



# *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 28 - 33

## Exodus 28

***28:1-4 - "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me--Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. You shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. You shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me. These are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me."***

This is the official beginning of the priesthood for the Old Testament tabernacle / temple. The priesthood begins with Aaron as the first high priest, and extends through his family to his sons. We will see that when Moses returns from the mountain that Aaron's tribe, the Levites will also be set apart for priesthood service. The priests were not voted into office by the people, but were chosen and appointed by the Lord. As priests, they do represent the people before the Lord, but first, they represent the Lord to the people. As the priests of the Lord their first responsibility is to Him. Yahweh declares that their first priority is "to minister as priest to Me." In our study in Exodus 19 we saw that the Lord had called all of Israel to be a kingdom of priests to serve Him, but the sin and rebellion of the people resulted in the Lord setting apart only one of the twelve tribes as priests. The Lord's original intention for all of His people to be priests unto Him was never realized in the Old Covenant, but in Christ, in the New Covenant, all believers are now identified as a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9). The priority of the priests in this passage is also the number one spiritual priority of the royal priests of the New Covenant. We are called to minister to the Lord. This means that our top priestly responsibility is to approach the Lord daily, worship Him, and present ourselves to Him for service. Paul calls this our spiritual service. "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Romans 12:1).

All of the priests of the tabernacle were to be clothed in special garments when they approached the Lord, and especially the High Priest. The garments were to be physically unique, but the purpose of the garments was in what they symbolized. Throughout the Bible, from the Garden of Eden with its fig leaf coverings, then animal skins, to the book of Revelation, garments serve as a symbol of spiritual principles. "It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (Revelation 19:8). In the case of the tabernacle priests their garments were "for glory and for beauty." The word translated beauty meant more than something that was attractive. It signified something that evoked a sense of majestic beauty. It

describes a kind of breathtaking beauty that stirs a sense of awe in the observer. The concern for the clothing of the High Priest was much deeper than that he was to dress nice for his duties. His special clothing which was not to be worn by any other priest, or any other person in the world, was aimed at symbolizing the unique role of the high priest in God's plan of redemption.

The high priest role was ordained by the Lord to reflect an essential aspect of the work of Christ. His work is greater than any single role of the Old Testament era could fully portray by itself, but Christian theologians have identified the three key roles in Old Covenant Israel as a combined image of the role of Christ in God's plan. Those three roles were prophet, high priest, and king. The role of king will not be introduced to Israel for several generations yet, but at this point the role of Moses as the chosen prophet of God, and Aaron as the first high priest both reflect the greater role of Christ. In the New Covenant, there is no longer any physical temple, no levitical priesthood, and no high priest on earth. Instead, "...we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God..." (Hebrews 4:14).

These special garments were not worn by Jesus in His life on earth. The high priests garments made for glory and beauty point to the spiritual qualities of Christ, not His external garments. He alone embodies all of the fullness of God's glory. "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3). How can the radiance of God's glory and the unmatched beauty of His perfect nature adequately be symbolized in a physical representation. It is not possible, but these special garments, made by "skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom" clothing Aaron who was set apart for this unique role in the worship of Israel came as close as possible to represent Him. When we read these descriptions, we are meant to draw the conclusion that Christ, as the true High Priest, is far greater in glory and beauty than even what we see described here.

***28:9-12 - "You shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree settings of gold. You shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for a memorial."***

The high priest's garment was to have two shoulder pieces which each contained an onyx stone. On each onyx stone there were to be six names engraved in gold filigree settings. The twelve names engraved were the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The engraved stones were worn on the shoulders of the high priest every time he came into the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. The spiritual effect was that Aaron was bearing the names of the tribes before the Lord as a

memorial. This concept of a memorial is not like our modern connection of what we do to remember our honored dead. Instead, it was a symbol, that when the high priest entered into the presence of the Lord, he did so carrying the names representing all of Israel with him. These memorial or remembrance stones were placed purposefully on the shoulders of the high priest. The imagery of the shoulders in tabernacle service always conveyed the concept of burden bearing. The various furnishings of the tabernacle, such as the ark, the altar, the table of bread, etc. were made with rings and poles so that they could be carried from location to location in their journey. They were carried as a burden on the shoulders of the priests. This was the special burden of the high priest. He did not carry furniture on his shoulders, but he carried the burden of the people on his shoulders before the Lord.

This points to the commitment and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus to bear the burdens of His people in the presence of the Lord. These two Old Testament passages described how the Lord bears us and our burdens. "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself." (Exodus 19:4). "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation." (Psalm 68:19). The fulfillment in the New Covenant is found in the role of Christ as the High Priest Who bears us and all of our burdens on His shoulders in the presence of His Father in heaven. "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest..." (Hebrews 7:25-26). The high priest approached the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies on behalf of all the people bringing their spiritual needs before the Lord. Now, Jesus carries the burden of our lives in every detail on his shoulders in the presence of the Father. It should be the greatest encouragement for all believers when they are engaged with burdensome issues to know that Jesus is shouldering the load for them in heaven.

***28:28-30 - "They shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it will be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece will not come loose from the ephod. Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually. You shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the LORD continually."***

There was also a chest piece to be worn over the heart of the high priest. It was to be woven from the same materials and pattern used for the walls of the tabernacle signifying that His role was of the same heavenly origin as the pattern of the tabernacle itself. On this breastpiece there were set twelve individual precious gemstones of various kinds. The stones were set in four rows of three.

Each stone represented one of the tribes of Israel. When the high priest walked into the presence of the Lord, he carried the names of the tribes of Israel upon his chest over his heart. Since the two memorial stones bearing their names were already worn on his shoulders, these stones portray a different aspect of the relationship of the high priest to the people of God. For the shoulder stones the emphasis was on bearing them and their burdens before the Lord. Here, the emphasis is on bearing them on his heart.

The difference in the way their names are borne between the shoulder and chest stones is worth noting. For the shoulder stones the names of tribes were grouped together emphasizing the relationship of the high priest to the people of God as a whole. Here, with the breastpiece there is a single stone for each of the twelve tribes signifying the individual concern of the high priest as he represents them before the Lord. Within this Old Testament detail from the garment of the high priest is an amazing comfort for all believers in Christ. Jesus is in heaven now. He knows each of us individually, and bears us on His heart before the throne of God. We are never forgotten, or lost in the sea of Christians that He shepherds. Just knowing that Jesus has me specifically on His heart as my great High Priest gives me an unsurpassable sense of security in our relationship.

The breastpiece is also called in this passage "the breastpiece of judgment." It is not just a breastpiece of warm and fuzzy feelings. It served as a continual reminder what I deserve in the presence of the Lord, and what I actually receive in His presence. What I deserve is judgment; nothing more and nothing less. I deserve judgment for my many violations of His holy standard as revealed in His Law. For each point that I broke His Law, I deserved to receive the full impact of His judgment. As the high priest stood before the ark of the covenant which contained the tablets of the Law, remember the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of the lamb was between the names of the children of Israel on his heart, and the Law inside the ark. As a result, the mercy of God was given to the people for the sake of the blood of the lamb rather than the judgment they deserved. Though they lived in the mercy of God, they were never to forget what they deserved.

There is one other interesting detail regarding the breastpiece. It was made like a pouch to hold two other stones that were hidden from sight. Those two stones were not engraved with the names of Israel. We do not know any additional details about these stones except the purpose for which they were used. We will read more on this in later passages, but these two stones were used by the high priest to give special guidance to Israel in certain nation shaping decisions. Most theologians believe that one stone represented a yes answer from the Lord and the other represented a no answer. After prayer, the high priest most likely drew out of the pouch one of the stones and received a direction for the nation. This provision is similar to the special way the Lord confirmed His direction to Gideon in the famous fleece story. What we are meant to draw from this detail of these stones is not the specifics, because we have been given no such stones in the

New Testament to discern God's will. The principle does apply however. The principle is that the Lord does not want us to guess regarding our major life decisions. His will must be discerned and He is gracious to make His will known to us when we take the time to seek Him. When making life shaping decisions we should approach our great High Priest, and ask for the will of God to be made known to us.

***28:33-35 - "You shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet material, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe. It shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its tinkling shall be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the LORD, so that he will not die."***

The garment of the high priest was spiritually significant all the way down to the hem near his feet. Sown into the hem all around were to be symbols of pomegranates made from the same material, alternated with small golden bells. The bells served a very practical purpose in the ministry of the high priest. As he walked in the tabernacle, the sound of the bells confirmed that his ministry to the Lord was acceptable to the Lord. The earthly high priest worked in a high risk environment. There were no natural dangers in the tabernacle, but there was one great spiritual danger. The very real danger was the Lord Himself. The implication was that if the high priest was not properly clothed, or was not bearing the blood of the spotless lamb as he should, or in any way was violating the laws for the high priest, his life was forfeit. This was especially important on the day when the high priest entered beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies where no other priest or any other person was allowed to go. As long as the bells on His hem were heard, the other priests knew that he was alive and accepted by the Lord. Josephus describes how later generations of priest tied a cord to the ankle of the high priest so that his body could be dragged out of the Holy of Holies if he died before the ark of the covenant.

For us in the New Covenant, we have no such concern about the acceptance of our great High Priest. We know with absolute certainty that His work was forever accepted by the Father as pleasing in His sight. Our confidence that the sacrifice of the cross was accepted by the Father as satisfying payment for our sins is based on the resurrection of Christ. God raised Jesus from the dead as His ultimate seal of approval on the work Jesus accomplished for us on the cross.

The alternating bells and pomegranates do have an interesting New Testament parallel. The hem of the high priest's garment represents the place where we, as the people of God receive the blessings that flow from His anointing. In the next chapter describing the consecration of the high priest we will see that Aaron was to have anointing oil poured upon his head when he was ordained to his office as high priest. The oil was not poured sparingly, but in such quantity that it ran down his head, dripped from his beard, and soaked his garments. One of the psalms



was written to describe this. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing--life forever." (Psalm 133:1-3). The anointing oil ran down to the hem of his robe. The blessings of God poured out upon Christ now drip down on us. We touch the hem of His garment like the woman that sought Him in the crowd and are blessed. The blessings we receive from the hem of His garment point to the two categories of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Those categories are what we call the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. The pomegranates indicate the fruit while the bells indicate the gifts. They are alternated around his hem because of the necessary mixture of both in our spiritual walk.

### **Questions from Exodus 27:**

**Question:** What does this exclusive fuel (oil) that was used to light the tabernacle symbolize in the New testament?

**Answer:** I believe the oil points to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the anointing of God (Zechariah 4). The Holy Spirit fills us as the individual lamps set upon the lampstand (the church) in order for us to shine the light of the testimony of Christ.

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### **Exodus 29**

***29:3-7 - "You shall put them in one basket, and present them in the basket along with the bull and the two rams. Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. You shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod and the ephod and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod; and you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. Then you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him."***

The consecration of Aaron as the first high priest of the tabernacle is the focus of this passage. There was an elaborate seven day process for his consecration (Exodus 29:35). The seven day time period again directs our attention back to Genesis and the original week of creation. The ordination and consecration of the new high priest spiritually signified a new creation work of God. As we saw in yesterday's study, Aaron as the high priest represented as a type or symbol the role of Christ as our great High Priest of the New Covenant. The new creation theme connected to the consecration of the high priest is fulfilled in Christ as God began a new spiritual creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). Everyone who is born again through Christ is born into a new creation. The work of Christ as the



High Priest Who offered to God the perfect sacrifice is the beginning point of that new creation.

The high priest was brought to the doorway of the tabernacle at the beginning of his consecration process. There he was to be washed with water in preparation to being clothed with the holy garments of the high priest. Once washed, the high priest was to be clothed with the special garments God had ordained for only him to wear that displayed the glory and the beauty of his office. Then, Moses was to take the anointing oil and pour it on Aaron's head. We saw that this anointing was not a mere drizzle of oil, but a pouring out of the anointing oil upon his head. Remember, from a later description in the Psalms that the oil ran down Aaron's beard and even dripped down to the hem of his garment. This was a full, generous anointing. The symbolism highlights a key element in the life and ministry of Jesus. When Jesus was beginning His public ministry He first presented Himself to John the Baptist at the river Jordan, which was the symbolic entry point into the Promised Land. There, Jesus was baptized by John, in the fulfillment toward which the washing ceremony for the high priest pointed. As He was being baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. "Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." (Luke 3:21-22).

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at the beginning of His ministry was the fulfillment of the symbolic pattern established by the anointing with oil of the high priest of the tabernacle. The high priest could not begin his work until he was first anointed, and Jesus did not begin His work until He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Peter describes the ministry of Jesus in these same terms. "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38). This anointing with the Holy Spirit forms the basis of one of His titles in ministry. We identify Him as the Lord Jesus Christ. The word, Christ, is not His last name as we use both a first and last name today. Rather, both Lord and Christ are title words describing two essential elements of His ministry. The title, Christ, is a translation into Greek of the Hebrew word Messiah. Both words refer to the anointed one. The name Jesus Christ then refers to Jesus the anointed One.

The anointing of Jesus with the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the distinguishing characteristic of His ministry. It sets Him apart from even the greatest of God's servants including the apostles of the New Testament and the prophets, priests and kings of the Old Testament. Each of them were given a measure of the Holy Spirit's power to accomplish their own assignments from God, but Jesus was given the fullness of the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). This special anointing with the Holy Spirit was prophesied of the coming Messiah throughout the Old Testament. "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a

branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." (Isaiah 11:1-2).

***29:10-14 - "Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. You shall slaughter the bull before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. You shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger; and you shall pour out all the blood at the base of the altar. You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on them, and offer them up in smoke on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its hide and its refuse, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering."***

For the next stage of the consecration of the high priest it was necessary for a bull to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord as a sin offering. This is one point in which the consecration of Aaron could not perfectly reflect the future consecration of Christ. The key difference between Aaron and Jesus is that one had sinned before the moment of their consecration, and the other had never sinned. Because Aaron had sinned, his own sins required a sacrifice of blood before he could enter and serve in God's holy place. Jesus did not sin even a single time before His baptism by John and anointing by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, immediately following His baptism and anointing, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days (like Moses had gone up Sinai for forty days), and was tempted in every point of temptation by Satan. Jesus passed each test with perfect obedience and demonstrated that He alone was qualified by His own holiness to accomplish the plan of salvation.

While Jesus did not require a sacrifice to be offered for Himself to cover sins He never committed, an aspect of His special work of redemption is pictured for us in the consecration ceremony with this sacrificed bull. The bull was slain at the altar in front of the tabernacle, but its flesh, hide and entrails were to be taken out of the courtyard of the tabernacle, and even outside the camp of Israel and burned. The burning conveyed that the bull had been completely offered up to God. The writer of the book of Hebrews refers to this wording, "outside the camp" that appears for the first time in the Bible here in this passage, and he applies it to the death of Jesus on the cross. "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (Hebrews 13:12-13). Jesus was not crucified in the temple in Jerusalem, but just outside of the gates of the holy city, or outside of the camp.

***29:15-18 - "You shall also take the one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram; and you shall slaughter the ram and shall take its blood and sprinkle it around on the altar. Then you shall cut the ram into its pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head. You shall offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD: it is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD."***

A basic spiritual pattern is reintroduced in the consecration of the priests, but in a different expression that we saw before. The pattern is the laying on of hands. Generations before, we saw Jacob lay his hands purposefully upon his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh in order to bless them (Genesis 48:13-20). Here, in the consecration of the priests, Aaron and his sons were to lay their hands, not on their descendants, but upon the bull and the ram that were to be sacrificed. There are two principles expressed in the laying on of hands that tie together what Jacob did with his grandsons, and Aaron and his sons did with these sacrificial animals. The principles are identification and transference. The physical contact of the laying on of hands identifies the person laying hands with the one he is touching. In this case, the bull and the ram are now identified with the priests and take their place in the sacrifice. The transference in the case of Jacob is the blessing transferred from Jacob to his descendants. For the priests, their sin was transferred to the bull and ram sacrificed for them. Even though we did not physically lay our hands on Christ when He went to the cross, the principles of identification and transference are the spiritual elements that cause His sacrifice to be effective in dealing with our sins. Through identification, He took the place we deserved on the cross, and our sins were legally transferred to Him and paid for by His death.

***29:19-21 - "Then you shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram. You shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of his sons' right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet, and sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar. Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments and on his sons and on his sons' garments with him; so he and his garments shall be consecrated, as well as his sons and his sons' garments with him."***

There was then a second ram, and third sacrifice offered for the consecration of the priests. The reason for the multiple sacrifices was that no one animal sacrifice was able to convey all that the single once for all sacrifice of Christ accomplished for us. Our own service to God does not depend upon multiple sacrifices of different animals carried out in different ways. The cross encompasses all that all of the sacrifices of the tabernacle portrayed. In this third sacrifice, once the priests again laid their hands upon the ram and it was slaughtered, a new element was introduced using some of its blood. They were

to take the blood of the ram and put some of it on the right ears of Aaron and his sons. The blood was also applied to their right thumbs and their right big toes. For us, who are so distant from them in time and culture, this seems like a strange part of the ceremony. Keep in mind the possible symbolic content of this three-fold application of the blood. Each place the blood was applied was to the right side of their body. This was an understood and common reference in that day. The right side was considered the side of power. Most people are right handed and their right arm tends to be the stronger and more skilled arm. It was also the side of honor, so that an honored guest was seated to the host's right hand. The symbolism taught that the strength and honor of the priesthood was not in themselves, but in the blood of redemption.

The specific parts of the body to apply the blood were chosen to correspond to three important aspects of their ministry. The ear is of course the part of the body by which we hear. As priests, it was necessary that their ears would be redeemed by the blood and open to hear. The first and most important was that the priests were God's servants in His home and their ear needed to be turned to Him to listen to His directions above all else. Jesus modeled this orientation for us perfectly. All of His ministry He carried out as He listened to the Father and did nothing on His own initiative. "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 5:30). This priority of hearing the Lord's directions was prophesied about Jesus, and applies to the Lord's purpose to all New Covenant priests including us. "...He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple. The Lord GOD has opened My ear..." (Isaiah 50:4-5). Before the power of the cross was applied to our ears, we were stubbornly not listening to God, but now He has redeemed by the blood our ability to hear and obey.

The second body part to receive the blood was the right thumb of the priests. The thumb was considered the strength of the hand and represented the entire hand. The hand is used to work in the world. This image of the blood on the thumb indicated that all the future work of the priests was redeemed for God. The significance is that prior to the cross we all worked, but our works were in a sense dead works, or done only to serve and benefit ourselves. By applying the redeeming blood of the sacrifice to the thumb, the work of the priest was no longer done for themselves, but for God. All work was now good work and to bring glory to God rather than themselves. This is again perfectly modeled for us in Christ. "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." (John 8:29). Jesus always and only did the things which were pleasing to His Father. We are called as priests to follow His example and fill our lives with God pleasing good works. "Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works..." (I Timothy 6:18).

The blood was also to be applied to the right big toe. Like the thumb to the hand, the big toe was considered the strength of the foot and represented the entire foot. The foot is used for walking in this world. The point of this detail is that the

blood redeemed all of the steps of the priests. Where they walked was on holy ground and by redeeming their foot with the blood they would not bring any defilement to the house of God. It signified in symbol what we refer to when we say that we "walk with God." With the blood on the ear at the top of the body, the thumb in the middle of the body, and the toe at the bottom of the body, the image was of the whole man being redeemed by the virtue of the blood. In the same way, the cross of Christ sanctifies us completely from our head to our feet. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. " (I Thessalonians 5:23).

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## Exodus 30

***30:6-9 - "You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it."***

Another piece of furniture in God's house is introduced in this section. This was the altar of incense. This is the second altar for the tabernacle, but it served a different practical and symbolic purpose than the first altar. The first altar was outside in the courtyard and was the place where the various sacrifices were slain and offered to the Lord. This second altar was much smaller in dimensions, and was to be placed inside the tent of the tabernacle in the first of the two rooms. There were three furnishings in that first room; the lampstand, the table for the bread, and the altar of incense. The altar was to be placed further into the room than the other two furnishings. Those two were placed on the long north and south walls. The altar was placed on the far west side of the room centered directly in front of the dividing veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Even though they were separated by the veil, the altar was centered in front of the ark of the covenant.

Once placed there, only one priest was allowed to interact with this altar. The first altar was used by all of the priests that served when the sacrifices were offered. But, they were not to approach this altar of incense. Only the high priest was allowed by God to approach and make use of this altar. Each morning and evening when Aaron, the high priest would enter the Holy Place to service the lamps upon the lampstand by trimming the wicks and refilling the oil. The high priest's other daily responsibility was to then approach the incense altar and burn incense in the morning and evening. The importance of this practice was

emphasized by the restriction that only the high priest could do this job, the specific instructions for the formulation of the incense to be offered (30:34-38), and the warning given at the end to not violate the sanctity of this altar by offering anything upon it other than what the Lord had commanded. We will read the tragic results of two of the priests who chose to ignore this warning from the Lord and suffered the consequences (Leviticus 10:1-3).

The spiritual symbolism of the incense altar is identified for us in these three passages. "May my prayer be counted as incense before You..." (Psalm 141:2). David wrote this Psalm, and saw his prayer before the Lord offered on earth as the smoke and fragrance of incense rising toward the heavens and into the presence of the Lord. Then in these passages from Revelation we have a direct correlation drawn between prayer and the incense. "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." (Revelation 5:8). "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand." (Revelation 8:3-4).

The Revelation passages do not describe the scene in the earthly tabernacle, but the scene in heaven. Remember that the tabernacle was constructed following a pattern that was revealed by God to Moses on the mountain. Hebrews tells us that the earthly tabernacle modeled a greater heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:1-5). In heaven, John sees golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. Then an angel offers incense which is mixed with the prayers of the saints on a golden altar in heaven which is before the throne of God just like the incense altar was before the ark in the tabernacle. As the incense mixed with the prayers is offered on the golden altar in heaven the smoke and the prayers rise before God on His throne. The imagery both in the earthly tabernacle and the heavenly temple cause us to understand that the incense represents prayer. It was to be offered morning and evening which indicates the necessity of believers praying day and night without ceasing. Only the high priest was actually to offer this incense, but that was not to teach that only the high priest should pray. All believers should and do pray. The reason that only the high priest offered the incense is that only our great High Priest Jesus makes our prayers fragrant and acceptable before God. We pray in His name so that all of our prayers are offered through Christ to God. We do not go to God in prayer apart from Christ. If we do, we are offering strange fire and our prayers will not be accepted by the Father. Our prayers are accepted on the basis of the righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, not on the basis of our own goodness.

***30:12-16 - "When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, so that there will be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone who is numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the LORD. The rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make atonement for yourselves. You shall take the atonement money from the sons of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves."***

The Lord changes topics here between the description of the final two furnishings of the tabernacle and gives instructions of the taking of a census for Israel in the future. The connection to the tabernacle is in the purpose attached to the atonement money collected from the census. All money collected was dedicated to the support of the tabernacle. That money would be saved by the priests for the upkeep of the tabernacle structure and its services. Taking a census is a common practice for every nation. Our nation still takes a census of all the people living here every few years. However, the Lord wanted Israel to know that they must follow a specific pattern when taking it, and He warned them that failure to follow His pattern would bring upon themselves a severe consequence of a plague. Later in the history of Israel, David foolishly ignored the Lord's instructions regarding the census and brought judgment upon Israel (I Chronicles 21:1-8). The normal reasons a census is taken in a nation is to count the people for one of two purposes. The two purposes are for taxation or in order to identify the number of men available to go to war.

The Lord required Israel to have everyone twenty years old and over to pay a ransom price as a contribution to the Lord at the tabernacle. The price was set by the Lord for everyone. The individual's economic condition did not apply in determining the amount of the ransom. Everyone, whether rich or poor was to contribute a half a shekel. That money was considered atonement money. The concept that the Lord was building in His holy nation was this; the entire nation belonged to the Lord and every single man belonged to the Lord. The did not want Israel to collect taxes or go to war without first demonstrating their faith that they belonged to Him, and not themselves by paying a price for each man counted in the nation. The set price for all whether rich or poor showed that each man bore the same value before the Lord. A man's natural riches did not make him more valuable to the Lord, and a man's poverty did not make him less valuable.



**30:17-21 - "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the LORD. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."**

The final piece of furniture for God's house is described in this passage. The laver was an open basin made of bronze that was filled with water and used for washing. It was placed outside in the courtyard. It was past the altar for sacrifices on the way toward the door of the tabernacle. When entering the tabernacle the priests first had to stop each they entered the tabernacle at the laver. If any priest entered the tabernacle without first stopping at the laver, he would die when he entered the tabernacle. That detail alone should tell us that this was an essential part of approaching the Lord in His house. There was nothing optional about the laver. It was also necessary, even if the priests were not going to enter the tabernacle, but they were going to remain out in the courtyard and offer a sacrifice on the altar, then they also had to first visit the laver. At the laver the priests were to wash both their hands and their feet.

The washing of the hands and the feet was to cleanse the priest of any defilement he contacted outside the courtyard in the world around the tabernacle. The washing signified the cleansing necessary to serve God or enter His house. The image pictured is that the house of the Lord is clean, and He did not want His servants tracking in the dirt from the world around them. The offering of the required blood sacrifices at the altar did not eliminate the need for the cleansing water. The blood sacrifice pointed to the need for forgiveness. The question is why, if a sacrifice had been made by blood, they still needed to be cleaned with water? The blood of the sacrifice signified that their sins were forgiven and their hearts were cleansed. However, even with clean hearts, just living in and interacting with this fallen world exerts a subtle defiling influence on us. The water of the laver completes the cleansing of an already clean people. Their main cleansing is by the blood of the sacrifice, while the water of the laver focuses only on the hands and the feet that most directly touches the fallen world. This corresponds to the scene at the Last Supper when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. "

"So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is

completely clean; and you are clean, ..." (John 13:6-10). This is not the washing of salvation, but a washing following salvation that further washes us following the washing away of our sins. Jesus told Peter that he had already been washed and was already clean, but that he still needed to be washed by the Lord to clean his feet. The laver therefore is not a symbol of initial salvation, but of ongoing sanctification. The sacrifice of Christ upon the cross which is represented by the altar is the washing away of our sins in salvation. That is a washing in blood. The laver shows us that an ongoing sanctifying washing is necessary for our daily lives even after the cross.

Paul describes this continual washing of sanctification in Ephesians. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27). This is an additional washing we all need. It is a washing of sanctification and is described as the washing of water with the word. This laver washing points to the daily cleansing of the world's influence that we experience as we are exposed to God's Word.

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## Exodus 31

***31:1-5 - "Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you:"***

Up until this point the Lord has given Moses the command to construct the tabernacle according to the exact specifications of what he was shown by the Lord on the mountain. This is the first time the Lord tells Moses how to carry out the actual construction work. Moses will be in charge of the project and will be responsible to supervise the construction because he is the only one who saw the pattern of what it was supposed to look like when finished. The Lord does not intend Moses to do the actual work of building the tabernacle however. The work is going to be done by men that the Lord has called for that purpose. The Lord chose a team of skillful men that have each been given special skills by the Lord so that they can accomplish this great assignment. The skilled team is to be led by two particularly skilled men, Bezalel and Oholiab. God's purpose for these two men is reflected in the meaning of their names. Bezalel means in the shadow of

God, and Oholiab means the tent of the father. Once the tabernacle is complete, all of Israel will live in the shadow of the presence of God from that point forward as Yahweh dwells in His house in the midst of His people. It will be His tent pitched in the midst of the tents of Israel just like a father's tent in the midst of the camp of his family.

These two men were men of extraordinary skill in various forms of craftsmanship. Bezalel's specialties included gold, silver and bronze working, stone cutting for the settings of the precious gems, and wood carving. Bezalel may have been experienced and skilled in these crafts before this appointment, but the Lord is clear that the skill needed to do the work on the tabernacle according to His standards is not natural or learned. Their skill is God given and a product of His grace. Bezalel in particular was filled with the Spirit of God for this work. The Holy Spirit's influence upon him provided Bezalel with wisdom, understanding and knowledge in all of the crafts needed for the house of God. As one example, I read years ago the testimony of a master goldsmith who had studied the description of the golden lampstand that Bezalel made for the tabernacle. He was commissioned by the Lord to make the entire lampstand out of one piece of gold. The work was to be done, not by pouring melted gold into a mold, but by hammering out a single large piece of gold. Given the intricacies of the design of seven branches, bulbs, flowers, etc., the goldsmith claimed that there was no goldsmith alive today that could possibly duplicate this project.

Bezalel's filling with the Spirit of God is another reference in a hint to the overall theme of the tabernacle as a model of the new creation work of God. We have already developed in our previous studies that the tabernacle has many intentional parallels pointing back to the original creation week and the Garden of Eden. The presence of the Spirit of God at the heart of the work should remind us of the beginning of the creation of God. "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters."

(Genesis 1:2). Just as the Spirit of God was present at creation moving to bring order and beauty out of chaos, the Spirit of God now fills Bezalel to bring order and beauty according to God's design out of the raw materials contributed for the tabernacle.

The special abilities of Bezalel and Oholiab also have an important relationship to our lives in the New Covenant. Each believer has been given by the Lord their own special work to accomplish in the building of God's spiritual temple in the New Covenant (Ephesians 4:16). Their work foreshadows the New Covenant concepts that every Christian is given a specific life assignment by the Lord (Ephesians 2:10), and also equipped with at least one spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10-11) that enables them to accomplish their assignment. Each believer is spiritually gifted, each in their own area and corresponding to their assignment from the Lord. We all contribute our own part to the building up of the church, which is God's temple. The Lord has filled each of us with the Holy Spirit and gifted each

of us with spiritual gifts so that the work we do will be up to His standards for His house.

***31:12-17 - "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."***

The long section detailing the construction work for the tabernacle beginning back in chapter 25 has now ended. The Lord chooses this point to give a second reminder / warning to His people regarding the sabbath command. This sabbath section is not really out of place here at all. It is a perfect place to rehearse the sabbath requirement after finishing the instructions to accomplish the work of the sanctuary. The Lord's reminder about the sabbath includes the same information that was revealed in chapter 20 when the Lord first gave the Ten Words to Moses and the people from Sinai. This time, the Lord adds one new principle to His explanation of the purpose of the sabbath. What the Lord adds was critical for Israel to understand in order to handle their sabbath observance properly, and it is also critical for believers to respond to the sabbath as they should in the New Covenant. The Lord says for the first time that the sabbath functions as a "sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you." The sabbath is a sign between the Lord and His people. A sign is a practical element that points to a greater spiritual reality. As an example, circumcision was identified by the Lord as a sign of the covenant. The physical act of circumcising the sons of Israel pointed forward to the greater spiritual reality of the circumcision of the heart that the Lord performs in the new birth. The main thing we should understand about signs is that the sign is not the goal, but is necessary to point toward the goal.

The goal that Lord wanted His people to understand by having them rest from work one designated day out of each week is that our salvation is ultimately His work and not ours. Throughout the Old Covenant, Israel was to rest from their own works each seventh day and focus their hearts in faith on the Lord and His greater work. Instead, what happened for many in Israel is that the sabbath became an end in itself, and their concerns regarding the sabbath day were focused on the rules and regulations of how much they could do without violating the no work requirement. Rabbis argued over sabbath regulations such as how

many feet anyone was allowed to walk on the sabbath, or whether it was even allowed to cook on that day. In doing so, they effectively missed the entire point of the sabbath which was to provide a powerful weekly reminder that the Lord is our Savior, and that salvation is His work and not ours. This is why Jesus was embroiled in sabbath controversies with the Pharisees who focused all their attention on the technicalities of the sabbath while missing its main point entirely.

Hebrews chapter four gives us an necessary explanation of what the Lord wanted us to learn from the sabbath, and what it still teaches us today. The main point that is made is that God ceased from His work and rested on the seventh day in order to show us that we need to rest from our own works. He meant more than just our physical work, but our works by which we would try to justify ourselves as a good person before God. The Lord's counsel in Hebrews is that we must cease from leaning on our own works and to rest in faith that the work for our salvation has already been accomplished. Christ accomplished the all the work necessary for our salvation. We can add nothing to it to make ourselves more acceptable to God. All that we must do now is believe that the work is finished in Christ. That saving faith is also a rest from our own works, or a spiritual sabbath. In the Old Covenant, one day out of seven was a sabbath serving as a sign pointing to the greater sabbath of salvation. Now, in the New Covenant, every day of the week is a sabbath unto the Lord as we rest in the salvation work of Christ. "For we who have believed enter that rest..." (Hebrews 4:3).

There is one other element of the sabbath law which applies to our lives. A violation of the sabbath law bore an extreme penalty under the law. Breaking the sabbath was a death penalty offence against the law of God. Should people who do not rest from work one day out of seven today be executed? No, in the New Covenant, we do not live under the law applied in the same way it was in Israel then. However, the sabbath law death penalty still teaches us something very significant today (II Timothy 3:16). Since the sabbath law is a sign of the salvation work of Christ and the absolute necessity that we cease from our own works and trust in the work of Christ, the death penalty aspect speaks to a certain response to the gospel of salvation today. The person that rejects the gospel, that Christ alone has accomplished God's plan of salvation, is a person that spiritually is disregarding the salvation rest of believing in Christ. The Old Covenant death penalty shows God's continuing response to those who reject the salvation that can only be found in the work of His Son. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18). In the New Covenant there is a death penalty attached to disregarding the sabbath rest of faith in Christ for salvation. It is not a physical death penalty carried out in this world, but a spiritual death penalty that will be carried out on the final day at the judgment seat.

***31:18 - "When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God."***

This brings to an end the first meeting between God and Moses on Sinai for the reception of the Law and the plans for the tabernacle. Moses will return to the mountain later and the Lord will fill in more details for both, but now Moses is ready to return to the camp of the people. When the Lord finished speaking He gave to Moses the two tablets of stone which contained the Ten Words, or the Ten Commandments. This was according to what the Lord had promised when He called Moses to the mountain. "Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." (Exodus 24:12). The details of these two stone tablets are not complete and we are left to draw our own conclusions about their physical arrangement. We know for sure there were two tablets and a total of ten commands contained on them.

There are two possibilities of how the tablets contained the commands of the Lord. One possibility is that the Lord split the commands between the two tablets and had some written on one tablet and some written on the other. In this arrangement there might have been five commands on one tablet and five on the other, or six and four as some believe. The other possibility is that both tablets were identical to each other. In this arrangement, the purpose of the second tablet is as a confirming copy of the first. It was common in the ancient cultures when forming a covenant for two copies of the covenant document to be produced with one copy being given to each of the parties to the covenant. In this case, both copies were placed in the safest possible location, in the box of the ark of the covenant, under the seat where the Lord appeared to meet with Moses. Even if all ten commandments were on each tablet, we know that the tablets were written on both the front and back of the stone. The concept of half of the commands being on their own side still preserves the spiritual pattern of the two main categories of the commandments being to love God and love our neighbor. I lean toward the traditional view of half the command being on the first tablet and half on the second, but the main thing is that we understand the spirit of the Law and how it applies to our lives.

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## Exodus 32

***32:1-6 - "Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play."***

We have already seen how Israel has struggled with temptation and sin in the grumbling incidents at the Red Sea, in the wilderness of Sin, and at Rephidim, but now their greatest failure takes place at the same time as their greatest spiritual event. Moses is still on the mountain in the glory cloud of God's presence receiving the revelation of the Law and the plans for the construction of the tabernacle. Before Moses even makes it down the mountain to deliver those awesome revelations from the Lord, the people veer completely off course down in their camp. As with any sinful episode any of us experience, the sin does not just magically appear out of nowhere. Their hearts have continued to harbor the same inclinations that have gotten them into trouble before. All it took was something to light the fuse of their discontent again and they all plunge together headlong into rebellion. The fuse this time was the prolonged absence of Moses. He was on the mountain for a full forty days, but the Lord had not told them exactly how long Moses would be on the mountain. They certainly expected him to have returned before now. Their disregard for Moses reflects their disregard for the Lord and exposes that they remain a people that walk by sight, not by faith. Just over a month ago, they saw the great and fearsome power of God revealed in smoke, fire, earthquake, and thunder from the mountaintop, but now all that is forgotten because they have not seen anything recently. When believers who have received great indications of the Lord's blessing quickly turn aside, only because He has not miraculously blessed them recently, they are falling into this same "what have you done for me lately" syndrome.

The people prove that their issue is a faith versus sight (II Corinthians 5:7) issue when they approach Aaron and appeal to him to make them a god to lead them. Aaron instructs the people to take their gold earrings and bring them so that he can make the god. It is a sad irony that the gold that should have been contributed (Exodus 25:3) to the beautiful construction of the tabernacle for the glory of God is now contributed to their shame and His dishonor. Aaron, who was



to be set apart and consecrated as the first high priest to represent the people in the presence of Yahweh, now leads the people away from Yahweh and into idolatry. Aaron and the people knew better and were without excuse. The Lord had spoken His Ten Words from the mountain in the hearing of all the people, and they are already violating the first two commands (Exodus 20:1-5).

It is interesting that what Aaron did was not a total rejection of Yahweh, but rather an evil and dangerous spiritual mixture. Aaron and the people did not declare that Yahweh was no longer their God, but that the golden calf was a representation of Yahweh and that they would dedicate it with "a feast to the LORD." Theologically, this is called syncretism, which refers to a mixture of different religious elements. This kind of mixture of the idolatry with the purity of the name of Yahweh is despised by the Lord. In a sense, it is worse than entirely false religion. The greater danger is in mixing elements of truth with error and producing a more deceiving concoction. Aaron compounded his sin with making the calf by making an altar to place before the calf for offerings to it. The people even offered burnt and peace offerings to the golden calf similar to the offerings the Lord had commanded be offered only in the tabernacle on His holy altar. The picture produced a corrupted symbol that salvation can be achieved by man's choice and efforts apart from Christ. Then, the people held a great celebration to congratulate themselves on their new god.

***32:7-14 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."***

Meanwhile, on the mountain, the Lord alerts Moses regarding what has happened down in the camp of Israel. The way the Lord chooses to describe it to Moses is telling. The Lord tells Moses that Israel has corrupted themselves,

turned aside from His commands, and committed idolatry. But when the Lord mentions Israel here to Moses He refers to them as "your people." Up until now, in all references by the Lord to Israel, He has called them His people. The Lord also identifies them as the people Moses brought up from Egypt, not the people He brought up. The shift in descriptions is fully intentional by the Lord. The point is that He refuses to identify with them in their idolatry. The Lord is not being petty or spiteful here. The issue is that they have rejected Yahweh by making and embracing the golden calf. The closest analogy would be of a marriage. The Lord as the faithful husband has been cheated on by His unfaithful fiancé Israel while He is busy on the mountain making final arrangements for their marriage ceremony. Now that Israel has broken her marriage vows in unfaithfulness with another lover, the Lord refuses to be identified as her husband.

The Lord warns Moses to go down the mountain immediately. The implication is that unless he does, the well deserved judgment of God will be directed toward their rebellion. The Lord is not mildly upset at Israel. He refers to His burning anger toward them. Because of the predominant focus on the love and compassion of the Lord in our generation, it is easy to forget that the Lord is also capable of great indignation at the complete disregard for His holiness. The Lord then says a very curious thing to Moses. He tells Moses to leave Him alone so that He can give full vent to His furious wrath and destroy Israel. We should not interpret this as a bluff by the Lord just spoken to make a point. The following passage confirms that this was the Lord's intention. "Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them." (Psalm 106:23).

When the Lord essentially tells Moses to stand aside so that He can destroy Israel, Moses responds with an appeal to turn away His wrath. The appeal of Moses is an awesome example of intercessory prayer in which one person stands before the Lord on behalf of others and cries out for mercy and grace. In this intercession, Moses points toward our great intercessor, Jesus, Who stood between us in our sin, and God. The only reason we do not receive the well deserved wrath of God is because of the intercession of Christ. Moses appeals to the Lord to change His mind and not destroy them. He appeals with wisdom and mature concern regarding the greatest issue at stake here; the name of the Lord. Moses brings three issues to the Lord. Moses reminds the Lord of 1) His commitment to Israel is having brought them this far, 2) His reputation that will suffer in the eyes of the Egyptians if He destroys Israel in the wilderness 3) His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when He first established His covenant. Because of the effective intercession of Moses, a most amazing thing happens. The "LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."

This passage, and a few others that are similar in the Scriptures have caused many believers to question whether the Bible is inconsistent in its portrayal of

God. On the one hand God is described as all knowing including the future and unchanging in His nature. There are even passages that insist that God does not change His mind. Then, a passage like this says God did change His mind. How can we reconcile these apparently contradictory passages? It is true that the Lord does not, and never has changed His mind in the way we change our minds. When I change my mind it is because I was wrong in my opinion or conclusion and new information persuades me to adopt a new decision or perspective. God does not change His mind like that, because He is never wrong, and never learns new information that would change His decisions. However, in another important way, God does change His mind. God will change His mind to accomplish His purpose when He is dealing with violations of His standards. This principle requires us to remember that God is both just and merciful at the same time. His justice and holiness required a response of wrath against Israel. His announcement to Moses simply confirmed that unless something happened to turn aside His wrath, He must carry out His justice and give them what they deserve.

What was necessary was for someone to stand between Him and Israel as an intercessor. "Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, to turn away His wrath from destroying them." (Psalm 106:23). Had Moses not responded, Israel would have been destroyed. However, the intercession of Moses provided the basis for the Lord to turn aside His wrath as He wanted to do. This principle is the spiritual foundation for the absolute necessity of the cross. God wants to show mercy, but His justice demands a response of wrath. Only the intervention of an intercessor allows Him to respond in mercy. We can be certain that God wanted to have His wrath turned aside. If He was set on destroying Israel, He would have just done so and never started this conversation with Moses. He tells Moses to "let Me alone" as if Moses could stop Yahweh even if he wanted to do so. The Lord said this to stir the heart of Moses to step forward as an intercessor. God's change of mind was not from what He wanted to do, but from what He would have had to do.

***32:15-19 - "Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets. Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." But he said, "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; But the sound of singing I hear." It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain."***

Moses responds to the Lord's urging to return at once to the camp. He takes with him the two stone tablets of the Law. These are the tablets containing the Ten

Words written by the finger of God. Can you imagine the spiritual and historic value of these tablets. We place immeasurable value on works of art produced by the hand of Rembrandt, or significant documents such as the Declaration of Independence produced by the hand of Jefferson. How much more valuable would these two stone tablets be today that were produced by the hand of God? I recently watched on television an auction of Star Trek memorabilia in which one model of the starship from the show was sold for a bid of \$500,000. If these two original tablets were preserved today and placed on auction, what would their sale price be? Yet, when Moses, with Joshua, came near the camp and saw with his own eyes the rebellion of the people, he threw the tablets down and shattered them at the foot of Sinai. The irony of the location of the breaking of the tablets is that this was the same spot where just weeks before Israel had stood and heard the Lord declare these Ten Words with their own ears.

Was Moses at fault for shattering beyond repair the tablets which were so valuable? There is no hint here or elsewhere in Scripture that Moses was wrong to break the tablets or in any way displeased the Lord in doing so. Moses did respond in the moment with great burning anger, but this was not an anger management issue for Moses. His burning anger perfectly reflected the burning anger of the Lord at this rebellion. Even though the breaking of the tablets of the Law was not an ideal circumstance, by the sovereign plan of God, the reaction of Moses fulfilled a greater symbolic function in God's picture of redemption. The breaking of the tablets signified that the Law itself was broken. Even before the Lord could finish communicating the Law to his people they were already engaged in breaking its most important standards. The broken tablets serve as a powerful and permanent testimony of the need for a Savior Who can intercede between God's wrath and the people that deserve it. If the Law had never been broken, there would be no need for a Savior. This event shows that not even for a brief time could Israel go without seriously breaking God's holy Law. The only effective answer to the broken Law is a broken Savior!

***32:21-25 - "Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?" Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control--for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies--***

The attention of the Lord, through Moses, now turns to Aaron. The scene as Moses confronts Aaron is reminiscent of the Lord confronting Adam in the Garden of Eden after eating from the forbidden tree. The pattern of spiritual accountability seen here follows the pattern in the Garden also. There, in the

Garden, the Lord first confronted Adam, even though Eve had eaten first, because the Lord had placed Adam in authority. Aaron had been left in charge of the camp by Moses for the duration of his time on the mountain (Exodus 24:14). It was spiritually appropriate that Moses confronts Aaron as the responsible one, even though the rebellion did not start with him. It was Aaron's responsibility as the man in spiritual authority to stand against the rebellion and suppress it. At the worst, Aaron should have stood his ground and refused to give in to their demand for a god, let alone appease them by molding and carving it for them. What Moses says to Aaron indicates that he anticipates there must have been some great pressure applied to Aaron by the people in order for him to have compromised in such a serious way. Nevertheless, the Lord's judgment of Aaron's part is clear when Moses identifies "you have brought such great sin upon them." Yes, the people rebelled, but the idolatry was Aaron's responsibility. The lesson here applies to anyone placed in spiritual responsibility by the Lord. There will be pressure applied by the people being led to compromise the ways of the Lord whether it is the leader of a nation, a church, a business, or a family. The one in authority bears ultimate responsibility for holding to the right ways of God no matter the pressure.

Aaron responds to the conviction of question and rebuke of Moses. Aaron's answer would be comical if the issue was not so deadly serious. He answers with the same kind of response that Adam first gave the Lord in the Garden when confronted. "The man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.'" (Genesis 3:12). Adam shrewdly shifted responsibility from himself to Eve and even to the Lord. His answer was shrewd, but it did not fool the Lord. Adam was responsible for his decision, not Eve for giving him the fruit and not the Lord for giving him Eve. In the same vein, Aaron attempts to deflect the blame from himself to the people and even to Moses. The people were to blame because they were prone to evil and they made him make the calf. Moses was to blame indirectly for staying on the mountain for so long that his absence tempted the people. Aaron's justifications are as weak as Adam's. The lesson here for us is to learn how to bite the bullet and embrace responsibility when God's spotlight is shining on our hearts. We can't fool Him, so why even make a lame attempt to do so?

Aaron compounds his excuses for making the calf by adding one more detail in an attempt to effectively exonerate himself from any blame. When describing the construction of the golden calf he minimizes his role by saying, "I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." In other words, he chooses not to mention that he made a mold for the molten gold, and once the gold solidified in the form of a calf he worked with an engraver's tool and personally shaped it into its final form. His description implies that he barely had anything to do with it. The calf emerged from the fire having somehow shaped itself in the fire. Moses does not buy his story. Nevertheless, it is amazing the unbelievable stories men will invent to try and cover their tracks so that they can escape their accountability before the Lord.

## Questions from Exodus 31:

**Question:** Exodus 31:11 "the anointing oil also, and the fragrant incense for the holy place, they are to make them according to all that I have commanded you." Where did they get the continual supply of olive oil and other ingredients for the anointing oils. Wouldn't these require more than they could have plundered from the Egyptians. Did they have access to olive trees? If so wouldn't they have eaten the olives in addition to the manna?

**Answer:** There is nothing in the text to suggest that they had an insufficient supply of oil for their journey. Yes, it is possible that they encountered some olive trees along the way, since it is a common tree in the region, but I think that what they plundered from Egypt was their main supply of olive oil. They would not have eaten any olives they found because the olive oil was a far more valuable commodity than the olives were as a food source. The oil was used for the following purposes primarily; the initial anointing of the priests, the tabernacle, and the furnishings, which was not an ongoing daily use. The main daily usage of oil in the tabernacle was refilling the lamps on the lampstand. When considering the relatively small size of the seven lamps, compared to the 1-2 million people that left Egypt and most likely all took with them their own supply of olive oil, I do not think it is a stretch at all that there was plenty of olive oil for the purpose God had ordained (Exodus 25:6).

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## Exodus 33

**33:1-6 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way." When the people heard this sad word, they went into mourning, and none of them put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are an obstinate people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.' So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward."**

The golden calf incident is now over, and it is time to move on toward the Promised Land. The Lord instructs Moses to depart Sinai and move toward Canaan, while giving him the assurance that they will possess the land once they arrive, not because of the goodness of Israel, but because of the covenant

promise the Lord made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel encounters both the mercy and discipline of the Lord at this point. The mercy of the Lord is shown by not destroying them as they deserved for their rebellion, and reaffirming His commitment to establish them in the Promised Land. His discipline is shown with an unexpected announcement. "...for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way." The consequence of their rebellion is that they will have to complete their wilderness journey and entrance into Canaan without the presence of the Yahweh in their midst. The whole purpose of the construction of the tabernacle was so that God could dwell in the midst of His holy nation (Exodus 25:8). Their rebellion had defiled their standing before God as a holy nation, and now He would separate Himself from them. The Lord did not completely abandon them, because He would provide an angel to go before them, and His manna would continue to feed them, but His personal presence would be missing.

There is no greater consequence than the loss of His presence that the Lord can give to Israel other than death. The presence of the Lord with us is the heart and core of our relationship with God. All of His many blessings are the outflow of our connection to Him and His presence with us. It is the one great promise God had made to Moses when He first called and sent him on this mission at the burning bush. Remember, when Moses had objected and wondered how he could possibly fulfill such an impossible task, the single assurance the Lord gave Moses was that He would be present with him, implying that His presence was all that was needed. Now, as believers in the New Covenant, we have the wonderful assurance from the Lord that He is always with us, and will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Does that mean for us, that no matter what we do, or how we behave, that the Lord will continue to always bless us with the fullness of His presence? The answer is both yes and no. We are identified as the house, the temple of God in the New Covenant, and once God moves into His house, He never again moves out. So in that sense, when a true believer struggles, even with sin, the Lord does not leave him until he stops sinning. However, the continuing presence of the Lord with us, even as we sin, does not mean that our bad attitude and behavior has no effect on the quality of our fellowship with Him. The New Testament is clear that we can either please or grieve God (Ephesians 4:25-30). When we grieve Him, we discover that our fellowship with Him is not as close as before. Our motivation to walk in righteousness should be tied to our desire to always walk in the fullness of His close presence.

Some believers do not understand that God can show us both mercy and discipline at the same time. Some view them as incompatible, and that if God shows mercy, there will be no consequences, or that if there are consequences then He has not shown mercy. What they fail to understand is the goal of both God's mercy and His discipline are the same. Both are given when He chooses in order to change us and make us more holy. So, in certain circumstances, when He gives us both mercy and discipline, they are not fighting against each other, but together influencing us in two distinct ways toward holiness. God can



show mercy by withholding the full punishment we deserve for our sins, and at the same moment assign us specific consequences which are continuing reminders of the cost of rebellion to the will of God. When the Lord brings a consequence into your life, do not interpret that as a lack of mercy because any consequence He gives is not as great as what we deserve.

There is a secondary consequence the Lord gives to Israel here. They are to put off their ornaments. The ornaments included all jewelry that they had plundered from the Egyptians and which they wore as a celebration of their release from Egypt. The word used to describe their obedience to this command is that they "stripped themselves of their ornaments" is the same Hebrew word used in the exodus from Egypt when it says they "plundered" the Egyptians of these ornaments. The parallel is intentional. The point is that their rebellion has left them in the same condition as the Egyptians. The Egyptians deserved to be stripped of the ornaments that represented their pride and power, and now Israel is stripped in the same way. This is also not just a temporary consequence. They stripped themselves of ornamentation from this point forward. For the remainder of their years in the wilderness they are not allowed to wear these things. The Lord makes this a test of obedience for them on into the future so "that I may know what I shall do with you." This does not mean that the Lord does not know what to do, but that He is placing them on permanent probation in this area of behavior. If they cross this line and disobey further, then they will receive a greater consequence.

***33:7-10 - "Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp. And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent."***

Moses responds to the Lord's announced consequence. The original plan was for Moses to come down from Sinai with the unbroken tablets of the Law, and the plans for the construction of God's tabernacle which was to be the tent of meeting with His people. Because of the rebellion of Israel, there seems to be no immediate effort on the part of Moses to begin construction on the tabernacle. Instead Moses erects another tent, and pitches it outside of the camp of Israel a good distance away from the camp, but still visible to the camp. Moses designates this tent as the "tent of meeting." Moses uses the exact same wording that the Lord had used to describe the purpose of the tabernacle. It is a tent of meeting, but instead of being pitched in the middle of the camp of Israel, it is separated from the camp to show that God will not identify with Israel in their

spiritual corruption. This tent was not made according to the dimensions or design of the tabernacle, and it contained none of its furnishings. It only served as a meeting place for God to meet with Moses alone.

This tent was a tangible display of both the mercy and consequence of the Lord for their sin. The consequence was that it was outside the camp and daily reminded the people that God was no longer as close to them as He would have been in the tabernacle. Yet, the tent also showed them His mercy. It was merciful for God to allow this tent to even be close enough to be seen by Israel. It was an encouraging reminder that God had not completely abandoned them. They all observed each day as the pillar of smoke and fire descended at the entrance of the tent. But, they also saw that the pillar of cloud never entered the tent, but would only stand at the entrance as God spoke with Moses there. The reason the pillar never entered the tent was that it was not His house, like He had described the tabernacle. God would only move into His own home, once it was finished.

***33:11-17 - "Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" The LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name."***

In spite of the deterioration of the relationship between the Lord and Israel, the relationship between the Lord and Moses continues to grow. It is one thing for a person to think that they are close to the Lord when they are not, and another thing when the Lord describes His relationship with a person as a "face to face" relationship. This phrase was a common way to describe what we now call an intimate relationship. This is a relationship of true friendship that has developed between the Lord and Moses. When their relationship first began at the burning bush, Moses objected and tried to back out when the Lord gave him a mission he did not want to do. Even when the Lord gave Moses the assurance of His presence for the duration of his mission, Moses wanted no part of it and tried every way he could to not have to go. Now, the Lord confirms for Moses that his mission has not changed and that he is still to lead Israel on to Canaan. This

time, Moses has only one objection. Moses only wants the full assurance of the Lord that His presence will go with them. After seeing the ten plagues, the Red Sea opened, water flow from the rock, manna from heaven, victory over Amalek, and the glory of the Lord on Sinai the only concern he has is whether the Lord goes with them. If He does, then all will be well, but if not, then there is no point in taking another step forward. Moses now recognizes that it is only the Lord's presence in their midst that makes Israel special. Without the Lord, they are no different or better than Egypt.

In this exchange, Moses cries out to the Lord and asks something for himself. His request is not selfish, but is the kind of prayer that pleases the Lord. His prayer is, "...let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight." I love this prayer; it is one of my favorite prayers in the Bible, and one which I have followed the example of Moses in praying many times. His heart is that he wants to know the Lord. Moses already knows the Lord. In fact, he knows the Lord better than any other person on earth at this time. What this prayer teaches me is that the more Moses came to know the Lord, the more he desired to know the Lord in an even greater way. Like a moth to the light, Moses had encountered perfection in the Lord and he just had to draw closer.

Moses also prayed with growing wisdom. His desire was to know the Lord more intimately, but he also understood how the Lord would answer that prayer. Knowing the Lord at the level Moses desired is much more than simply having certain warm feelings toward Him. In order to really grow in his relationship with the Lord, it would be necessary for the Lord to cause Moses to know the Lord's ways. It is in knowing His ways that Moses would know Him better. This is a prayer focused on a deepening friendship. Friendships are based in shared things. At a certain level shared experiences can be the basis for friendship. But, the deepest friendships are formed in learning the ways of your friend and learning to share those ways. In a human to human friendship that process requires some adjustments on the part of both in the friendship as they learn each other's ways and adopt them as their own. In a friendship with God, the adjustment is all on our part, of course, because God is not going to learn our ways in order to become more like us. Growing in our relationship with the Lord is all about us learning about His ways and making those ways more and more our own.

Real Christian growth begins and ends here. "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel." (Psalm 103:7). This passage from Psalms highlights the difference in the relationship Moses had with the Lord compared to the relationship Israel had with Him. The Lord made His acts known to Israel in the plagues, the Red Sea, the manna, at Sinai, etc., but Israel did not grow because they never learned the ways of the Lord. Our spiritual growth is measured by how much we change from the day of our salvation, and progressively grow more like Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Without knowing His ways, we are left guessing regarding what direction to grow. One of the great studies

you can do in the Scriptures, and I hope this study is encouraging for you, is to pay close attention not just to what the Lord does, but how, why and in what way He does what He does. Knowing the ways of God in His holiness, justice, mercy, grace, love, compassion, discipline, instruction, provision, protection, direction, etc. is the raw material the Lord uses to transform us and make us more like Him. We can be 100% confident that this prayer pleased the Lord because He immediately responds and tells Moses that He will give him what he has asked.

***33:18-23 - "Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."***

I love the heart of Moses here. He has just asked something huge of the Lord in his cry to know the ways of the Lord in order to know Him and be favored by Him. The Lord has answered his prayer. If it were me, I might consider that a full day's accomplishment and end my prayer satisfied with the gracious answer of the Lord to my prayer. Moses is not finished however. The Lord's gracious answer emboldens Moses to stretch his faith in prayer to the limit. He now cries out, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" This is the single greatest thing any human can ask of God in this world. This is the pinnacle of all of the prayers of Moses. By asking for a revelation of God's glory, he was asking to see what no man can see in this world and survive the experience. He was asking to see God in the full manifestation of His glorious nature. His glory in visible expression is a light far brighter than looking directly at the sun at midday. Moses shows no concern for the effect it will have on him if God chooses to answer his prayer, he just knows that what he is asking is to see that which is greater than anything in this creation.

What is particularly amazing about this prayer of Moses is the background which leads to this request. Moses has already seen more of God's glory than any human being in all of history up until this moment including Noah, Abraham, Jacob, or anyone else. Moses saw the glory of God in the burning bush. He saw the glory of God in His mighty acts in Egypt. He saw the glory of God in the pillar of smoke and fire. Above all that, He has just spent forty days in the direct presence of God in the midst of the Shekinah glory cloud on Sinai. After all he has seen, his one great desire is to see more of God's glory. The one problem with the request of Moses is a practical one. Moses will not survive the full revelation of God's glory. Yet, the prayer honors the Lord and pleases Him. The Lord grants the request of Moses and essentially tells him that He is going to

show him as much of His glory as he can stand and survive seeing.

The radiance of God's glory is so powerful that the only way Moses can see it and live, is if the Lord takes special precautions to shield Moses from harm. The precautions are that the Lord declares that he will not show His face to Moses. The bottom-line, is if God shows His unveiled face to Moses, that it will kill him. The Lord describes that He will place Moses in the cleft of a rock which will help shield Moses from the radiation of His glory. Then, the Lord will cover, or shield Moses further with His hand. This does not mean that God has a physical hand, but that in the form in which He is going to appear to Moses He will put forth His hand and block some of the excessive glory from reaching Moses. Then He is going to pass by Moses in the cleft. Once He passes by, He will allow Moses to see His "back." Effectively, what Moses will be allowed to see of God's glory is what we could describe as His afterglow!

To fully see the Lord's glory, the Lord is going to reveal to Moses more than the physical eyes of Moses can contain however. The Lord is going to show Moses His afterglow, but He is also going to proclaim with His own name in the hearing of Moses as He passes by. The Lord calls this making all His "goodness pass before" Moses. His goodness is the sum total of all His attributes in expression. Moses will see the goodness of God in His radiant glory, but he will hear the goodness of God as He proclaims His own name. Proclaiming His name means rehearsing His essential attributes in a personal declaration about Himself for Moses. These are things Moses already knows about God, but hearing Him proclaim them in this way will create a deeper understanding of the nature and ways of God. Then the Lord gives Moses an explanation of why He is going to do this for him. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." The meaning of this declaration is that the Lord does not owe this to Moses. Moses does not deserve to see and hear what the Lord is about to show him. The Lord is going to do this for one reason; because He wants to. The emphasis is on the absolute freedom of God to make Himself known to whom He wills. This is the first lesson to learn as we grow to know the Lord in a greater way. We cannot bring ourselves closer to God, but we draw close as He chooses to make Himself known to us.