecy by Ezekiel: ‘I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give
you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws’ (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

• When we trust in Christ, the Spirit comes and gives us a new heart, not that we are no longer tempted to sin. We are. But now a new grace is at work in our lives, changing us from the inside out. It is the Spirit of God at work in us. How desperately we need the ‘heart transplant’ that only Christ can perform! How desperately we need more than a little bit of morality and religion. We need more than behaviour modification. We need heart transformation. The ten commandments are not enough to change us in our depths. Only Christ can deeply change us. This tenth commandment can only be kept as we walk in the Spirit. He alone can enable us to be completely content with who we are, and what we possess. If we have not yet trusted in Christ, do that now. Allow him to give you new birth, new life and a new heart! And if we are Christians, let us freshly cast ourselves upon Christ’s mercy and power to change us from the inside out. Let us not be discouraged by our sinful tendencies. Let us reaffirm, that since the Spirit lives in us, the power of sin in our hearts has been broken and new life now pulsates through our hearts transforming us from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). Then we will be able to say along with Paul: ‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want’ (Philippians 4:12). Only the Spirit can do a work this deep in our lives.

We need to very intentionally co-operate with the Spirit as he transforms us.

• We have seen in the last three sections how the Spirit is available to transform us and help us to love God and people. However, this transformation requires considerable co-operation from our side. One of the sections in the Bible that best describes the dynamic of the Spirit’s life-changing work is Galatians 5:16-25. To complete this section on ‘How God transforms us by the Spirit’, let us look at some of these verses in Galatians 5 and observe some brief insights ...

Galatians 5:16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

• We see that we are meant to live by the Spirit. Paul, speaking to Christians, takes it for granted that the Spirit is in us, and that he is exercising a leadership in our lives that we can know and feel! Paul also refers to the ‘sinful nature’ or flesh. This word is used differently in places, but here it means ‘an aspect in our personality in which we feel tempted to sin’. Two kinds of promptings are needed for the Christian to walk in the Spirit: The prompting of the Spirit, saying, ‘Live for the glory of Jesus’. Something inside that says, ‘Yes, I want to do that.’ They are the ‘things you want to do (v17).’
Gal. 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

- We see that the Christian will always be in a fight while in this world. There is a triangle here: You, the Spirit, the flesh. The Spirit who pulls on your life towards love, faith, purity, love for God, contentment, truthfulness and obedience; the flesh or sinful nature that pulls on your life toward sin and you who experienced the pull of both. They are, however, contradictory pulls. But it is assumed that you (i.e. the new you in Christ) want to go with the Spirit. However, because of the real pull of the flesh we never become totally sinless in this life. We don’t totally do what we want to at every level and in every hour of our life - i.e. although we are to become increasingly responsive to the Spirit, our responsiveness to the Spirit is imperfect.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

- We notice that the struggle need not make us feel condemned. We might say to ourselves, ‘I feel condemned because of the evil desires I find in myself. I wish I could get rid of the sinful desires altogether.’ Paul addresses this problem saying, ‘The Christian is not under law. By this he means that we are ‘not under the condemnation of the law’ (Romans 8:1).
- Which side will win? The Spirit or the sinful nature? Answer: The side we actively ‘feed’ and respond to. Think of an analogy. Imagine we have two dogs to feed? Which one will be stronger, and bark louder? Whichever dog you feed the most (i.e. yield to) will become most dominant in your life (i.e. hard to resist). The point is that we are to feed the Spirit and starve the sinful nature. The Spirit helps us, but we are not passive! We must ‘put to death the misdeeds of the body by the Spirit’ (Romans 8:13). The battle is fierce, but we can expect Holy Spirit resources. New floods of spiritual liveliness will come into our lives.

Galatians 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

- If we are not under the law (which clearly tells us what is and isn’t right) how do we know what the sins of the flesh are? They are obvious! We didn’t need the law to tell us these things are wrong. Joseph didn’t need the law to tell him adultery was wrong (see Genesis 39:9). The Holy Spirit will convict us of sin and warn us in the face of temptation - if we remain truly sensitive to him.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
• The result of obeying the Spirit will be fruitfulness. The works of the flesh are easy to ‘do’. But fruit is different. It is more indirect. Think of this analogy: we plant a seed, but reap a banana. Similarly, we obey the Spirit, and up comes joy, peace etc. Although justification and new birth come immediately at our salvation - Christ-likeness takes time to emerge. We do not work for our salvation - but we do work it out. Our character will begin to change as we persist in faith and responsiveness to the Spirit.

• Notice that love comes first. Loving others is the key to the rest of the fruit. The rest of the fruit follows. Paul speaks of fruit not fruits. They come as a group. Love brings joy - not just the joy of salvation (Acts 8:39) but the sheer joy of seeing Christ’s love in our lives. Then comes peace - unlove is stressful. Then patience - slowness to get angry. Kindness is the opposite of things like harshness and aggression. Goodness is about being upright and godly. Faithfulness is when we live in such a way that people feel they can trust us. Living without lying. Meekness has to do with not defending ourselves. Moses was meek in the way he allowed God to defend him. Self-control: nothing helps us get a grip on ourselves like giving ourselves to a life of love.

Galatians 5.23 cont’d. Against such things there is no law.

• Here is the major point we have been making: this kind of life goes beyond the law - or any other law. If we follow the Spirit intentionally, we will fulfil the law unintentionally - and go way beyond it. The giving of the law of Moses (which includes the ten commandments) merely foreshadows the giving of the Spirit. As we live by the Spirit we will fulfil the ten commandments in the deepest possible way, without even focussing on the ten commandments!

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

• First there is the assumption: we have spiritual life by the power of the Spirit. No one except Christians can live in the way God requires, and although the Spirit helps us, it is not automatic even for us. The Spirit helps us to be led by him in the direct obedience of God.

• Next, Paul asks us to do something: to keep in step with the Spirit. The implication is that not all Christians do this! There is much that does happen automatically at salvation: we are justified, regenerated, adopted into his family and receive eternal security. But obedience doesn’t happen instantaneously. We need to consciously practise it. No one else will obey the Spirit of Christ for us but we ourselves. The word for ‘keep in step’ used here is different from the word ‘live by walk in / the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:16. This one means: toe the line, be careful not to deviate, put ourselves exactly where God wants us and do just what he says. We go exactly where he leads. Although we no longer need the Law of Moses to guide us we still have a definite leading by the Spirit.
We don’t get to do whatever we like! Though we are not under the law of Moses, we are under the leadership of Christ.

Footnotes to the Bible Texts used:

- Exodus 1:5 Masoretic Text (see also Gen. 46:27 Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint (see also Acts 7:14 and note at Gen. 46:27) seventy-five
- Exodus 1:22 Masoretic Text; Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Targums born to the Hebrews
- Exodus 2:10 Moses sounds like the Hebrew for ‘draw out’.
- Exodus 2:22 Gershom sounds like the Hebrew for ‘an alien’ there.
- Exodus 3:12 The Hebrew is plural.
- Exodus 3:14 Or I will be what I will be
- Exodus 3:15 The Hebrew for LORD sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for ‘I am’ in verse 14.
- Exodus 4:6 The Hebrew word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.
- Exodus 4:24 Or [Moses’ son]; Hebrew him
- Exodus 4:25 Or and drew near [Moses’] feet
- Exodus 6:3 Hebrew El-Shaddai
- Exodus 6:3 See note at Exodus 3:15.
- Exodus 6:12 Hebrew I am uncircumcised of lips; also in verse 30
- Exodus 6:14 The Hebrew for families here and in verse 25 refers to units larger than clans.
- Exodus 8:23 Septuagint and Vulgate; Hebrew will put a deliverance
- Exodus 9:16 Or have spared you
- Exodus 10:10 Or Be careful, trouble is in store for you!
- Exodus 10:19 Hebrew Yam Suph; that is, Sea of Reeds
- Exodus 12:3 The Hebrew word can mean lamb or kid; also in verse 4.
- Exodus 12:40 Masoretic Text; Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint Egypt and Canaan
- Exodus 13:18 Or the Sea of Reeds
- Exodus 13:19 See Gen. 50:25.
- Exodus 14:9 Or charioteers; also in verses 17, 18, 23, 26 and 28
- Exodus 14:25 See Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Syriac; Masoretic Text removed
- Exodus 14:27 Or from
- Exodus 15:2 Or song
- Exodus 15:4 Or the Sea of Reeds; also in verse 22
- Exodus 15:15 Or rulers
- Exodus 15:16 Or created
- Exodus 15:19 Or charioteers
- Exodus 15:23 Marah means bitter.
- Exodus 16:16 That is, possibly about 3 pounds or about 1 1/3 kilograms; also in verses 18, 32, 33 and 36
- Exodus 16:22 That is, possibly about 6 pounds or about 2 2/3 kilograms
- Exodus 16:28 The Hebrew is plural.
- Exodus 16:31 Manna means What is it? (see verse 15).
- Exodus 17:7 Massah means testing.
- Exodus 17:7 Meribah means quarreling.
- Exodus 17:16 Or to
- Exodus 17:16 The meaning of the Hebrew for this clause is uncertain.
- Exodus 18:3 Gershom sounds like the Hebrew for a foreigner there.
- Exodus 18:4 Eliezer means my God is helper.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 19:6</td>
<td>Or possession, for the whole earth is mine. 6You</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 19:18</td>
<td>Most Hebrew manuscripts; a few Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint and all the people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 19:19</td>
<td>Or and God answered him with thunder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:3</td>
<td>Or besides</td>
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