



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



EXODUS 15 - 21

## Exodus 15

***15:1-3 - "Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name."***

The events of this chapter take place on the far side of the Red Sea after Israel has crossed over safely and the Lord has drowned the chariot army of Pharaoh in the waters of the sea. The first eighteen verses of the chapter are a spiritual song that Moses sang in celebration. The song seems to be a spontaneous composition by Moses as he was inspired by the Spirit of God. As he sang, the men of the nation all joined with him. Given that there were 600,000 men in the exodus, the chorus of their celebration was massive. It really is an amazing song and well worth some time spent with it in study. This song also has the honor of being the very first song written in the Bible. It is also the first worship song and the first example of congregational worship singing in the Bible. Our continuing practice of singing songs of worship when we gather together as the people of God follows the pattern we see established here. The pattern has not been diminished over all the time since that day, and it will continue not just throughout history, but into heaven and eternity as those gathered around God's throne will sing the song of Moses (Revelation 15:3).

There are many elements of this song which should be noted, but the single most important element is just how God centered it is. The song covers all the details of the Red Sea event, but the focus is not the event, not the Egyptians and not even Israel. The focus is the Lord. His greatness, His power, His anger, His lovingkindness, His holiness, His purpose, and His rule rise above all other concerns in the song. This is why the song functions as a pattern for us. There is a principle in interpreting Scripture which can be called the principle of first mention. We can expect in any first mention of something in the Bible that whatever God is introducing to us in that first mention is intended to be for succeeding generations a model from which to learn and to follow.

The pattern that still fully applies for us today is imperative for God's people to gather together as congregations and to sing unto the Lord songs of worship like this one in which the main focus is God Himself. God's people are distinguished from the world as a people of worship. Our worship, like the Israelites on this day, is to be characterized by great joy and celebration. Our celebration is not from a mere emotional high. If the joy of worship was primarily emotional, then we would only worship when we felt like it. Their worship that day was in direct response to the mighty acts of God on their behalf. This is why true Christian worship continues after 2000 years to focus on the person, death, resurrection, ascension

and exaltation of Christ. I worship Him whether I feel good or bad, glad or sad, because He has done awesome things for me and He is always worthy to be worshipped for it.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the song of Moses is the portrayal of the Lord as a warrior. "Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is His name." I describe it as unsettling because of the common emphasis on love and peace as predominant aspects of the Lord's nature. God is love, and the Lord is the Prince of Peace, but He is also a warrior. One aspect of the Lord's nature and character does not eliminate the other. Because God loves and God makes and preserves peace does not mean that He never goes to war. When it is time to fight as a warrior, the Lord rises up and goes to battle with His enemies. In this case, the Lord showed Himself as a warrior against the arrogant and rebellious who had dishonored His name by worshipping false gods and rebelliously rejecting His commands.

***15:11-18 - "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them. In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; Until Your people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever."***

The two questions at the beginning of this section of the song are what we call rhetorical questions. They are questions with an obvious answer. They are not asked in ignorance, but to emphasize the point being made by showing how obvious the answer is. The questions are, "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness...?" The obvious expected answer to both questions is "No one!" No one is like Yahweh among the gods. No one is like Yahweh in His majestic holiness. The questions highlight the uniqueness of the Lord. He cannot be compared to any person, and angel or demon, or even to any of "the gods". Some have mistaken this line of the song to think that Moses actually believed that there were Egyptian gods. Moses did not believe in the reality of any of the gods of the Egyptians. Rather, this is a poetic way of declaring that even the fantasy beliefs of the Egyptians cannot be compared to the greatness of the One true God. It is an interesting study to research the various mythologies of the cultures of the ancient world. Each culture had their own gods that they had imagined and honored. What is striking is that even the

fantasies of these made up gods do not compare with the reality of God. In other words, we could try to imagine the greatest god possible, and Yahweh would be far greater still.

An interesting shift in focus comes in this part of the song. The first part of the song was concerned with the immediate past and rehearsing what God had just done to the Egyptians. Now, there is a time shift from past to future. Moses begins to sing, not about what God has done, but about what God will do in their future. As the people of God, their journey has just begun. The exodus from Egypt was an awesome experience, but they are not to camp at the shore of the Red Sea forever. The Lord has already made known His long range plan for them to journey to the Promised Land. In between them and the fulfillment of God's promise are barriers to its fulfillment as represented by other nations, each with their own agenda. They would face Philistines, Edomites, Moabites and Canaanites. Each represented a threat to their safety and their hope for the future. As Moses sings about these nations, he does so with a strong sense of confidence and assurance. His confidence is not in the flesh, as though Israel was so great and mighty, but in the Spirit because God would lead them and God would protect them just as He had done with the Egyptians. For Moses in worship here, the future is as certain as the past as long as they are following the pillar of God and obeying Him. Those nations in front of them do not reign over them any more than Egypt did. It is the Lord Who reigns!

***15:22-24 - "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"***

We saw in the last chapter how quickly the hearts of Israel had turned from the celebration of their new freedom from the Egyptians to fear when Pharaoh had overtaken them at the shore of the Red Sea. All that the Lord had done to prove His power and faithfulness in the ten plagues was so quickly forgotten under the pressure of the present crisis which dominated their perspective. That experience was just a day or so away. The memory of the hard lesson learned of how easily they turned from trust to complaint should have been super fresh in their hearts and minds. Yet, here we are in this passage, which takes place only a day or two later. Since then they have been given one more ultra-powerful object lesson to reshape their perspective. The Lord has miraculously split the waters of an entire sea, they have walked through it on dry ground with walls of water on either side of them, and when the chariots of Egypt attempted to follow them they were swallowed up in the rushing return of the sea. Do you think this new lesson has penetrated to a deeper level of their heart than the ten plagues did previously? Sadly, no, they once again quickly default to grumbling against the Lord and Moses.

The circumstance this time is three days removed from the worship celebration of verses 15:1-18. They have now walked three days into the wilderness, heading toward the Promised Land. They are not wandering in these three days, because the pillar of cloud by day is continually leading them. They arrive at a place called Marah, which translates as "bitter". There is a water source there and as they first arrive you might imagine the people are glad that the Lord has led them to water in the wilderness. Water will be throughout the journey their number one physical need and it is naturally scarce in this desert wilderness. The people attempt to drink the waters of Marah only to discover that the water is bitter and cannot be used for drinking water.

This represents the first great test for Israel in the wilderness. It is the first of a series of ten tests that the Lord designs for them to expose their hearts to themselves and call them to change. Israel does not pass this test, but fails it miserably. They are hot, they are tired from a three day walk, and most of all they are very thirsty. All of us might be a bit cranky under similar circumstances, but their response is to resort to grumbling. This is not the first time we hear them grumble and it most certainly won't be the last. The issue is how they should have responded. There was nothing wrong with them being thirsty and crying out to the Lord and Moses for water. The problem was that they grumbled at Moses (and the Lord through him). Their grumbling was more than crankiness. It revealed unbelief in their hearts. They did not say, "Lord, we see no way for us to drink here, but You know our needs and we are trusting You to provide for us." Their failure is meant to teach us by their bad example. We are to learn from them how not to cry out when we find ourselves in God designed extreme circumstances in our own lives. "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us..." (I Corinthians 10:5-6).

***15:25-26 - "Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."***

In spite of their grumbling complaint to His messenger, the Lord mercifully answers the need of the people for water. He led them here to this place of bitter water, not just to prod them to complain, but to show them, and us, the one answer He has provided for bitterness in our lives. Moses cries out to the Lord on behalf of Israel to answer their need for water. As Moses prayed, the Lord opened his eyes to see a tree. Without any verbal instruction, the Lord gives Moses the understanding that he is to take the tree and throw it into the waters of Marah. When Moses throws the tree into the water, the water is transformed from bitter to sweet. The water is now miraculously fit for drinking. Like all the other

miracles of God, the miracle powerfully meets a physical need, but it also teaches in symbol a key spiritual lesson.

The lesson here is another significant type or symbol which points far forward in God's plan to the work of Christ. We are meant to notice that it was a tree that "healed" the waters and transformed them from waters of death into waters of life. The same Hebrew word for tree is found in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which describes a specific death penalty for an accursed man. Paul later refers to that passage in Galatians 3:13. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE". Paul connects the tree of Deuteronomy with the cross of Christ. I believe this cure for the bitter waters that God showed to Moses is a symbol of the cross. It is only when the cross is applied to our lives that our hearts are transformed. The waters that once came from our hearts were filled with bitterness. The waters are healed and "From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38).

#### **Questions from Exodus 14:**

**Question:** What a wonderful lesson in this passage of scripture. Just a question in the part of Pharaoh and God. If God allowed Pharaoh's heart to be hardened for His own honor and purposes, do you think God does the same to some political leaders who are doing wickedness now days to show forth His own honor?

**Answer:** Thanks for your question Brian (this question comes from Brian, who is the pastor-overseer of a number of churches on one of the Philippine islands. Please pray for him!) Yes, I am 100% convinced that God still works in the hearts of political leaders throughout the world in ways like He did with Pharaoh. The Lord is the same today as He was then, and there is no passage in the Bible that teaches that He has changed His ways. The difficulty for us is in discerning what God is doing with any particular political leader at any particular time. With Pharaoh, we have the benefit of the Lord telling us step by step when He hardened his heart. With other leaders we can be confident that the Lord is working, but we do not have specific revelations from God telling us what He is doing in each case. We are urged to pray for political leaders.

"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior," (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

This kind of prayer is asking for God to influence the hearts and decisions of all political leaders. This means not just the good ones, but the wicked ones also. When Paul wrote this, the Caesar in Rome was Nero, who was the most wicked of Roman rulers. Nero had thousands of Christians praying for him, but he never

got any "better", but rather grew progressively worse. At first glance, this might seem like there were thousands of wasted prayers, but I don't think so. I believe that the Lord hardened the heart of Nero for His greater glory. Nero was the Caesar that raised the first great persecution of the church by Rome. Thousands of Christians were martyred for their faith in Christ under his rule, but the name of the Lord was awesomely glorified in the martyrdom. There were also multiplied thousands more who were drawn to salvation because of the testimony of the martyrs. Nero's hardness ended up serving God's greater purpose.

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## Exodus 16

***16:2-7 - "The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumbings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?"***

The Lord has led Israel now from their recent camping place at Elim to the wilderness of Sin. They have been gone from Egypt long enough to have exhausted the supply of food that they had carried with them from Egypt. The people are now hungry, and there is nothing in their natural surroundings that shows any promise for enough food to feed such a large host of people. There are no grocery stores in this wilderness and certainly no McDonalds for an easy solution to their hunger. The question arises in the hearts of the people as to why the Lord would have led them to such a place where there would be no food for them. One unhealthy question leads to a dangerous consideration. The people begin to compare their present situation in the wilderness without food to their former situation in Egypt. Yes, they were slaves and life was hard, but at least the Egyptian slave masters provided daily food for them to keep up their strength for the next day's hard work. Having questioned the Lord in their hearts and then considered how much better they had it in Egypt, the people then cross the line of righteousness and choose to grumble among each other.

There is a spiritual dynamic of how we affect and influence one another that we should all understand and treat with respect and caution. If I am struggling in my



heart with my life circumstances but doing so privately only before the Lord the effect on you or the community of believers is minimal. If I openly begin to complain and grumble in your hearing about a shared circumstance of difficulty, I have the potential of having a powerful negative influence on you and everyone else in that community. You hearing me grumble tempts you to indulge in the same temporary release of the stress of the difficulty by grumbling along with me. Soon the mood and the attitude of the entire community can become a chorus of complaint. This pattern took place once again in the camp of Israel. This is now the third time they grumble with what they believe are good reasons from a natural perspective, but from a spiritual perspective has a corrosive impact on their faith. Their first complaint was at the shore of the Red Sea when overtaken by Pharaoh and they complained they were going to die. The second time was at Marah when they complained that they had nothing to drink. In both cases, they saw the Lord work a miracle on their behalf to provide a safe escape and to cleanse the bitter waters. Those two miracles should have prepared their hearts for the next testing circumstance and functioned like a spiritual vaccine against further grumbings. Yet, here they are once again, so recently removed from those evidences of the Lord's faithful care for them, and they are again quick to complain.

Another common aspect of community complaints that surfaces here is the specific target of this complaint. The people approach Moses and Aaron and complain to them about the lack of food to eat in this place. They do so in another example of biting sarcasm which reveals the condition of their hearts. They don't want to die, but they claim it would have been better for them to die in the plagues in Egypt than to come all the way out here to the wilderness to die of starvation. There is a reason why the people complain to Moses and not the Lord. Deep in their hearts they know that whatever the Lord has done was the right thing to do. So, rather than grumble at Him directly, they choose a more subtle and indirect way to grumble about the Lord. They target the Lord's chosen leaders for their complaint. Their challenge to Moses and Aaron was, "...for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Was their complaint valid? No, because the reason they had been led here was not to kill them with hunger, and even more to the point, it was not Moses that led them here at all. The Lord, in the pillar of cloud and fire had led them to this place of hunger.

This highlights for us though, one of the principles of spiritual leadership. Becoming the target of undeserved grumbling by the people you lead spiritually comes with the territory. This factor alone makes spiritual leadership an unattractive "job" that I would not encourage anyone to seek. The cost of leadership is simply too great to choose it as a life's vocation. Am I recommending not to seek to be a spiritual leader in the Christian community? The short answer is yes! The greatest heartaches of my life have come from this kind of interaction with the people God has called me to lead. However, I am not saying to any, that they should not become a spiritual leader, nor am I choosing

to walk away from my own leadership role. What I am saying is that the burdens that come with the role are too great to endure unless you have been called by the Lord into leadership. If He has called you, then He will sustain you and grant you the grace to endure even the worst complaints. The grace God gave Moses to endure these complaints resulted in his discernment that they were not really complaining about him but about the Lord.

***16:14-15 - "When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat."***

The Lord is so very gracious to us as His people. To complain even once to Him about Him deserves His hand of judgment to fall immediately upon our lives. Yet, He knows our weaknesses and especially so in extreme circumstances that test our character like this one in which Israel found themselves. When they grumble this third time against Him, the Lord was not pleased with them, but He did not give them the judgment they deserved. Instead He powerfully answers the practical pressing need that stirred their complaint. The Lord provided food for them and did so in a way to meet their physical need while communicating symbolically to them about their deeper need. This is the beginning of the forty-year-long miracle of manna. The name manna was coined at this time from the shared question they asked when they woke up to this strange substance covering the ground around their camp. They asked, "What is it?" This question in Hebrew is the words "man hu", which then became the term manna. The question they asked has been answered a number of ways by people who have read this account and attempted an explanation, but there are really only two possible answers. Either what they gathered for forty years was a natural product of the desert or it was a miracle.

Those who seek to identify a natural cause for every miracle in the Bible are convinced that this manna was no miracle, but the product from the tamarisk tree in that region of the world which secretes a sap which is sticky and white and hardens to into edible pellets. People that try to rationalize the Biblical miracles with such shallow explanations are blinded by their own agenda that they grasp after any faint correlation that allows them to dismiss the miraculous. The reason that manna could not have been tree sap is that over a million people ate all of their daily meals for forty years of this manna. All of the sap in all of the tamarisk trees in the world would not have been enough to correlate with their diet. In addition, the manna appeared only six days a week and took the seventh day off, and no tree would ever do so. Then on the sixth day the manna supply was double what it was for the other five days and again no tree would produce twice the sap let alone all the trees do so, and if they did, that in itself would constitute another miracle. There is just no escaping the testimony of the manna. Either

believe it was a miracle, or choose to reject it as a myth, but don't try to connect it to a natural cause.

The Lord give us additional testimony about the manna further on in the Scriptures. "He rained down manna upon them to eat And gave them food from heaven. Man did eat the bread of angels; He sent them food in abundance." (Psalm 78:24-25). "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.' Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." (John 6:31-35). The clear testimony in these two passages is that the manna was bread from heaven. That means it did not come from the earth and had no natural source or cause. This is far more important to correctly identify than to simply satisfy our curiosity about an unusual substance. Above I mentioned the symbolic purpose of manna. The Lord Jesus references the manna event in connection to one of His miracles. Remember that He multiplied loaves of bread and fed a multitude of thousands in the wilderness of Judea. When some of the people asked Him to compare the bread He multiplied with the manna, the Lord Jesus answered in an unexpected way. He identified the manna with Himself. His teaching reveals to us that the manna was a symbol of Christ. Jesus is the bread of God which came from heaven to give life to the world!

***16:22-30 - "Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning." So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none." It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? "See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.***

The Lord purposed for the manna to serve a triple spiritual purpose for Israel, but unfortunately they only saw and understood the first purpose. The three purposes were that the manna was to meet their immediate physical need for

food, it was to point forward into the future as a type of Christ as the Bread of Life, and third it was to be a daily test of their obedience to the Lord's commands. It is not at all unlike the Lord that He will also test our hearts in the same things He provides to meet the needs of our lives. In this case, the test was in the connection of the manna provision to the principle (and later the Law) of honoring the sabbath of the Lord. The sabbath is a day of rest that would soon be given to Israel as the fourth of the ten commandments on the two tablets of stone. They will not receive that Law until they reach Mt. Sinai in the wilderness ahead, but the Lord gives them the pattern of the sabbath here before He gives them the Law.

The sabbath did not originate with the giving of the Law on Sinai, but from the pattern of the Lord's own actions at the beginning of world history. "By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Genesis 2:2-3). The same principles that we find in this Genesis passage are involved in the sabbath that Israel was to follow in connection to the manna. The seventh, or final day of each week, they were to rest from gathering any manna. Instead, the Lord would provide a double portion of manna on the sixth day so that on the seventh day they would be able to eat without gathering. There were two miraculous elements in this sixth day / seventh day manna pattern. First, the Lord provided twice as much of the bread from heaven every sixth day for forty years. Second, the Lord suspended the normal rotting process that occurred overnight for any manna that the people attempted to hoard.

Like the manna, the sabbath pattern was also a gracious provision from the Lord and also a spiritual test. The provision was that He gave them one day each week to do no work and just rest. This was not their normal pattern in Egypt. As slaves in Egypt there was no such thing as weekends, or days off from their labor. All the slaves worked seven days a week all year long with no rest days to recharge. The Lord knows our capacity and provided in this pattern of one day of rest after each six days of work a wise and necessary way to renew physical and spiritual strength. Anyone, even today, who ignores this pattern of the Lord and works seven days a week does so to their own detriment.

The sabbath was also an ongoing weekly test. Would Israel simply listen and obey when the Lord said to not gather manna on the seventh day. By this point, we are not surprised to see many of the people ignoring this new boundary and going out on the seventh day searching for manna that was not there. The Lord responded to those who failed this test with more than minor irritation. "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?" The tone of the Lord's response is one in which He is warning them that such rebellious disregard of His commands will be met with serious consequences. We know that the Bible is filled with the commands of the Lord that form for us firm

boundaries around our actions. When the Lord says "no" we would be wise to listen and obey.

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## Exodus 17

***17:1-4 - "Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."***

The Lord now leads Israel further south in the Sinai desert until they arrive at their next planned camping spot at Rephidim. This was, like all of their camping spots throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Lord's plan for the best spot to stop, not theirs. Even though the Lord chose this spot for them by the pillar of cloud and fire stopping at Rephidim, the people quickly become irritated over the Lord's choice for them. There was apparently nothing wrong with this location as a resting place, other than the glaring lack of any water here. The lack of any water once again becomes the natural reason which leads to an exposure of a deepening issue in the hearts of the people. The people approach Moses as their leader and "quarreled" with him. This does not imply that there was a back and forth argument between Moses and the people, but it does describe the attitude of the people who complained to Moses. The word translated quarreled refers to a complaint made with serious hostility. It describes the flavor of their complaint. Now, we should already be familiar with the tendency of the people to complain. This is now the fourth time the people have lodged a formal complaint against the leadership of Moses (and the Lord) in their relatively short time since being freed from their slavery. The pattern of their complaining spirit is growing all too familiar. Each of these complaints was unfounded and should have been an occasion for them to trust the Lord rather than grumble about Him or His messenger, Moses.

What we see in this particular complaint is that it is progressively worse than the previous ones. Before, they complained and grumbled, but now they quarrel with Moses showing open hostility toward him. The people are exposing the depths of their own rebellion in this because in order to complain again they have had to ignore the warnings of both Moses and the Lord. The dangerous pattern here is that sin, left unchecked by necessary repentance, will always grow worse and more serious over time. Moses correctly identifies what they are doing and

rebukes them. "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" The people have crossed a second serious line of sin here. The first line was in their previous complaints when they should have trusted the Lord. Now, they presumptuously dare to put the Lord to the test. What this means is that their complaint is essentially saying to the Lord, "We will see what kind of Lord you are by how you respond to our complaint for water. If you give us what we want when we want it, then we will accept you as Lord. If you don't, then you are not the kind of Lord we want." This is the spirit of rebellion on full display in their attitudes. To be the Lord, by definition, means that He is in charge, and in His wisdom, He determines when, where, and how to provide for us. For us to challenge Him in His decisions for our lives, and, even worse, to question His right to be in charge of us by how He responds to our demands is the worst kind of arrogant rebellion. The people then add to their complaint the same invented insinuation that they used back at the Red Sea when they accused Moses and the Lord of bringing them out to the wilderness only to cause them to suffer a more painful death here.

Moses does not answer the people further and in this decision he shows growing wisdom. In their current perspective and heart attitude, there is really nothing he could say to them to change their disposition. The Lord is going to have to change them. In turning right away to the Lord, rather than try in vain to reason with unreasonable people, Moses saves himself unnecessary further headaches, and limits the explosive potential of the confrontation. What is interesting about the prayer of Moses that follows is just how short, direct and honest it is. Moses does not launch into a long winded prayer filled with what he is "supposed to say" in such situations. "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." His prayer takes about five seconds to pray. In certain communications with the Lord, less is more. He does not best around the burning bush, but gets right to his concern. His prayer actually consists of his own complaint to the Lord. There is a key difference between the complaint of the people and the complaint of Moses though. The people are complaining about the will of God and what God has chosen for them both as a camping spot, and the leader that brought them there. Moses is complaining about the sin of the people and asking the Lord for help in dealing with them. Their complaint is a growing sin, while his complaint is aimed at limiting their sin.

***17:5-6 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."***

The Lord answers the cry of Moses with a surprising plan. He instructs Moses to take the staff which he used to strike the Nile, take some of the elders of Israel as witnesses, and then to go ahead of the people to a chosen location at nearby

Horeb. Horeb is the same location where the Lord had originally appeared to him in the burning bush, and it was the place where the Lord would soon give Moses the Law on Mt. Sinai. Once Moses and the elders arrived at Horeb, the Lord described that He would stand on the rock there. Moses was then to take the staff and strike the rock with it. When the rock is struck, the Lord would cause a stream of water to flow from the rock sufficient to meet the need for all the people. There is much more going on here than the Lord simply providing a drink for Israel. As with the previous miracles in the wilderness, the Lord is meeting their natural need in a way that will teach a critical spiritual principle for all future generations. The way the Lord provided for their water is another of the great types of the Old Testament pointing to Christ and His work of salvation.

Paul refers to this event in this passage; "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ." (I Corinthians 10:4). Paul identifies this rock at Horeb as a spiritual rock. That should help us to see beneath the surface of this event. He also further identifies this rock with Christ. He does not mean that Christ literally became this rock, but that when the Lord stood on this rock it became identified with Him spiritually. When Paul says that this rock followed them through the wilderness he implies that wherever they traveled through the wilderness from this point forward, this rock was at the camp site God selected to provide an ongoing supply of water for the entire nation.

The specific way that they received the water from the rock was the key to this symbol of our salvation. Moses was ordered to strike the rock which represented Christ. The striking of the rock is an image of the crucifixion of Christ. This entire event is a symbolic preview of the cross. The people have a great need for water that is naturally impossible to meet. The people sin in their hearts and complain with hostility toward the Lord. Instead of punishing the people as they deserved, the Lord strikes His own Son, and in that strike, He releases life giving water in abundance for them. The water flowing from the rock points to the outpoured Holy Spirit bringing new life in salvation to the people.

The detail of how the rock was to be struck is also important. Moses was to strike the rock with the staff of God. This staff represented the authority of God. This was the staff of God's judgment. God mentions that it was the same staff with which Moses struck the Nile to make the connection with that judgment upon Egypt. The point is that the cross of Christ is not the doing of human beings. Yes, Jesus was nailed to the cross by human hands, but it was God's plan and will that He was crucified. The cross was not about the human judgment of Rome or Jerusalem against Christ, but the judgment of God upon Christ as he took our place to suffer our judgment for us. "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." (Isaiah 53:4).

**17:8-13 - "Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."**

After the incident with the people's complaint about water and the awesome answer of the Lord in the miracle of water from the rock, we might expect that the Lord would give His people a break to think it over. The Lord often works according to a different agenda than we would choose for ourselves. An unexpected enemy arrives on the scene as soon as their thirst is satisfied. As we will see in the battle that ensues, this battle has a distinctly spiritual element. It is what we would call spiritual warfare. The lesson here should be obvious for all believers. If the water from the rock is an image of salvation, then what is the relationship of the immediate battle that follows? The point is that our spiritual warfare starts at the moment of our salvation. Before we were saved, the enemy of our souls has no reason to fight against us since we are no spiritual threat to him. As soon as we are saved we become a threat to the kingdom of darkness because our lives are now a testimony to the saving power of God. I have counseled many new believers who were surprised at the unexpected disruptions in their life as soon as they were saved. New believers should not be discouraged by the sudden impact of spiritual warfare after salvation, but encouraged by it as an indication of the salvation of the Lord.

The enemy Israel faces is Amalek. This was a tribe of people descended from Jacob's brother Esau. They are distant blood relatives to Israel, but they are not coming to greet Israel to the wilderness. This passage from Deuteronomy gives us more detail on this attack. "Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget." (Deut 25:17-19).

The response of Israel to this attack has a natural and spiritual aspect. Moses appoints Joshua to lead the battle against Amalek. This is the introduction of Joshua. He is a younger man that served as the personal assistant to Moses, and will later be chosen by the Lord to lead Israel into the Promised Land. It is interesting that the Lord handles this battle with Amalek in an entirely different



way than the battle against Pharaoh's chariots at the Red Sea. Then, the Lord had Israel just stand and watch as He did all the fighting. Now, the Lord wants Israel to fight in their own defense. In doing so, the Lord is now beginning to train Israel for the later conquest and occupation of the Promised Land. Even though Israel is to fight for themselves in this battle, that does not mean that they are fighting on their own. Their battle is going to depend on more than the strength of their arm, sword and shield. The outcome of the battle will still depend on the Lord. The scene with Moses on the hill lifting the staff of God is a powerful image to show them to not lean upon themselves in their battles, but in the Lord and to lean on Him from moment to moment in the battle.

There is also a great benefit for Moses in this situation. In order for Israel to prevail, the staff of God had to remain lifted by his hands. Yet, the strength of Moses was limited and left alone, the staff would fall and Israel along with it. Moses must have been recently discouraged from being the target of the complaints of the people. In granting Israel victory this way, the Lord was speaking to Israel and to Moses. The message to Israel was that Moses was the leader chosen by God to lead His people and only if the authority of God through Moses was supported would there be victory. For Moses, there was the encouragement of experiencing two men coming along side to support him and strengthen him to fulfill His role so that the victory of the Lord could be won.

#### **Questions from Exodus 16:**

**Question:** 16:34 - What did the "Testimony" consist of at this time?

**Answer:** Great question. I'll elaborate for those that may not have noticed this in yesterday's reading. You are asking about an important detail from this passage. "Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations. As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept." (Exodus 16:33-34). At first glance this passage is a bit confusing. The Lord commanded Moses to instruct Aaron to take a jar of the manna and place it before the Lord to preserve it for future generations. This manna was not for anyone to eat, but as a continuing reminder of the provision of the Lord for Israel throughout their forty years in the wilderness. The passage describes that Aaron obeyed and placed the manna before the Testimony. Your question is what was the Testimony at that time. The answer is that there was no Testimony at that time. That is the confusing part. There is an explanation however.

The Testimony was a term that referred to the ark of the covenant constructed for the tabernacle. The concept of it functioning as a testimony came when the Lord instructed Moses to have three items placed inside the box of the ark. The three items were the jar of manna, the rod of Aaron that budded, and the stone tablets of the Law. The ark is not introduced until chapter 25 of Exodus and it is there described as the Testimony. "You shall put into the ark the testimony which I

shall give you." (Exodus 25:16). "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel." (Exodus 25:22). The explanation of the passage in Exodus 16:34 is that Moses is writing this account, not as it happens, but years later near the end of the journey through the wilderness. He knows about the ark of the testimony as he is writing. He includes the description of the jar of manna placed into the ark of testimony as part of the story of when the manna first fell to emphasize for the reader the spiritual significance of the event. In the chapter 16 description Moses does not write that Aaron placed it in the testimony right then. We tend to assume that because we think chronologically. The point Moses is making is that later, when the ark was constructed, Aaron then placed the jar of manna in it by the direction of the Lord.

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## Exodus 18

***18:1-6 - "Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away, and her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." The other was named Eliezer, for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God. He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."***

While Israel is still camped at Rephidim, near Horub, Moses receives an unexpected, but welcome visitor. His father-in-law, Jethro, whom he has not seen since his return to Egypt arrives at the camp. Word had traveled to Jethro in Midian about how Moses had led Israel out of Egypt by the power of the Lord. Jethro had come to honor Moses for what had been accomplished, to renew their personal relationship, and to bring the family of Moses to him for a reunion. The last time the wife and sons of Moses are mentioned was at the lodging place where they stopped as Moses was returning from Midian to Egypt (Exodus 4:24-26). No detail is given there of what happens from that point to his family, but they are not mentioned once Moses arrives back in Egypt until now. With this passage we can conclude that from the lodging place Moses sent Zipporah and his sons Gershom and Eliezer back to her father Jethro. There are two possibilities for why he sent them back. Either there was serious strife between Moses and Zipporah over the circumcision issue and he did not want to be distracted in his mission, or he sent them back for their own safety due to the danger of his mission.

Jethro was able to find Moses here, because a camp of over a million people would be well known to everyone in the region by now. Moses may have also arranged to meet Jethro here for a restoration with his family when he returned from Egypt. The Lord had given this location to Moses as a sign and promised that he would return here. "And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." (Exodus 3:12). The names of Moses' two sons are rehearsed in the text with a reminder of the meaning of their names because Moses now sees the hand of the Lord in why he gave them these names at their birth. The sons were born before his journey to Egypt, but Moses now interprets their names as prophetic encouragement from the Lord regarding what He had done in his life. Gershom, which means "stranger there" highlights that while born in Egypt, Moses did not belong there. His home was not behind him in Egypt, but ahead of him in the path the Lord had appointed for him. Eliezer, which means "God is my help" is a reminder of how the Lord had helped him and Israel in such an awesome deliverance from the power of Pharaoh.

These names serve as twin principles to focus our attention where it belongs in the purpose of God which we share with Moses. Our sense of personal identity should not be based on who we were, or where we came from, or what kind of life we had before our salvation. We are now truly strangers to our old life. That was a life we just passed through and we were never meant to stay there. Our life is all about what the Lord has done for us by His amazing grace in the cross of Christ. Our life is about where He is taking us.

***18:7-12 - "Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how the LORD had delivered them. Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people." Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God."***

When Jethro arrives in camp, Moses shows him the honor of a visiting man of importance. He gives Jethro the greeting of a welcomed and honored guest including both a ceremonial bow of honor and a kiss on the cheek of friendship. Asking each other of the other's welfare since they last met gives Moses the opportunity to share with Jethro the news of all that has transpired in Egypt and

in their journey through the wilderness. Jethro has already heard the basic word of mouth report of these events, but Moses now gives him the full account of the ten great judgments of the Lord on Egypt, Pharaoh's hardness of heart, the plundering of Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, the destruction of Pharaoh's chariots, the celebration of Israel that followed, the tests of no drinking water at Marah, Massah and Meribah, the provision of manna from heaven, and the battle with Amalek. This series of testimonies of the Lord's reality, presence and power serve as an overwhelming proof to the heart of anyone with ears to hear and eyes to see.

Moses sharing these testimonies of the Lord is an early example of what we now call evangelism. Biblical evangelism is not an expression of argumentation, manipulation or marketing. True evangelism consists in the simplicity of passing on to others what the Lord has done. For Jethro, his heart is so impacted by the account that he immediately rejoiced because of the evident goodness of the Lord toward Israel. Jethro blesses the name of Yahweh as an acknowledgment that he believes the testimony of Moses. His response shows that he perceives for the first time that Yahweh is the supreme God. Remember, Jethro was previously identified as the priest of Midian. We do not know which specific god or gods the Midianites honored, but this is the moment of Jethro's conversion to a true believer in the One true God, Yahweh. "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people."

Jethro's declaration indicates he now has a genuine faith in the Lord. It is possible that he still believes in the existence of other gods at this point, but that Yahweh is clearly superior to them all. That possibility does not diminish the validity of Jethro's faith. The genuine nature of a new believer's faith should not be evaluated based upon how fully developed it is in all details of theology. What matters at this point is whether the Lord has caused Jethro to believe in Him as the supreme God over all. There were many details of my theology that were in error when I was first saved. I remember shortly after my salvation struggling when another believer spoke to me about the blood of Christ. I did not understand the significance of the blood for my salvation, because I had not yet been taught the doctrine of Christ's substitutionary death upon the cross. Because I was truly saved, once I was taught, my heart embraced the truth of God's Word regarding the blood. It is the grace of God and our genuine faith that carry us forward into a greater and more accurate understanding of the truth as we grow.

The actions of Jethro following his declaration of faith in the Lord are also significant. He worships the Lord by offering a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. He then shares a meal of fellowship with the other leaders of Israel. The pattern here still applies today. When a person accepts the message of the gospel of salvation we should expect their heart to be moved to express the change that always accompanies a true conversion. Jethro first shows by his

sacrifices that he has his own spiritual relationship with the Lord now, and his meal with the elders shows that he now identifies in true fellowship with the covenant people of God.

***18:13-20 - "It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do."***

The next day, Moses returns to his normal daily routine and Jethro is with him to observe. Jethro is troubled by what he sees Moses doing, not because it is a bad thing, but because it is an unnecessary burden for Moses and all the people. Moses was accustomed on the days they were not traveling to sit as a judge to handle the problems and issues that arose within the camp. Remember that there were 600,000 men, plus women and children at this time. These are the people of God, living under the blessing of God, but that did not mean that they were trouble free. We have already seen that God has led them into challenging circumstances to expose their corporate flaws for the sake of their spiritual growth, and those are just the flaws they all shared. On an individual basis, how many issues, problems and disputes do you think might arise among between one and two million people all out camping together in the wilderness? Moses was at this time the sole judge for those issues. A line would typically form for Moses to hear and judge each case in turn. He would begin early in the morning each day and at night when he finished for the day, the line still remained.

Jethro concern was that this system was sure to eventually wear out both Moses and the people that had to wait to be heard. I remember when I was handling pastoral counseling for a congregation of 500. There were some days where I had one appointment after another for the entire day. At the end of the day I would return home drained from sharing the life crisis of just seven or eight individuals, couples or families. I'm sure there were more than seven or eight cases for Moses to judge on a daily basis, but no matter how many he was able to judge, the extent of the need was far greater than his capacity to meet it. There is a super important lesson here for spiritual leadership. We are called and graced by the Lord to represent Him and minister to His people on His behalf, but

no one of us is able to fully accomplish the work of God on our own. We are designed with a limited capacity to represent Him and serve His people. Ultimately, only Christ can meet all the needs represented in the church of God.

Jethro then begins to give Moses counsel in how to modify his ministry approach. We can interpret Jethro's advice as well intentioned but worldly counsel and dismiss it. Or, we can see his counsel as stimulated by the Lord and wise perspective the Lord intended to use to shape the ministry of Moses and all future leaders. I believe this second perspective is how the Lord intends us to interpret this. The Lord has many times spoken directly to Moses, but now He chooses to speak indirectly to him through a wise and trusted counselor. The message is clear, and identifies a Biblical principle of leadership that no leader ignores if he is wise. The principle is that God's leadership pattern is a shared leadership. No one man that God appoints to lead is meant to lead by themselves. The burden of leadership and ministry is to be shared with other men. Shared leadership is beneficial for the primary leader and for the people that he leads. The primary leader is spared the danger of overload and inevitable "burnout", and the people are blessed to receive more timely personal attention.

***18:21-23 - "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."***

The type of men with whom Moses is to share the leadership is the focus of this passage. They are identified here by a short but spiritually descriptive standard. They must be "...able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain." These descriptions are meant to be understood as qualifications. It is necessary to emphasize that the Lord is the One who establishes the standards of qualification for who may lead His people because they are His people. The principle continues throughout the Old Testament and on into the New Testament church (I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9) and even until today. A person must be spiritually qualified to lead God's people. Only the details of the qualifications have changed, but the essential character of qualified leaders is consistent from that day until today.

Keep in mind that the way a spiritual qualification works is that all qualifications must be part of the leader's character. If a person is mostly qualified, or even 90% qualified, that translates to not yet qualified to lead. These are not a menu from which we can choose which characteristics matter most to us. Each quality is critical for effective leadership. On the other hand, no one is perfect in any of

these qualities. What is necessary is that the leader's life is characterized by these qualities.

There are five specific qualifications that we can identify from the list. They are: 1) The leader must be a man 2) The leader must have the capacity to lead 3) The leader must be in right relationship with the Lord 4) The leader must be committed to the truth revealed in God's Word 5) The leader must be a man of personal integrity. The quality of our churches would be significantly improved if these five standards were spiritually applied to all that were considered for church leadership.

### **Questions from Exodus 17:**

**Question:** 17:10 - Is Hur Caleb's son? Is there significance to why he is the one helping Moses here?

**Answer:** The Hur mentioned in Exodus 17 helping to hold up the arms of Moses is possibly the son of Caleb (1 Chronicles 2:18-20), but we can't say for sure. Hur was a fairly common name. Another possibility is found in the writings of Josephus, the first century Jewish historian. He identified this Hur as the husband of Miriam, the sister of Moses. No reason is given explaining why Hur is one of the two holding up the arms of Moses, so we are left to draw a conclusion from the little material we have. It is easy to understand why Aaron was one of the two as the brother of Moses and the one appointed by God to help Moses in his ministry. Hur was one of the leaders of Israel that Moses trusted along with Aaron and Joshua. In Exodus 24:14, when Moses goes up to the mountain of God he leaves both Aaron and Hur in charge of the camp. It seems that Aaron and Hur are the second and third leaders after Moses, with Joshua as the future leader in training.

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### **Exodus 19**

***19:3-5 - "Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;'"***

Every chapter of the Bible is significant because they are all the inspired Word of God. Some chapters, because of their special content, stand out even among the other chapters of God's Word. This chapter is one of those special chapters. It is the prelude to the revelation to follow in which for the remainder of the book of Exodus, the Lord is going to give to Moses the Law and the plans for the

tabernacle. In this introduction to the revelation of the Law, the Lord makes declarations to Moses that introduce new concepts that describe His great purpose for His people in a way that carries directly into the New Covenant and speaks just as powerfully to His purpose for us today.

Israel has arrived at Mt. Sinai, which is also known as the mountain of God. The pillar of cloud and fire now rests upon the mountain under which Israel is camped. The Lord calls Moses to join Him on the mountain. The message of the Lord that Moses is to deliver to Israel rehearses where they have been (Egypt), how God permanently changed all of their lives (the ten plague judgments upon Egypt), how He had sustained them in their journey here (borne on eagles wings), and what the goal of their journey was (to be brought to Yahweh in this place). Before the Lord gives them His Law, He wants to be sure they hear again that everything that has transpired so far has been His doing and not theirs. The Exodus is the story of God's great purpose for His people being accomplished by His power and grace for His own glory. It is a necessary spiritual foundation for the Law that the people understand the great purpose of God for their lives. Without understanding His purpose, the Law will become in their perspective nothing greater than a long arbitrary and oppressive list of do's and don'ts. What we should understand, even if they did not, is that the Law is a necessary aspect of His purpose. When God calls His people to obey any specific requirement of His Law, there is always a greater purpose behind that call.

The Lord chose to describe their journey from Egypt to this mountain using a poetic image of His relationship to them. Yahweh bore the entire nation of Israel on eagles wings. In the image, Yahweh is pictured as a giant eagle capable of carrying the whole nation. In this image there are two possible positions that Israel occupies in relationship to the eagle. Either Israel is in the eagle's claws or Israel is riding on the eagle's back as it flies. If Israel is held in the claws of the eagle, then the image is that of the Lord as a predator and Israel as His prey. I don't believe this is the picture the Lord intends here. In the other way of seeing this image, the Lord is like the mother eagle that flies underneath its baby eagle as it makes its first flight from the nest. Whenever the baby eagle would begin to fall in its first flight the mother eagle would soar upwards underneath and carry the eagle chick to safety. The image is one that conveys the care and commitment of a parent to its offspring. Yes, Israel left Egypt, and traveled here to Sinai, but each step along the way it was the Lord's presence, power and provision that sustained them and brought them here.

The Lord also uses a new term here for the first time in the Bible. The term is "My own possession." The phrase translates a single Hebrew word, segullah. It refers to the specially treasured personal possession of a king. The Lord uses it to describe His own heart perspective toward Israel. To catch the full meaning it must be understood in the context of what the Lord says next about the earth. He declares that all the earth belongs to Him. Since He created all things, He also owns all things. Yet among all that He owns, He considers one thing to be his



special treasure. That one special treasure is His people. The theology term that corresponds to this concept is election. God has a certain relationship to all of His own creation and every person and nation. Election teaches us that God chooses to form a special covenant relationship with some, but not all. We show this same inclination when we choose among all the people alive to focus special attention on one person and to enter into a committed lifelong relationship in the covenant of marriage. That person we marry becomes our segullah, our special treasure. The Lord refers to Israel in this way throughout the Old Testament. "For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession." (Psalm 135:4). In the New Testament, the Lord uses this exact same name to identify His special love for the church. "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" (I Peter 2:9). "...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." (Titus 2:14).

***19:6 - "and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'  
These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."***

There are three connected descriptive terms the Lord uses in this passage to identify how He sees Israel (and by extension now, the church). The Lord wants us, as His people, to identify ourselves in the same way. We are His own possession (special treasure), we are a kingdom of priests, and we are a holy nation. The great purpose of God is that His people would be identified with Him and live in this world reflecting His likeness. When the Lord called Israel a kingdom of priests it was a life shaping designation. The role of priest was not unknown in the ancient world all cultures had certain individuals like Jethro, the priest of Midian, that were set apart from normal occupations in order to serve their god or gods. What was revolutionary about this message is that the Lord was not describing His plan for a few among Israel to be set apart for priestly service, but that the entire nation would serve Him as priests. Such a thing had never been conceived before in history, that an entire nation would all be priests. This does not mean that every person would stop doing normal occupations, but that every man, woman and child in Israel was meant to see that their lives belonged to the Lord in a special way and that they were to live every day with that as their dominant perspective.

We will see in the chapters ahead, that this declaration from the Lord represents to us the plan of the Lord to one day fulfill among His people, not a real expectation to happen immediately. Soon, because of the rebellion of Israel before they even move away from this mountain, we will see the Lord naming one tribe of the original twelve as a tribe of priests. That failure of Israel to live up to this awesome purpose of God for His people does not, however, mean that God has abandoned this plan as one that cannot be fulfilled. In the New Covenant, because of the power of the cross of Christ to transform our hearts,

and the presence of the Holy Spirit filling His people, the Lord's purpose to have all His people set apart to serve Him as a kingdom of priests is now being fulfilled. The following passages apply this same designation to the church. "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;" (I Peter 2:9). "...and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 1:6).

Sadly, even today, among the believers of the New Covenant, there is much confusion regarding priests. Because of the long history of the Roman Catholic Church, and its unbiblical priesthood pattern, many true believers are shocked when they first hear that God identifies all Christians as priests. The Catholic Church historically has confused the priesthood with church leadership roles. This is not taught anywhere in the New Testament. The true priesthood in the church is to be set apart by God through salvation to a life of holy service. To be a priest in the New Covenant means that your life belongs exclusively to God because of Jesus Christ. There are no special physical garments to wear identifying a certain few as priests. All of us who have been cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ as spiritually clothed in robes of righteousness.

The third special designation for God's people in this passage is that they are called by God a "holy nation". This was not as strange to the ear as the kingdom of priests concept would be, but the implications are just as great for Israel first, and now the church. The first implication is that from this point forward Israel was no longer an extended tribal family, but a nation. This is the official point at which Israel first becomes a nation. There were many nations in the world at that time, but until the Lord formed Israel into a nation, none of them are identified as holy. Israel was called to be the first and only holy nation. The great implication is that Israel is to be different from the other nations of the world. The first and great difference is that every other nation was devoted to their own gods, living by their own moral and ethical standards, and pursuing their own purposes as a nation. Israel was to stand alone among the nations devoted only and exclusively to Yahweh, committed to living only by His moral and ethical standards, and pursuing only His purpose for them as a nation. God selected Israel to be a shining example to all other nations of what a nation should be like. Now, in the New Covenant, what is the holy nation of God in this world? God's holy nation today is the true church of all the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. The holy nation of God is now a spiritual nation without geographic boundaries. God has seeded all the natural nations of the world with some of His holy nation to influence each nation from within. As believers, our first identification should be as Christians, even before we identify ourselves as American, or any other national identity. We are called to live as His examples of His holy nation. "But you (the church) are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION..." (I Peter 2:9).

**19:10-19 - "The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder."**

This passage tells of the final preparations the Lord makes among His people before the giving of the Law, which begins in the next chapter. The Lord instructs Moses to have the people "consecrate" themselves. It meant to cease any activity that would have a spiritually defiling effect on them, and to prepare to meet the Lord Himself. The Lord announced that He was going to come down upon Sinai in the sight of everyone. He did not mean that everyone would see His unveiled glory, because no one could survive seeing the Lord's full glory. He meant that in the cloud, the Lord was going to manifest His presence in a powerful way upon the mountain. Even veiled in the cloud, Israel would not survive the experience unless they were spiritually prepared by three days of consecration. The Lord also had boundaries erected around the mountain so that none of the people or even their animals would wander too close to the Lord and die in that transgression.

In today's religious culture, we are not accustomed to being concerned about people dying if they get too close to the Lord. The loss of that perspective is really a loss for our culture. What the Lord was teaching Israel here is a basic lesson about His holiness, and the only appropriate human response when in the presence of the holiness of Yahweh, the fear of God. Today, people tend to presume upon the kindness and tenderness of God and trample on His holiness. This was not an issue for Israel on the day the Lord descended upon Sinai. When He did, there was great thundering, lightning flashes, a thick cloud upon the mountain, a progressively louder trumpet sounding, and then the Lord descended in fire! As He did, the entire mountain quaked violently, and all the people trembled as they looked toward the mountain. None of this is God

showing off in an unnecessary display. The entire point was to establish the hearts of Israel in the holy fear of God. He is exactly this awesome and holy today.

### **Questions from Exodus 18:**

**Question:** 18:5-6 - Is this example of Moses going on God's mission without his family here for us to see God's desire for the husband as spiritual leader of the home to be the one to pursue any outside ministry of the family while the wife/mother is caring for the home and family matters (though Zipporah was with her father)? Or is it possible that Moses fell short as a father by doing this?

**Answer:** No, I don't believe that we are meant to take the story as firm pattern against going on a mission with one's family. We see examples earlier with Abraham and Jacob where they took their entire households with them as God directed them. You can make a case for the man called to a dangerous mission exercising wisdom in leaving his family in a safe situation while he completes the dangerous mission. In this case, the more dangerous portion would be what had already taken place in Egypt. Certainly, Moses was reunited with his family at this point and they remained with him for the rest of his mission through the wilderness journey. Moses did fall short as a father by not circumcising his son earlier, but there is no hint in this passage that he was a bad father for having sent his family back to Jethro while he went to Egypt.

**Question:** 18:12 - The sacrificial system had not yet been established. Was there an informal pattern of eating a meal before the Lord at this time? Any thoughts on what that looked like and how it got started (perhaps Noah in Gen 8:20-21?)

**Answer:** I believe that this is the first example in Scripture of a group of people eating a meal "before God". We have no details of what was different about the meal. I doubt there was any physical difference of food or practical arrangements. I think the emphasis we are to catch is that Moses, Aaron, Jethro and the elders ate the meal unto the Lord with a shared awareness that the relationship established between them was of the Lord. It was common in the culture then for visiting chiefs and dignitaries to be honored by a celebratory meal. What this meal did was direct the honor shown in the meal beyond Jethro to the Lord Who brought them together.

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## Exodus 20

***20:1-2 - "Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."***

This chapter gives us the first declaration of the Ten Commandments and the beginning of the many laws that God gave to Moses for Israel. The remainder of the laws are given throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The first thing we should notice is how these ten laws in this chapter were communicated to Israel. There are a grand total of 613 individual laws given by God throughout these four books. 603 of those laws were communicated by God to Moses, who then was to pass them on to Israel. These first ten, however are meant to be understood as special among all the laws because they were spoken by God to all of the people, and not just to Moses alone. The people were at the foot of Mt. Sinai in this scene and the presence of the Lord was within the cloud on top of the mountain. The Lord spoke with a loud enough voice to be heard by every man, woman and child of Israel and to cause them to tremble in fear at the sound of His voice. There is a reason the Lord chose to speak these ten to all, and not just to Moses. It was critical for the people to understand that these laws were aimed directly at each of their hearts. The Lord was making each Israelite personally accountable to His standards for them.

The second thing worth noting is how these laws are described in the text. They are not called the Ten Commandments. They are not even called laws here. Both of those terms are used elsewhere in God's Word as descriptions of His standards, but the term used here is a more simple "words". These are more accurately called the Ten Words. The difference in emphasis is subtle but necessary. These ten things function as laws because God uses them to hold His people accountable, but they are more than mere laws. They are also principles. God is not just correcting bad behavior here, He is also teaching right behavior in contrast. They are useful to teach us, convict us, correct us and train us in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16). The primary Hebrew word that is used to identify what we call the Law is Torah. The word Torah literally means teaching or instruction. As we consider the Ten Commandments, we should be thinking, not just what God wants us not to do, but also what God by contrast is training us to be like as His image bearers.

There is traditional disagreement on how the ten words were meant to be organized. What is clear from Scripture is that the Lord later wrote these same ten words upon two tablets of stone for Moses to carry down the mountain. The two tablets each have a more specific focus with the first tablet's concerns being our responsibilities toward the Lord, while the second tablet is focused on our responsibilities toward our neighbors. The disagreement is on how many words or laws were included on each tablet. The two primary alternatives are 5/5 and 4/6. The advocates of the 4/6 arrangement see the fifth commandment regarding

honoring parents as a neighbor command and so group it with the second tablet commands. I believe that the tablets were arranged symmetrically with five commands on each. The fifth command to honor parents fits with our responsibilities toward God because of the unique role parents play in a child's life in being the first representatives of the Lord to that child.

Jesus used two other individual laws later in the Law of God to summarize and identify with clarity the overall purpose of each tablet. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40). Even though most of the ten are phrased as negative prohibitions using "You shall not..." language, each of the ten has its own role in training our hearts in what God desires to see in us and receive from us. The two tablets of five laws are summarized by the two principles; love God and love your neighbor. Jesus taught that the entire Law of God is communicating these priority concerns. A helpful way of understanding the Law is that God calls us to love Him and love our neighbor. The Ten Words are ten examples in ten specific categories of how and in what ways we are to our God and our neighbor. The Ten Words serve as an outline of all of the 613 individual laws. God was gracious to give such an outline summary knowing the impossibility of us remembering 613 details at the same time, but the realistic expectation that we would be able to remember ten reminders of the substance of His standards.

***20:3-6 - "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."***

The first concern of God's Law is about Himself and our proper relationship to Him. The spiritual goal of these first two of the Ten Words is to train our hearts in how to love God. Yet, like most they are phrased emphasizing what we must not do. The reason for the negative wording is that the people that received the Law were listening that day with good intentions, but their basic spiritual condition is as fallen humans. Sin has already infected them, so the natural tendency is toward sin and disobedience in every category of life. The negative phrasing immediately limits the development of those sinful tendencies while also providing by contrast a template for understanding what God desires for us instead.

Law number one was to have no other gods before the Lord. This does not mean that the Lord is proclaiming the actual existence of other gods, but that He is prohibiting Israel from following the pattern of all the nations around them in worshipping gods of their own invention. The phrase, "before Me" is a Hebrew figure of speech which indicates that the Lord forbids the acknowledgment or honoring of any other so-called god other than Himself. Understood positively, it is a declaration from the Lord that He is the only God that exists and as God, all worship properly belongs to Him alone. The temptation for Israel throughout their generations was to follow the example of the nations around them in their practice of worship. We are rarely tempted today to worship Ra, Osiris, Isis, Zeus, and the other gods of the nations. That does not mean that the first command is an easy requirement for us to fulfill today however. The core of the issue with this command is what we worship in our lives by assigning greatest value to certain things. God calls us to honor and value Him above all else.

For the ancient peoples false worship of false gods invariably was expressed in making idols to represent their gods. Two comments are necessary regarding an appropriate application of this standard today. First, this prohibition against making things in the likeness of things in heaven, earth, or in the water has been mistakenly used to prohibit many forms of art such as statues or paintings. Taken to an extreme some believe that painting, sculpture or photograph that depicts a bird, animal, fish, human or angel is a violation of this law. They are completely missing the concern here. God is not forbidding works of art that stimulate us to honor Him more. What He forbids in the second commandment is the creation of anything that then becomes itself an object of our worship.

The danger for us today is directing our heart's devotion to created things rather than to the Lord, even if the things created are much more technologically advanced than they were in ancient times. It is possible for people to so devote themselves to things that the thing becomes like a god to them. Indicators of this modern expression of idolatry are what we spend most of our time and money on. It is possible for a person to show that kind of spiritually dangerous devotion to a car, television, computer, hobby, etc., in which they rearrange budgets and schedules to give first place, not to the Lord but to some thing they actually love above all else.

***20:13-15 - "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal."***

These are commands six, seven and eight and are the first commands on the second tablet of the Law. All three are in the negative form of communication, but all three have the same positive purpose of teaching us how to love our neighbor. None of these laws of the second tablet are as simple as they seem at first glance, and each is aimed at a range of thoughts, words and actions (Matthew 5:21-30). Israel became infamous over the generations for avoiding the letter of the law, but minimizing the spiritual implications conveyed by each of these laws.

The sixth word is a prohibition against murder. The old King James translation of this command produced a common misunderstanding that still raises debates in our society today. In that translation, it read, "Thou shalt not kill." Man have wrongly seen this as a complete prohibition from God for any human being to ever take the life of another human being under any circumstances. That is not the intent of this law. There is a critical difference in prohibiting killing and murder. Murder always includes killing, but killing does not always include murder. Killing refers to the act of ending another person's life. Murder adds a moral element of evil to the act of ending another person's life. It is always wrong and prohibited by God to end another human being's life with evil intent or reasons. God defines evil elsewhere and teaches us how to recognize it. On the other hand, the Bible sanctions killing under certain circumstances. Those circumstances are righteous war, governmental execution and self defense (when your own life is in danger). Jesus broadens our understanding of the influence of murder to include murderous thoughts and words as well as actions.

The seventh command has fallen into serious disrepair in our culture today. When a television show such as *Desperate Housewives* (which is based upon a single premise, that adultery is a pleasure that should not be denied) is one of the highest rated shows it should be obvious that the culture has drifted far from God's standards as revealed in the Ten Words. Glorifying portrayals of adultery as viewing pleasure is the perspective at which this law was aimed. The prevalence of the sin of adultery is greater today than perhaps any time before now. One of the most effective things we can do as believers is to use God's own terminology to describe it and to identify it as a sin as He does. The culture substitutes terms like, "an affair" to evacuate it of any spiritual concerns and to remove God from the picture. People remain uncomfortable with bold declarations that any sexual relationship for those who are married outside of their marriage is a sin of adultery. Other kinds of sexual violations of God's standards are addressed later in the Law, and this command in that sense summarizes God's standards in those areas. The bottom-line of this law is that God defines what is right and wrong about sexual relations, not us. When individuals or entire societies substitute their own desires and preferences for God's law standards regarding sex, the deterioration is rapid and substantial. What feels right to each person then becomes the new standard, and the only sin is by the person that dares to say that what they are doing against God's revealed Word is wrong. Tolerance of all sexual practices becomes the shared value of the society and holiness and obedience to God's standard become the strange or abnormal thing.

The eighth command prohibits theft. How much stealing does it prohibit and of what kind of things? The simple answer is all. Whether a person steals a billion dollars through illegal insider trading, or a quarter from their parents' change, the law is straightforward in its concerns and applies equally. The positive element of the law is a confirmation by God of what we call the rights to private property. In the biggest perspective, God created all things and so He owns all things. He



has, however, given to each person some things to own. Private ownership serves His purpose to train us in larger issues of personal responsibility. The things that belong to us we are free to give to another, but no one has the right to take what is ours without our agreement.

***20:17 - "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."***

The final command of the Ten Words has a special function among the ten. It was chosen by God to be last on purpose. Overall, one of the main purposes of the Law is to expose to us our own sinful tendencies and to prepare our hearts for the Savior by showing us our great need for salvation (Galatians 3:24). The first nine commands of the ten all have an internal element and application as Jesus taught us, but the command itself is worded with a focus on observable behavior. You can see for yourself when I worship an idol, take the name of the Lord in vain, dishonor my parents, steal from my neighbor, etc. This final command of the ten is aimed at addressing an internal temptation and sin exclusively. The requirement is to not "covet" our neighbors' house, mate, servants, animals, or any of his possessions. The word covet means to desire what one should not desire. The amazing point of this law is to show God's people that He determines what our behavior, our words, and now even our hidden desires should be. The problem is that coveting is hidden to all except God Himself. I can covet, and you may never know that I am. But, the Lord knows.

This command meant that for the sticklers about obeying the behaviors required by the Law, there was still a command that would convict their heart of sin if they were honest in their own heart evaluation. I may never in my life commit physical murder or adultery, and in avoiding those outward behaviors convince myself that I was righteous. We all know in our hearts however that we have privately desired something that belonged to someone else. Whether it is my neighbor's TV, landscaping, bathroom, car, watch, job, etc. does not matter. Once I want what belongs to them, the boundary of this command has been crossed. Paul refers to this in this passage. "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." (Romans 7:7). Even as a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, the Lord used the tenth command to convict his heart of sin. When Christ saved him, he later testified that his heart had learned the spiritual opposite of coveting. God trained his heart in contentment (Philippians 4:11-13).

## Questions from Exodus 19:

**Question:** 19:13 - The first reference of stoning is in Ex. 8:26. Did the Israelites learn this from the Egyptians? Did "shot through" (with an arrow) continue as a means of punishment after this?

**Answer:** There is no evidence or indication that Israel learned stoning from the Egyptians. This command in 19:13 comes directly from the Lord. It was His chosen method of death penalty execution for the nation of Israel to practice. I am not aware of any continuation of shooting after this. Being shot through refers to being shot with an arrow. Most likely this was included in this special scenario for anyone that violated the boundaries around the mountain and was caught already heading up the mountain. In such a case an arrow could still reach them without anyone else crossing the boundary line.

**Question:** 19:22 - Is this mention of "priests" referring to the tribe of Levi (future) or were some already identified for specific priestly duties (given the position of priest for the time being)?

**Answer:** It is an interesting question, because the Levites have not yet been set apart to serve as priests. Even the commentaries I have read are uncertain of who these priests were. There are several possible explanations, but none of them is completely satisfying to me. At this point, I have to say I just do not know the answer. Here are the best among the possible explanations: 1) It refers to Aaron and his sons who were beginning to function as priests prior to their formal calling 2) They are the firstborn sons of Israel set apart for holy service 3) Moses is anticipating the Levite's role and inserting them into the story to emphasize that the consecration would even affect the Levites.

**Question:** 19:10, 22, 23 - There are three different mentions of consecration. Vs. 10 reads "go to the people and consecrate them" (something Moses is actually to do?), Vs. 22 mentions the priests consecrating themselves and verse 23 speaks of them consecrating "it" (the mountain or area around the mountain?). Can you elaborate on these different forms of consecration mentioned here and how that might apply to us in the New Covenant? Are we to consecrate others, areas or ourselves?

**Answer:** Moses consecrates the people in 19:10 simply by delivering to them the command of the Lord for their consecration. The faithful proclamation of God's Word always has a consecrating effect on believing listeners. For the priests to consecrate themselves in 19:22, the emphasis is on them obeying the instructions of the Lord including washing their garments, abstaining from marital relations for the two preparatory days. The consecration of the mountain in 19:23 is referring to the erection of physical barriers between the people and the mountain so that they could not transgress.

Yes, all of the many forms and expressions of consecration both here and throughout the Law are meant to speak to us. Remember "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;" (II Timothy 3:16). The point for them and for us is that the people of God are first and foremost to be a holy people because our God is holy. These passages are helpful to us in considering different circumstances in which God calls us to greater holiness. Apply these three situations I would consider: 1) The consecrating influence of God's Word every time I read the Bible, listen to a Bible teaching, or participate in a study such as this one 2) The consecrating effect upon my life when I obey God's Word 3) The consecrating impact of being in the manifest presence of God. The mountain was to be consecrated simply because God was there. For instance, when we gather together as the church, the Lord promises to fill our gatherings with His presence. That experience is meant to influence us to greater holiness each time we gather.

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## Exodus 21

***21:1-6 - "Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them: "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently."***

Commenting on some sections of God's Law is a challenge in our culture and society today because of how radically different the ancient Biblical culture was from our own. Many of the laws we will encounter beyond the familiar Ten Commandments will stretch and challenge our perspectives. Things we should keep in mind as we dig into God's Law include 1) Every one of these laws was inspired by God and is meant to teach us something. 2) The laws must first be understood in their original setting before we leap to wrong conclusions based upon comparisons to modern society. The values represented in these laws are not primitive, or archaic, or old fashioned, or no longer of any applicable value. 3) Each of these laws was meant to convict our hearts of the reality and consequences of sin. 4) Each of these laws reveals some aspect of God's righteousness in various life situations which we can derive as a principle to be applied in a variety of similar situations. 5) Each of these laws was meant to display our great need for Christ. For the sake of space, I won't attempt to

connect all five of these points to each law we consider, but will choose at least one to emphasize for each law we study.

This section is concerned with the laws regulating slavery in Israel. For many new Christians as they first read through the Bible, they are shocked when they come to this section of Exodus and discover that God allowed slavery to be practiced in Israel. When the Exodus story of God setting Israel free from slavery in Egypt is read it is often interpreted as God's only comment on slavery and these subsequent slavery laws seem to embarrassingly contradict the anti-slavery message of the Exodus. I'll attempt to clarify a difficult issue in a short space. The first thing to clarify is that the slavery laws in the Law of God do not promote or even condone the evil kind of slavery Israel endured at the hands of the Egyptians. We need to distinguish between the slavery of Israel in Egypt to the slavery later practiced in Israel which was regulated by God's Law. Egyptian slavery was complete ownership of people by a dominant master (Pharaoh) who enforced his rule over his slaves by threat of death. Egyptian slaves had no rights and no protection under any law. Pharaoh as a god in Egypt was the law. Their slavery was permanent and oppressive.

The kind of slavery later practiced in Israel was completely different. What is shocking to us today is that any form of slavery was practiced, but what was even more shocking in the world of that day was these new slavery laws that actually granted rights to slaves and regulated by authority of law what a slave master could and could not do regarding slaves. It was revolutionary to consider a slave as a human being with their own rights worth protecting by law. This form of slavery was not like the Egyptian practice, and neither was it like what was practiced in American history prior to the Civil War. Slaves in this country before the civil War were enslaved by force, taken from their homes against their will and then sold into lifelong forced service. The pattern in Israel was not by force, not lifelong, and the slave master was as regulated by law as the slave. A better term to avoid confusion might be bondservant rather than slave. They were contractually obligated for a set period of time, usually six years, to serve in the home or business of the person who owned the right to their contract of service. At the end of that period they were free to go and the master was legally required to release them from their service. The most common way to become a "slave" was to sell yourself into slavery for that six year period. The motive to do so was usually economic due to a significant debt, or poverty. Working as a bondservant provided regular meals, clothing, and shelter during hard times.

One other circumstance typically led to slavery and that was when a person was caught stealing. If they were unable to repay the victim the double restitution required by the Law, then they would be required to serve as a slave, or bondservant for the person from whom they had stolen to pay off the debt created by their crime. What is noticeably different here from modern society is the replacement of a jail sentence with bond-service. There was no such thing as jail or prison in Israelite society. God never instructed Israel to build any. There

was no need for one. The most serious criminals were eliminated by the death penalty, and the less dangerous violators were required to work off their debt, not to "society", but the person that they actually harmed by their theft. Our society has used the prison system as an alternative to God's pattern revealed here, but the fruit has not been good. The prison system is a mess and tends to function as a breeding ground for more crime. The pattern described in this passage is truly rehabilitation focused with the best opportunity to redeem a bad decision on the part of the person who has stolen.

There is one other important element in this slavery section, and that is way it functions as a spiritual symbol. In the New Testament, slavery is a common symbol for the effect that sin has upon the sinner's heart (Romans 6:17). Sin indulged gains a measure of control over the person who sins. The lesson to all of Israel, and to us as well, is that there are consequences to our sin that extend beyond the moment of sin. Understanding the cost of the consequence in a vivid way like in the reality of slavery was meant to be a strong deterrent against temptation.

***21:12-14 - "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die."***

This section is concerned with laws regarding assault and murder. The laws identify critical differences in the varying circumstances involving one man striking another. The factors considered, such as degree of harm done to the person struck, the intent of the person who strikes the other, and the differing penalties in each case are all legal elements that our laws are based upon today. Our laws for the same circumstances were primarily drawn originally from English Common Law years ago, which were based largely on the standards learned from the study of God's Law. Nevertheless, this area of the law concerning harm done to another person, and the penalty due for that harm has been hotly debated in the recent generation. This passage is very clear, that is one strikes another and the result is the victim dies, then the person that struck them "shall surely be put to death." The strong emphasis on the penalty required is established by the word, surely. This is what we call the death penalty. This is God's standard for the penalty that must be carried out upon anyone who murders. They must be put to death. The whole reason why the Lord used the word, surely, is the natural tendency for societies to choose some other penalty for this crime. The reason why the death penalty is a non-negotiable penalty was given by the Lord earlier to Noah (Genesis 9:6). Human beings are made in the image of God, and have special value as His image bearers. When the concept that humans bear God's image is removed from the legal system, it is inevitable that the death penalty will be re-evaluated as it has been in our nation over the last generation.

The Lord also makes an exception under certain circumstances for the death of the person struck to not require a death penalty. The exception is when the person that struck the other did not "lie in wait" for the one they struck. This can be interpreted in two different ways. Either it refers to the issue of what we call in the law today, premeditation, which means that it was not planned, and that the guilty person struck the other only in the heat of passion without intending to murder the other. The other possible interpretation is that this is covering all manner of what we call accidental deaths, in which a person is struck and dies, even though the person never even intended to strike them at all. This would include unanticipated events like swinging a sword and hitting a person to the side that was never seen, and any other unintended deaths. It was common in ancient cultures for families to respond to even accidental killings of one of their own by in turn killing the person that had killed their family member. The Lord makes a new provision here for the safety of the one responsible by establishing a safe place where they can flee from family retribution. These places will be addressed in more detail later in the Law when the Lord causes Israel to build a series of cities in the Promised Land called cities of refuge.

***21:15-17 - "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."***

There are three laws given in these three verses. They cover two topics and at first glance the third law seems to fit better with the first. Some have questioned why the third law is not grouped with the first, as if the Lord mentioned it out of order by mistake. The Lord did not forget, like we do, and fit it in later out of place where it was supposed to go. The order is intentional. All three are laws worthy death penalty judgments, but they are mentioned in descending order of the seriousness of the crime. All three require the violator to be put to death, but even among the death penalty cases, there are degrees of evil behavior involved, and those subtle distinctions are expressed in the order chosen so that we can learn from them. Laws one and three in this group are violations of the fifth of the Ten Commandments from the last chapter. The fifth word of the ten required that all in Israel honor their parents. We saw that the Lord identifies the honoring of parents with the honoring of Him since parents are the first representatives of His authority we encounter in our life.

The two violations covered here are if a person strikes either of their parents, or if they curse either parent. The parent does not have to die from being struck for this law to apply. What is staggering is just how different this standard of the Lord is from standards in our society today. Thankfully, our society still will respond if there is a serious physical assault upon a parent, as long as they are willing to "press charges", but if the parents live, the penalty for the rebellious son or daughter is going to be far far lighter than death. What does our society do today to the rebellious teen who curses his parents in anger? The answer is, nothing!

They do not receive even a minor fine, or any penalty whatsoever. Any person that attempted to pass such a law as this today would be mocked a ridiculed as crazy, or barbaric. Who is more wise; our society or the Lord? Without such a serious deterrent in place, has the respect for parents increased, remained the same, or seriously diminished in our society?

The second of these three laws covers the issue of kidnapping, and also treats it as a much more serious crime than we do today. If a person kidnaps someone today, the death penalty would only ever be considered if they also murder the person they kidnap. Here, the death penalty is required just for the kidnapping, whether the victim is harmed further or not. There is one important difference in this kind of kidnapping, than the kind we see today most often. This was not kidnapping for a ransom. This was literally, man-stealing. It meant to capture another person against their will and it was usually done for the purpose of selling them into slavery. The motive was economic and crime was in reducing an innocent person to a commodity for the perpetrator's selfish use. Anyone that had so devalued another human being was not fit to continue to live according to the Lord. Interestingly, this law touches more closely than the laws above the practice of slavery that we remember from American history. The slave traders that sailed to Africa and forcefully captured Africans to be sold into lifelong slavery were by Biblical definition kidnappers and should have been executed by a righteous society, rather than sanctioned for economic benefits.

***21:22-26 - "If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. If a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave, and destroys it, he shall let him go free on account of his eye."***

This section introduces us to the famous "eye for eye" formula. It is part of another section dealing with physical harm done by one to another in a dispute or fight. Theologians refer to the formula as the Lex Talionis, which means the law of retribution. The standard is equal penalty to be imposed for the harm done. The types of harm mentioned are not a complete list, but examples to show the required response. It is a common misunderstanding to think that Israel was supposed to literally do the exact same thing to the violator in each case. We do not see a letter of the law response in any future historical examples in God's Word. We never see the society gouging out the eye of the violator because they damaged the eye of another person. The point was to consider the relative value of the harm done to the victim in each case. The violator commonly redeemed the value of the harm they had done by making restitution to the person harmed. It was up to the judge in each case to evaluate the true injury done, and to set a real value for their harm. The loss of an eye would be considered of greater value

than the loss of a tooth, or a bruise. This principle is at the foundation of our personal injury laws today. If a person causes you to lose the permanent use of your eye, it is the court's responsibility to determine the value of your eye over the course of your life.

Something of significant application for our laws today, is the example given of the involvement of a pregnant woman. The woman in this example has not chosen to be involved, but the fight between two men affects her. One of the men strikes her. If the blow causes her to give birth prematurely, but there is no injury, then the husband of the pregnant woman is authorized to impose a fine on the guilty man, subject to the approval of the judge. If there is an injury, then whatever the injury caused the man who struck is responsible for the much more severe penalty up to death, if he caused a death. The key detail to notice, in light of the current standards in our society is that this law does not differentiate whether the injury caused is to the mother or her unborn child. The law implies an injury to either must be met with the appropriate penalty. No matter how it is worded in our culture today, an abortion does injury to the unborn child, and the Lord sees that child as having the same value and same protection under His law even though the child has not yet been born.

### **Questions from Exodus 20:**

**Question:** Exodus 20:5-6 - "...am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." This verse notes the passing of iniquity to children for those parents who hate Him. But even to those that love Him, it does seem that children take on certain behaviors and sins exemplified in parents' lives. How does this apply to us today (2 Tim 3:16)?

**Answer:** I'm not following you on the connection you are drawing to II Timothy 3:16, but I can comment on Exodus 20:5-6. The emphasis in this passage is on the Lord's role in dealing with the descendants of either obedient or disobedient people. It is a warning to the people receiving the Law to be obedient, because their choices and behaviors will have a reverberating consequence through succeeding generations for either blessing or cursing. The Lord's role is highlighted as the One Who rewards the obedience of His people with blessings that extend beyond the present generation. In fact His blessings are described here in almost unbelievable terms. He promises here that if a man is obedient in his life to the Lord, that the Lord will cause blessings to flow to "thousands" of succeeding generations of his descendants to follow. For the disobedient person, the curse from the Law that he deserves is going to impact even the third and fourth generation of his descendants. It was a way of emphasizing the difference in how much greater His blessing was as an encouragement to be obedient.



In relationship to what is actually meant by passing things on to the next generation, this is what I believe is meant. I do not think that the Lord is saying that if you choose to sin, then God will cause your children to sin. That would contradict the principles of how God deals with each generation as described in Ezekiel 18. I believe it is describing consequences. Yet, each generation will still be responsible for their own response to the Lord. As an example using something practical; if I were given a million dollars by the Lord as a reward for obedience, my continuing obedience would provide a financial blessing of inheritance to my children. That blessing will increase in the hands of the next generation if they follow my example of obedience and they will pass an even greater inheritance unto the second generation and so on. If however, I am disobedient, then I will pass the consequence of a smaller inheritance unto my children. Rather, that the million dollars I may pass on a debt to be paid, If my children follow my bad example, there will be an increasing trouble that ripples through my family future.