

Devotional Meditations on the Book of Exodus

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Note: this is a draft copy still in need of editing

#1 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 1

The word "Genesis" literally means "beginning." The book takes its name from the first word of chapter 1: "In the beginning." We can rightly call it a prologue to God's history of redemption. It was written by Moses during the time of the Exodus and contains the history that predates and leads up to the formation of the nation of Israel.

The book of Exodus thus marks a new beginning. In Genesis 1 God commanded mankind to be "fruitful and multiply" while they fill the earth and subdue it to his glory. They were free in Eden from all sin and tyranny. There was no death or oppression. They served a gracious, loving, and good God who provided abundantly for them.

Now at the beginning of Exodus we see parallels to the beginning of Genesis. Note how in verse 7 Moses tells us that they were "fruitful" and "multiplied" and increased greatly. The creation mandate for all mankind carries over into the redemptive nation of Israel.

But there are some major differences. Instead of the freedom of Eden there is now slavery. Instead of the fruitfulness of a garden, there is fruitless labor. Instead of blessing there is the reality of the curse. By the pain in their backs and the sweat of their brow they barely eat bread. The joy of meaningful work is replaced with the bitterness of harsh servitude. Karl Marx definitely struck a cord describing the bitterness and curse of labor and slavery, but he was blind to its spiritual source and heavenly solution through God's power.

Sin has twisted God's creative design. Israel increases in population in keeping with his creation commission. But their increase in number only multiplies their misery. The blessing of children becomes fear and trepidation as the king of Egypt seeks to kill all the male children. The joy of increase is replaced with the dread of loss in the prospect of their certain death.

This is, in part, due to the fear of an oppressive monarch who does not wish to lose his grip on power. (Incidentally, if you want a window into the chief motivation of all human rulers, this is it: they are only afraid of losing power!).

But spiritually speaking it is a manifestation of a deeper principle first expressed in Genesis 3. The seed of the serpent is at war with the seed of the woman. The serpent will strike at his heel, but his head will eventually be crushed.

The murder of the male babies not only ensures a limitation of their number, but also the fact that no redeemer or savior will arise from among them. The prophecy of Genesis 3:16 is that redemption will come through a male child. We saw previews of that future hope in Cain (which turned out to be misplaced) and Noah (cf. Gen. 5:29). Neither man ushered in the new order God had promised. In particular, Noah was unable to free them from the toil of the labor of their hands.

Although the serpent seeks to crush the redeemer's head, God will raise up a redeemer from among oppressed Israel: Moses. This pattern will repeat in the life of Jesus, when Herod seeks to kill all the male babies born in the time of Christ (Matthew 2:13-18). But God will preserve the Savior until the time of his sacrifice.

Out of sin and death, God will bring righteousness and life. Out of bondage, God will bring freedom. Out of a wilderness, God will bring them to a garden-land flowing with milk and honey.

The Christian faith centers on how God graciously brings a new beginning for his people. This cannot come through human power or working. Man will not work his way from heaven to earth—from the state of sin and misery to the state of salvation. On their own they are slaves. Freedom comes from God through Jesus Christ. It will not come through Moses, although he foretold and typified those days. It can only come through Christ. It will not come through human triumph and political might. It will only come through embracing suffering, trusting in God to bring his deliverance in his good time.

Today as God's people we must remind ourselves that we are heirs of this new beginning. His mercies are new every morning as we are refreshed in this hope. It has already started in Christ's resurrection and will certainly be completed in his second coming. In the interim it is ours simply to trust him, wait upon him, and devote ourselves to him while we long for his glorious appearing.

#2 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 2

Exodus 2 tells the story of the birth of a redeemer. The promise of Genesis 3:16 is that a seed of the woman would arise to crush the head of the serpent. Through the previous book of Moses, God had preserved his chosen line from which this Redeemer would come.

Although they have multiplied greatly they face the prospect of possible extinction. Pharaoh has forgotten Joseph, just as the cupbearer did. The children of the free woman have become slaves in Egypt.

But God has not forgotten them. This, too, was from God's word. The Lord told Abraham back in Genesis 15:3 that his descendants would sojourn in another land as slaves for 400 years, but afterward they would come out with great possessions. Nothing is outside the plan and promise of God.

With the appearance of Moses, that time has arrived. At his birth, he was seen to be a "fine child." This is likely a reference to his striking appearance. It is not immediately clear why this is significant. Some connect it to the shining face of Moses later in the story. Others think that it relates to the Egyptians preoccupation with beauty and appearance. It could simply be that the appearance of Moses served to turn the heart of Pharaoh's daughter towards him. Who can resist a cute baby?

His mother hides him for three months. Hebrews 11 says that she did this "by faith." Anyone who has had an infant baby knows how difficult it would be to keep him quiet that long. Imagine the long, anxious nights when the Egyptians were actively on the hunt for the baby boys. It took a great deal of faith to keep that up during her entire pregnancy and early childhood.

After three months she can no longer hide him. So she makes a pretty big gamble. She takes him to the river and makes a little "ark" for him (the same Hebrew word used to

describe Noah's ship). Perhaps she is hoping that someone will find him and not know his Hebrew origin. If that is the case, it clearly doesn't fool Pharaoh's daughter who immediately recognizes him as a Hebrew baby. Perhaps she is trusting in the natural compassion of a fellow human being. Even hardened humans will show mercy to infants. A fellow female is an even more likely candidate for a compassionate rescue.

She takes pity on him and eventually adopts him as her own. In God's providence, she also finds his natural mother to be her nursemaid. Her bet has paid off more than she could have imagined.

Two things are striking about this narrative. First, the deliverer here appears in a form of weakness. He is only a baby. The deliverer arrives in a lowly form. He must first be delivered before he can be the deliverer.

Second, the deliverer is saved through water. This recalls Noah's flood but also looks forward to the crossing of the Red Sea.

Moses appeared in the same pattern of Christ. They manifest God's power through their weakness. Both are born as helpless children. Delivered by God in his infancy when he was powerless (see Matthew 2-3), he is also crucified in weakness as an adult. Salvation comes through a man-child, but the man can only be born of a woman. Salvation comes through her in what is uniquely hers: childbearing. Men who look down on women in their domestic calling are utter fools. Every man is born of woman. Without her he is nothing. Feminism makes the same mistake from the opposite angle. It starts with the assumption that only a "man's" work is of "real" value and thus degrades that which is God's particular calling to the woman. God was pleased to exalt that which was considered lowly in the eyes of men and woman. He brought salvation for Israel and for all nations through the faith of a mother.

In the next scene, Moses makes his first attempt at delivering his people. Rejecting his privileged status as a member of Pharaoh's house, he struck down an Egyptian

oppressing a Hebrew. But Israel will not receive him, and Pharaoh seeks to kill him for it.

In fear, Moses flees to Midian. There he finds Zipporah and becomes lives as a shepherd for forty years. The mighty Moses did not begin his ministry on a high note. He was filled with fear, not faith. But this, too, was in God's plan. He was waiting for the right time and had chosen this to be the place where he would reveal himself to Moses in the burning bush.

These episodes collectively remind us that as great as Moses is, he is not the final deliverer. Moses himself has already told us this. As Genesis 49 indicated, the true redeemer will come from the tribe of Judah, whereas Moses descends from Levi.

Moses was a great servant in God's house, but Jesus is the Son who is over it all. He was faithful, just as Moses was. Although Pharaoh forgot the blessing the family of the Hebrews became to the Egyptians, God did not forget. He heard their groanings and their cry for mercy. In the fulness of times, God heard the cries of his people in every nation and sent his Son to redeem them.

#3 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 3

Moses' life had prepared him for leadership. His life was not only preserved by divine providence in his infancy, but God also placed him in a high position during his upbringing. He grew up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Raised in power and privilege, he was in a strategic position to lead his people. Like Joseph before him, God seemed to be setting the stage for an amazing intervention through Moses.

But the previous pattern of God's providence took a different turn with Moses. Having attempted to deliver his people from Egyptian oppression, he was rejected by his own people. Alienated from Pharaoh he was forced to flee to Midian.

Although this all takes place in a few brief chapters, it actually summarizes a fairly long period of time. The book of Acts tells us that he was 40 years old when he first sought to deliver his people (Acts 7:23). He then spent another 40 years in Midian away from God's calling (Acts 7:30).

Think about that for a minute. This means Moses was 80 years old when God spoke to him out of the burning bush. It is true that he lived to be 120. But even measured proportionally by that number it is quite late in his life to be wrestling with a sense of calling. Most of us today would think of age 80 as well into the time of our lives where we need to settle down and retire. But Moses was just getting started.

That is a long time to wrestle with God's purpose for your life, especially if you are called to be a leader. Moses knew that leadership entailed suffering and misery. Far from being a privileged status that would serve to encourage his own ego, it was instead a load of responsibility that seemed too great to bear.

We can see Moses's reluctance to accept God's call throughout the narrative. But we also see God's mercy to encourage him.

Three times Moses questions God's call to him. Each time he brings up a different "excuse." First, he points to the people: "...they will not believe me or listen to my voice" (3:1). In this Moses is correct, albeit not really acting in faith. Most of the time the people will not listen! Moses is given powerful, miraculous signs to demonstrate that he is being sent by God. His staff will transform back and forth from a serpent and then a staff. There is some theological symbolism here, in that the serpent is the figure of the devil, who is under the control and power of God. Second, Moses is told to put his hand in and out of his cloak, where it becomes leprous and then clean again. There is yet more theological symbolism here. Leprosy makes one ceremonially unclean. The miracle is thus not only a manifestation of God's raw power showing him to be a messenger from God. It also tells us about the message: God will make the unclean clean, and the unholy holy. Finally, God gives him the power to transform the water of the Nile into blood. The blood indicates that death is coming, either for judgment or redemption. This will culminate in the final plague of the death of the firstborn and the substitutionary blood of the Passover lamb.

With these signs, Moses would demonstrate himself to have authority from God. The signs were not only to help Israel accept Moses, but they also were for Moses to be assured of his call. Every true leader is filled with self-doubt about their own inadequacies. Moses will highlight this in the next part of the dialogue: "I am not eloquent!" For us, it is quite humorous that Moses would say this about himself. We know him as the greatest literary figure of the ancient world, the human author of the five books of the Bible. If he is not eloquent, then no one is!

On the one hand, this kind of self-doubt does evidence an important quality for any leader in God's church: humility. Moses was the meekest man who ever lived. It seems he was naturally disposed to not make much of himself. But sometimes self-doubt is a mask for self-trust. We doubt ourselves because we believe success is dependent upon our power or abilities. True humility makes weds confidence with self-deprecation. We can do nothing, but can do anything.

The passage concludes with Moses answering God's call and tying up the loose ends of his unfaithfulness in fleeing to Midian. I think this is the best way to interpret his late

circumcision of his son and the interchange with his wife over the whole matter. But we don't have space to explore this further.

Moses went as God had told him, and the people believed (at least initially).

In the fulness of times, this pattern would repeat with Jesus. Although he never shirked away from his responsibilities as the leader of God's people, he did wrestle with God's calling. He never sinned when he did this and remained perfectly submissive and obedient. But the struggle was real. He spoke of an impending baptism on the cross and declare that he was filled with distress until it was accomplished (Luke 12:50). In the garden of Gethsemane, he prayed to the Lord saying: "Father, if you are willing take this cup from me." But he quickly added: "Not my will, but thy will be done."

He did miracle signs that undeniably ratified him as a messenger from God. The people and even his enemies could not deny it. But they still rejected him and hung him on a tree. Yet in this, he became the faithful Son over God's house and the sacrificial lamb to save his people from death.

We may wrestle with God's calling to us, whether with our ordained office in the church or our general office as Christian. Most of the time we understand exactly what God is calling us to do. We just don't want to do it because it requires us to take upon ourselves responsibility and sacrifice. Thankfully we have a Savior who never shirked away from these responsibilities. He was rejected by men and even by God on the cross. But the Lord raised him from the dead. By faith, we participate in that victory already as we await the consummation.

Let us then give ourselves fully to what God has called us. Let us empty ourselves in his service as he fills us with his power and love.

#4 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 4

Sometimes things surprise us and don't turn out the way we expect. Other times we are not surprised.

I know that latter statement sounds inconsistent, but life is sometimes contradictory. We can often cherish a set of expectations for our lives but know deep down know that they probably won't be realized. Our thoughts follow the principles of logic and do not like this kind of incoherence. Unfortunately, our emotions don't like to cooperate with our reason.

Moses has spent a good chunk of the last few chapters seeking to convince God that he is not the best man to deliver God's people. Part of that has to do with himself: he is not eloquent enough. Part of that has to do with the people he's going to deliver: Israelites will not believe him or obey his voice.

Moses has been through this before. This is not his first rodeo. He is 80 years old and knows the ropes pretty well. Early on he took a great risk in seeking to deliver God's people from the oppression of the Egyptians. What thanks did he get for it? His attempts to help others only caused trouble for him personally. When he knew Pharaoh was after him, he got up and fled. He went to Midian for 40 years. He wanted nothing to do with God's people or the task of leadership. Instead, he went away. The troubles were out of sight and out of mind.

Moses's reservations did not dissipate. He had good reason for them. This was not a situation where a person's self-doubt is not based in reality. All too often a person will lack the confidence necessary to do what God sets before them. An athlete who has been defeated in one phase of an event has to learn to quickly turn the page and do better in the next phase. A good coach understands how to encourage them that they might regain their confidence and succeed. In these instances, they need encouragement and a ratification of their gifts and abilities.

Not so here. Moses's fears are fulfilled. When he finally comes before Pharaoh in God's name and demands that he let God's people go, everything gets worse in the short term. Pharaoh increases the burdens on the Israelites. Now they have to make bricks without straw. At least before the Pharaoh was satisfied with their labor. Now he accuses them of being "lazy" and makes their life bitter with hard labor.

[As a sidenote, note the hallmarks of a tyrant: unreasonable and irrational demands are placed upon a people which actually work to the net detriment of the society they govern. When they are confronted with their unreasonable stipulations, they turn the tables and blame the citizens for their problems. They then appeal to their raw power to enforce their arbitrary decrees. This is certainly a frustrating environment for any people. They should take courage and have patience, knowing full well from this story that God does not take well to tyrants.]

All too often people think of the Christian faith as a magic bullet that will immediately solve many of life's problems. It is certainly true that in so far as repentance frees us from sin there is an immediacy to the spiritual blessedness we feel as Christians. The prodigal son certainly enjoyed the transition from eating pods with the pigs to feast in in his father's house. But this does not mean that we will be immediately free from troubles. To be sure, many who experience a sudden conversion to Christianity can be instilled with a high degree of spiritual adrenaline. If one has never seen the day, the first rays of dawn might seem like the noonday. But we have to get through the morning (the toughest part of the day for many) before we can see full daylight. Before we Christ's glory, we must bear the cross.

#5 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 5

Exodus 5 is structured around a grand contrast between slavish labor and festive, worshipful rest. Israel's present sufferings take the form of laboring under the harsh taskmaster of Pharaoh. The misery and pain of this slavery is clearly seen and keenly felt.

What is not clearly "seen" is the worshipful rest to which Israel is called. That is clearly an unseen, future hope. Moses and Aaron are sent to Pharaoh to declare to him on behalf of God: "Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness." Their present misery in slavish labor is set in contrast to the still unseen, future hope of joyous, worshipful rest.

Whatever hope and anticipation Israel had of freedom is quickly dashed. Moses and Aaron's efforts result in even greater suffering and misery for the people of God. Attempts at liberation only make matters worse. As happens several times in the Exodus narrative, Israel longs to stay in what "safe." Slavery may be miserable, but it is the "seen" and the "familiar." The harsh taskmaster at least offers predictable stability.

What a vivid picture of the spiritual dilemma of the Christian church. On one hand, she has called to an unseen hope of worship for rest in Christ. The pathway through the wilderness to that place is filled with trials and difficulties. But the present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory of what is to come.

At the same time, we still feel the pull of slavery to sin. It offers temporary pleasures and comforts, but also delivers obvious and potent miseries in our lives.. When we seek to turn from them in repentance, we still feel the pull of the "visible" and very present pleasures they offer. Like Israel, we long to go back to the "fleshpots of Egypt" even though we know full well the slavery that goes along with them.

A Christian is called to something different.. It is perhaps best summarized in Hebrews 11:24-25, which describes the faith of Moses: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."

This is the choice we are faced with in every hour of temptation. Will we exchange the worshipful rest of eternity for the fleeting pleasures of sin? In the end the latter only delivers slavery and misery.

#6 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 6

Christians have a reciprocal union with the Lord. Relating to the God of the Bible is not a one way street. We are related to God and he relates to us. He is our God and we are his people. Obviously, God has the priority in this relationship. He is the sovereign Lord. We are not his equal. But in grace takes delight in the service and love his people give him.

God's covenant love that is the source of his redeeming power for his people. He hears their groanings and the misery of their slavery. He listens to their cry and answers from heaven. He has mercy on them in their harsh slavery and broken spirit.

The covenant also involves headship. In other words, God relates to mankind through their representatives. It is noteworthy that the chapter expresses these principles in verses 14-25, which contains a list of the heads of the clans of Israel. Moses also was a typical mediator--a representative of Israel to God and God to Israel.

Ultimately these things come to fullest expression in Christ. He is the sum of the covenant. In him God and man become one: two natures in one person without conversion, composition, or confusion. In him God's compassion and mercy are fully revealed. He heals and casts out demons, showing love to the miserable. He is the one and only true mediator between God and man, who gave himself as a ransom for all his people.

He is the Passover lamb and the High Priest; the firstborn of God who gave his life that the angel of death may not touch us. He is greater than Moses—even as the son in a house is greater than the servant. He brings us to the true land of freedom where sin and death will be no more.

#7 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 7

I know it is hard for us to believe, but Moses was not an eloquent man. The same could be said of the Apostle Paul. By the standards of professional "rhetoric," they did not see themselves as great speakers. Thankfully, there is a difference between the written and the spoken word! They may have been weak with their tongues (by human standards), but they were mighty with the pen. They were both interested primarily in the truth of what they said as opposed to the verbal ornamentation of the way they said it.

To be sure, there are some differences between the two. Paul may have been ridiculed by the professional speakers of the day, but he was nonetheless a powerful preacher by God's standards. When he came to preach to the Gentiles, they thought Barnabas was Zeus (a more powerful God) and Paul Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

Moses, however, does appear to be weak in the tongue. The Scripture does say that he was the meekest man on earth. To use modern language, he probably was not an extrovert. He did not take naturally to a position of leadership (as we have seen in the previous chapters).

For this reason, God makes an arrangement with Moses and Aaron which reflects the relationship between God and the prophets. The Lord appoints Moses to be like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron will be his prophet. In other words, just as God sends messengers on his behalf, so Moses will send Aaron in his place before Pharaoh.

God does not deal directly with his people. There is no way for us to approach him immediately (i.e. without a mediator) because our sin makes it impossible for us to survive the searing purity of his holiness. Moses was a type of the one and only true Mediator, Jesus Christ. The relationship between Moses and Aaron is thus a type of the type to help Israel better understand how God was working.

God works through men. He delegates his great power to weak human vessels. This becomes a great stumbling block for many. It was so to Pharaoh, whose heart was

continually hardened even though he saw the undeniable power of God at work in Moses. It was also a stumbling block to Israel, who was blind to God's power in him, constantly complaining about the hardships God brought to them and quickly forgetting his mighty works.

Therefore, the chapter introduces the miracles promised earlier by the Lord to Moses. The staff is cast down and turned into a snake. The magicians of Egypt copy it with a false sign and wonder (characteristic of Satan's kingdom) and Pharaoh's heart is hardened. The water of the Nile is turned to blood (along with their canals, ponds, and pools). The magicians also copied this mighty work, and Pharaoh's heart was hardened once again.

Pharaoh saw the undeniable power of God, but his heart remained unmoved. This was, in part, because he refused to acknowledge that God was at work through Moses. God's decision to work his power through a weak man was (in part) the stumbling block he could not get over.

The same will be true in the fullness of times in Jesus. The Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a mighty warrior to lead an army against the Romans. This is clearly what the disciples thought. This also explains their preoccupation with arguing over who will be the greatest in Christ's kingdoms. But they missed the fact that Christ came in weakness so that God's power might be fully manifested in him.

Think of this: even though Jesus was God, the Bible tells us that he emptied himself of his divine prerogatives and privileges in his humiliation (Philippians 2). This does not mean he lost his divine nature (which is impossible). Instead, it means that he did not take advantage of the privileges of that power for himself. Thus, in his temptation, he did not turn the stones into bread, even though he could have easily done so. On the cross, he did not call down 10,000 legions of angels (who would have decimated his accusers and enemies in a second). He was weak so that God's power would be strong through him.

Although he is no longer in his state of humiliation, he continues to work through weak men. Central to the life of the church in the OT and the NT is the role of ordained officers to teach, rule, and care for the church. It is easy for church members to see their weaknesses and shortcomings. As those entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, they speak and act on behalf of God (although they are fallible agents). Anyone who has any proximity to God will have their faults exposed clearly for all to see. A candle may seem bright in a dark room, but next to the sun its light appears as nothing. So a divinely-ordained position of leadership naturally causes our shortcomings to stand out. These men have a God-sized responsibility laid upon weak, human shoulders.

Even as the church may have to properly address problems and sins among their leaders in a God-honoring way, they must remember that God chooses men for these roles precisely because they contrast so starkly with him in his divine power. They have nothing in themselves to offer the church except Christ, who comes to us through his word. If church members think they would be happier if only they had better, more eloquent, more effective leaders, they need look no farther than Moses. He was the greatest leader of the OT, and his people constantly complained against his leadership.

Church leaders should take heart from this reality as well. There is nothing more debilitating to the spirit than to pour oneself out in the service of Christ for his people, only to be on the receiving end of unjust criticism. Like Moses, they must embody the spirit of meekness. Even overblown criticism likely has an element of truth to it. It's being magnified or put under the microscope is probably not a God-honoring way for them to bring it up. Likewise, we can't really analyze a person's faithfulness as a leader unless we take into account the full balance of their efforts in terms of the way God's gifts are manifested in them. It is quite common that leaders who are strong in one area tend to also be weak in another. Hence both Moses and Aaron are given different tasks. Likewise, although people can get upset that one area of the church's life isn't getting the care and attention that they would like it is often because another area of the church needs greater care and attention.

The important thing to remember is that behind all human words (whether stated poorly or well) is the Lord God. He is at work to soften and to harden, to save and to judge. The task of leaders and of God's sheep does not change no matter what comes their way. They are to patiently trust in God to do what he has promised in his time and in his ways.

We are weak. He has chosen us for this very reason so that his power may be manifested through us, that he might receive all the glory and honor.

#8-10 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 8-10

The tail end of Exodus 7 saw the beginning of the 10 plagues of God upon the Egyptians. Most of the plagues follow a stylized pattern. Pharaoh is first told to let God's people go and then warned of an impending plague. The plague then comes and Pharaoh asks for relief, only to then harden his heart and refuse to listen.

There are some differences as the plagues increase in severity. Sometimes Pharaoh is warned and sometimes God strikes without warning. Sometimes it says that God harden Pharaoh's heart, and other times it says that he hardened his own heart. Sometimes the plague affects everyone, and sometimes the Israelites are explicitly exempted from the plague.

So there is a pattern, but not one that is slavishly followed. Call it reveals both an order to his divine workings, but one in which his sovereign freedom is manifested.

We don't have the space in the devotionals to cover all the details in the passage. Indeed, if we tried to cover all the OBJ small details we could write volumes of books, much of which would not really edify you. That is not to say such detailed study is of no value. The problem is that it can easily distract us from the core point. We focus on the leaves of the trees and lose the forest. The Bible is characterized by its simple clarity. Even the unlearned in a due use of the ordinary means can attain to a saving and edifying understanding of it. Our focus in these devotionals (and by extension, our devotional time with God more generally) is to draw near to him through the simple truth revealed within his word OBJ OBJ OBJ. We must never lose sight of the fact that when we read the word of God we confront God himself. God reveals himself through it. We can never take the word of the majestic God and use it merely as a way to satisfy or stimulate our intellectual curiosity.

OBJ The goal of all Bible study is edification. We have to ask the question: what is God teaching me about my faith and life in Christ in this passage? We can easily get lost in the details and deceive ourselves into thinking we have done an act of devotion and service to God, when we are really just satisfying intellectual or spiritual curiosity.

We can we say about these plagues? Some main themes jump out.

First of all, each of the plagues is a judgment not just against Pharaoh and the political entity that he rules. It is a judgment against an invisible spiritual world that stands behind it. This is explicitly stated in Exodus 12:12, but it would not have been a point easily missed by the original readers. The Egyptians worshiped many gods. The chief

among them was a Ra, god of the sun. It's not without humorous irony that one of the last plagues involves the darkening of the sun. The sun-god who gives light to the world goes totally dark! The plagues are thus a demonstration of God's omnipotent, divine power over the entire created cosmos.^[OBJ]

Secondly the plagues also revealed the concursus between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It's an age old philosophical and theological dilemma as to whether man has any kind of free will, and whether God is totally sovereign. The Bible presents a picture of our relationship with God such that he is completely and entirely sovereign. He foreordains whatsoever comes to pass works all things according to the council of his will. ^[OBJ] Yet he exercises that sovereignty in a way that does no violence to the will of the creature. This means that while God at every point has the priority (for who will be so stupid and foolish to argue that their will is greater than God's?), he never forces anyone against their will. God foreordains that sins will be committed, but the humans that commit them freely choose to do so and take delight in them. Thus it is sometimes said that God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and at other times that he hardens his own heart. Some use the latter verse to cancel out the former, but this is not Moses' intention. As Romans 9 indicates, God's power and sovereignty is manifested in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, not Pharaoh's power and sovereignty.

Finally we can rightly say that the plagues of Egypt are eschatological. That's a mouthful of a word that simply means that the plagues reflect what will happen at the end of the world. Eschatology has to do with the "last things." The plagues are a preview and anticipation of the final judgment God will bring upon rebellious mankind. Indeed, it is a preview of the final plagues that God will bring over the forces of darkness ruled by Satan that keeps the entire world in bondage.

This ensures that the plagues, rightly understood, must be seen in the light of Christ our Savior. He is, after all, the Passover Lamb reflected in the final plague. Through him alone the angel of death passes over us, neither can the darkness touch us. He is one greater than Moses who brings a final deliverance not only for the Jewish people but also for all nations.

Exodus 11

The previous devotion on this book was intended to cover Exodus 9–10. So we pick up in chapter 11.

I've heard many debates between Christians and atheists. One common argument against believing in God is the claim that there isn't enough evidence. The atheist will go further with a stronger claim that due to evil a good God cannot exist. The atheist claims are simple: insufficient evidence for a good God, and a lot of evidence against him.

But there's a problem with this line of reasoning. Nine plagues weren't enough to convince Pharaoh. Thousands of miracles also won't be enough to convince the Jewish leaders in Jesus's day. In these circumstances, it's hard to imagine a greater amount of evidence available to more people at a single time. Evidence is only persuasive to those who can hear it and see it. The blind and the deaf cannot acknowledge what is in front of them because they are unable to see and hear it.

You might wonder why God went to such great lengths to demonstrate his power in the 10 plagues of Egypt. Why wouldn't one be sufficient?

Concerning Israel, God was demonstrating his infinite mercy to his objects of grace. He loved them and cared for them. He protected them through some of the worst plagues such that they did not touch them.

But with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God was demonstrating his infinite power towards objects of wrath prepared for destruction. He is the potter and we are the clay. He has the right to do with his creation whatsoever he desires. But he is also perfectly just, and will not even give the appearance of injustice when he judges the world.

For this reason, he gives Pharaoh nine plagues before giving final judgment. Time after time he sufficiently evidences his existence and power as well as his mercy. How many times does Pharaoh have the opportunity to repent! How many times does God relent of the plague even with a token change in his attitude! God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

When this process is completed, is it not plain to all that Pharaoh's destruction lies solely and only in himself? He was a brutal dictator who oppressed his own citizens to the detriment of himself and the nation. God allowed his evil to persist for a time only to demonstrate his perfect justice and execute judgment upon him.

This pattern will be repeated in Christ. The psalmists cried out for centuries: "how long, O Lord, until you come to rescue us?" God's delay caused them great consternation. But there was a purpose behind it. God sought to wait until "just the right time" to send Christ to die for the ungodly.

As the centuries passed, it became clear that mankind was totally unable to save themselves. The Gentiles had planned themselves headlong into lawless idolatry and depravity. Even the Jews had succumbed to the temptation of the flesh, corrupting the pure worship of God with the perversion of the nations. Like Israel immediately after the exodus, they forgot about the Lord and turn their own way.

When all seemed lost in the whole world had abandoned God, he chose to send his firstborn Son into the world. He would be our Passover lamb. Death would touch him, but his blood would touch us. Exchanging life for life, he would absorb our death. In his crucifixion, God revealed more plainly than ever the hardness of sinful man's hearts and their inability to save themselves. God came into the world and was visible in human flesh before their very eyes, but they rejected him and crucified him.

What great mercy we have been shown in Christ, God's firstborn son. As he was patient with the world, so he is patient with us individually. How slow we are to see his grace and how easily we become like the Israelites, complaining and grumbling about earthly inconveniences even while we possess an infinite heavenly treasure.

The story is likewise a warning to us. The fact that God has delayed judgment does not mean judgment is not coming. If we are living in sin we can easily deceive ourselves by misinterpreting God's patients. Rather than seeing it as a gracious opportunity to allow

us to repent, we may see it as a tacit divine affirmation of our evil ways. We need look no further than Pharaoh's great fall to see the foolishness of this way of thinking.

#12 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 12

Exodus 12 is about beginnings and endings. On the one hand, it previews an ending: the last of the 10 plagues was the death of the firstborn. Pharaoh oppressed God's firstborn son. God will therefore strike down every firstborn among the Egyptians. The ending of the plagues is imminent. The chance for repentance is almost over. The "judgment" phase of God's mighty works is coming to an end.

But Exodus 12 also marks a new beginning. It contains the institution of the Passover celebration. The text tells us that this feast is to mark the "beginning of months." With the Passover, time starts anew for the nation of Israel.

Therefore, every year would we begin with a reminder. On the one hand, they would remember God's fearful judgment against his enemies. Time will not go on indefinitely. One day judgment will come. On the other hand, they will be reminded of God's mercy and grace to those who trust in him. The Passover feast contains a picture and type of God's greater work to come. He would substitute firstborn for firstborn. The adopted firstborn son would be saved through the substitution of God's eternal firstborn son.

What is true nationally in type and shadow is also true spiritually and individually. Our life in Christ starts with the death and resurrection of the firstborn son of God. Just as the Levitical sacrifices began with a bloody, burnt offering of substitution, so the yearly feast begin on the same foundation. Christ's atonement must be our starting point. We must have forgiveness before we can live. He who is forgiven much loves much.

In Christ, we received two benefits: justification and sanctification. The two can never be separated. Our sins are forgiven and our lives are also renewed. Preceding our experience of both benefits is Christ's substitutionary atonement. In it, he not only pays the debt for sins but purchases for us eternal life. Through it, he receives the Holy Spirit which is poured out on us richly and abundantly.

We no longer celebrate the "type" of the Passover feast. Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed!

Instead, The only visible reminder is in the Lord's Supper in the simplicity of broken bread and a poured out cup that Jesus came to die for us and to feed us into eternal life. But even this is a subordinate help to us. Our main power and strength comes from the preaching of the word, which always must be centered upon Christ crucified and risen.

Our lives must be built on that foundation. All efforts to trust in our own strength will end up with Pharaoh: drowned in the waters of judgment where human pride and arrogance will one day fully be swept away.

But the humble, believing people of God will pass through the waters of judgment safely, even as the angel of death passes over them through the blood of the lamb. Christ will have brought us safely through the waters in a way greater than Moses. Moses parted the waters to walk through safely on the dry ground. Jesus walked upon the waters and had power to still the storms of the sea.

Whatever you face in this day or in the week to come must be measured by this mighty work that God has done. He has saved our souls from death and brought us into fellowship with him. Nothing can be meaningful for us unless it is connected to that highest of God's accomplishments.

#13 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 13

Exodus 13 contains at least three important theological themes. These all play a significant role in shaping The Bible's message regarding the coming Messiah.

The first theme is that of the firstborn. It's introduced in verse 2 and then developed more fully in 11-16. The "firstborn" has already played a prominent role in the book of Genesis. In that book God saw fit to frequently reverse The role of the firstborn, passing the inheritance rates to a younger sibling. In Exodus, this theme of the humiliation of the firstborn is repeated although in a different form. This time it is manifested in the Egyptians, the enemies of God's people. Now the nation as a whole takes the status of being God's "firstborn son" in a national sense. Of course, this sonship is ultimately an adoptive, redemptive sonship. They are not the "Son of God" in the full sense of that term. Instead, they are looking forward to a greater firstborn son who will be their redeemer. Jesus is the eternal firstborn son of God. They have sonship from God through his grace.

The second theme regards the role of "unleavened bread" in the celebration of the Passover. In the simplest terms, the unleavened bread pointed them to the haste with which they had to prepare and leave in order to avoid the judgment of God. Just as Lot had to leave Sodom and Gomorrah quickly without looking back, so the Israelites had to prepare and eat the Passover in haste. Spiritually speaking, the New Testament connects the unleavened bread to moral qualities of the heart in "sincerity and truth." Leaven, on the other hand, represents the quick spread of evil through humans, both as individuals and groups. Its specific reference is identified differently at different times. Paul connects leaven with "malice" and "wickedness," while Jesus refers to the leaven of the Pharisees as "hypocrisy." Interestingly, unleavened bread gets its identity from what it is missing (i.e., leaven). The idea seems to be that there is a general evil deeply embedded within us that must be purged.

The third theme is that of God's constant presence and guidance of his people. In the Exodus times, this took the visible form of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Close to the idea of guidance is that of protection. A good guide protects you by keeping you from danger. The fire and cloud are visible representations of the Spirit. Through them, God led the people in a way that manifested his mercy and grace. He did not lead them through the land near the Philistines, as they were not ready for war (which would later come in the era of conquest).

We conclude by noting the fulfillment of God's promise regarding the bones of Joseph. Hundreds of years after his death Joseph's bones are taken out of Egypt and buried in the Promised Land. This request of Joseph was an expression of his faith in God's unseen promise. God would bring his people to the land of promise. Ultimately this was not the land of Canaan, but the land of heaven above. Jesus is the firstborn Son of God who is our Passover lamb. By his Spirit he purges us from all evil, sanctifying us in body and soul to prepare us to live forever with him. He has sent his Spirit to be with us always, even to the end of the age.

#14 – Devotional Meditations on Exodus 14

The Bible tells us that God's power is most clearly manifested when we are weak. Sometimes God is pleased to work through human strength for his ends and purposes. For example, God institutes civil government and arms it with the "sword" to deter evil and promote what is good. Other times he will give certain people great athletic ability in exceptional speed or strength. It is not that God's power isn't manifested through these means. It is that God's power is most clearly manifested in our weaknesses. When we are weak is clear and obvious that the surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

When we are strong we are tempted to trust in ourselves. Trust in self can lead to arrogance and a sense of independence from God. We start to feel like we don't need him. It also leads to an attitude that looks down upon and despises others.

But that mainly occurs when we are in a position of relative strength. In a position of weakness, we see the flip side of the coin. Then we are filled with disappointment, jealousy, and bitterness. Trust in self is a double-edged sword that will cut you either way. In a sinner, worldly strength leads to one set of vices, while weakness manifests another whenever we are trusting ourselves.

The Israelites here are made weak, and this happens by God's design. He essentially tells them to position themselves in one of the worst possible places in the event of a military attack. They are to encamp with the behind them, cutting off any escape routes. They are weak and vulnerable to attack.

What is more, the world's most powerful military force is about to descend upon them. The army's leader (Pharaoh) is absolutely hardened against them and bent on their total destruction.

In their weakness, they are filled with fear, not faith. They cry out in that fear, longing to go back to the slavery from which they had so long sought deliverance. Better to live on their knees than die on their feet!

But the Lord is merciful. In the face of their weaknesses, fear, and unbelief, he brings his mighty word of promise, and mighty works of deliverance.

The Lord's word to Israel perfectly encapsulates the essence of faith: receiving, resting, and trusting in God's grace:

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today...For the LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

Through faith, God's power is manifested, and that at every level. Even the attack of Pharaoh comes at the powerful hand of God. It is the Lord who hardened the hearts of the Egyptians that they would descend upon Israel. And it is also the Lord who by the same mighty hand makes a way of salvation through the sea.

Through the manifestation of God's power, Israel's fear is turned to faith: "...so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses."

This revelation of God's power in human weakness comes to its fullest manifestation in the death and resurrection of Christ. He was weak in the flesh, but made strong through the Spirit in the resurrection. Although he was the judge of all, he subjected himself to the false judgment of men on the cross. Although he was the Lord, he became the servant of all to bring their redemption. Although he was the author of life, he succumbed to death for our sakes that we may have life through him.

Those who live in Christ manifest the same pattern. When things are tough and we are weak, we can calmly and silently rest in God's power. Fear is canceled out through faith. Instead of vocal complaints, we are silently content to wait upon God's timing to bring about deliverance.

#15 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 15

Exodus 15 marks a dramatic shift in the hearts of the people of Israel. They have moved from dreadful fear to confident faith; from the precipice of destruction to the height of victory; from bitter complaint to joyful praise.

It's easy to see parallels between ourselves and the Israelites in our emotional lives. Like them, we are often driven by fear, filled with discontentment, and thanklessly complain about our circumstances. In this Israel served as a bad, negative example to avoid in chapter 14. But in chapter 15 they serve as a positive example of thankful praise and faith. Thus, the lesson is: don't be like Israel in chapter 14, but we like them in chapter 15.

There is certainly truth in this. God's life is eternally in force both in its prohibitions and in its requirements. Likewise, the Israelites do serve as a positive and negative example for Christian conduct depending on the circumstances.

The problem is not what this approach affirms, but rather what it neglects.

There is an assumption built in to reading the Israelites as "mere" examples. Specifically, we assume that there is some strength and ability within ourselves to facilitate the change from the negative to the positive. Theologically, we call this "Pelagianism."

Now lest someone is offended at my insinuating that reading the Israelites as "mere" examples is a form of Pelagianism, let me make some clarifications. Most people who do this are not "absolute" Pelagians. They are Christians. They believe in the doctrine of total inability and the necessity of God's grace. It's just that when they come to interpret passages like this, they functionally approach it in a way that does not substantially differ from a Pelagian.

The change in Israel does not take place through a manifestation of their own strength. Instead, the change occurs because of a manifestation of God's power. Their task is to exercise faith in its simplest form: passive trust in God's power. As God tells the in Exodus 14:14: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD... The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Their ability to do even that is the fruit of God's prior grace.

This is what is celebrated in Exodus 15--the famous "Song of Moses." This song of redemption has its focus almost entirely on God. It is the Lord that has triumphed and thrown his enemies into the sea. He is his people's strength, song, and salvation. He is worthy of praise. It is his great majesty that has been revealed. There is no one like him in heaven or on earth. His kingdom will reign forever and ever.

Amazingly enough, even this manifestation of God's power does not provide a permanent solution for Israel's fear and complaint. Immediately after this in verses 22 and following, we read about the episode with Israel at Marah where the people grumbled because of bitter water.

Could not the Lord who parted the waters and rescued them from the mightiest army on the face of the earth also work to provide water for them in the wilderness? The Lord is their Savior and also their healer. Yet where is faith among the Israelites?

The truth is we have seen God's power and grace manifested even more fully in Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of all that Moses foretold. That's why in heaven we sing both the Song of Moses and "The Song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3).

Christians are those who have received the promise of deliverance from the kingdom of Satan and the hope of eternal life. This has come about through the revelation of the infinite power of God in Christ's death and resurrection. Anything we could gain or lose in this life is nothing compared with these things.

How out of place is it for us to complain about losing a speck of dust from our left hand when we carry a chest of gold and jewels in our right hand! So it is with us as Christians. Our right hands take hold of eternity and nothing can ever loosen it from our grasp. But when earthly things are taken from our left hand, we are forlorn, saddened, and filled with bitterness. We must heed this important reminder: the problem is not our circumstances but how we are responding to them in faith or unbelief. As I reflect on myself, it is quite pathetic how rarely I am upset at myself for my failure to respond in faith, and how often I'm upset at my circumstances which God has brought into my life by his wise providence. Truly I need to take the log out of my own eye before I mock and decry the Israelites for the speck in theirs.

In this, our weaknesses and inability are revealed. The sinfulness of the Israelites is not a Jewish problem but a human problem. When we are weak, God's power and grace are close at hand. He will complete the work he has begun in us, and make us strong in weakness, joyful in trial, and patient in affliction.

#16 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 16

When God lead Israel out of Egypt he took them through the wilderness. He did this as an act of mercy with their well-being in mind. Exodus 13:17 tells us that he purposely did not lead them through the Philistines. God knew that they were not prepared for war and would return again to Egypt if they faced hostile peoples so soon after their departure. The forty years of wandering would prepare them for the era of conquest that would come later.

Yet the choice between the way of the Philistines and the way of the wilderness put them between a spiritual rock and a hard place. There is little food in the wilderness. The choice was between death by the sword from a hostile pagan army or the possibility of starvation. Compared to these outcomes, life in Egypt might seem like a vacation.

The problem with their mindset is that it operates purely on natural, earthly principles according to human power. Israel had just seen God's supernatural power at work in a heretofore unprecedented way. Multiple miracles to ratify Moses as a messenger of God. There were ten plagues in Egypt showing God's power over water, weather, and even the cosmos itself (the sun went dark!). God parted the waters in the Exodus for their salvation and moved them back for Egypt's destruction. They saw these things with their own eyes and even celebrated God's grace to them in corporate singing (The Song of Moses).

As soon as these things happened the Israelites forgot about them. Surely the God who worked all these wonders and who only a brief time ago made the bitter water sweet could also give them something to eat.

And so he did. Bread from heaven came, and on the sixth day, he gave twice as much. It was perhaps the simplest test of faith one could devise. I will make bread supernaturally appear for six straight days. I will give them more than ample evidence to prove that I love them and will care for them. I only ask that they will trust me. I will appear in cloud and fire that my glory may be visible. The light of my presence will remove even the

faintest shadows of doubt. Surely when they see both my mighty works and glorious presence with their own eyes there will be no reason for them to doubt me!

Yet they continued to doubt, complain, and disobey. I realize it's a bit of hyperbole for me to put it this way but consider: the only thing more amazing than God's wonderful works is the unbelief of the Israelites. Indeed, Jesus himself "marvels" or "wonders" only a few times in the Gospels: at the unbelief of the Jews or the faith of a Gentile (Matthew 8:10, Mark 6:6). The Jews see and don't believe. Later the Gentiles will not see and yet will believe.

God holds out true Sabbath rest, and they want to return to slavery. God gives them water for their thirst, but they remain spiritually parched. God gives them bread from heaven to feed them, but they worship the gift instead of the giver.

God has fed us with the true bread from heaven. That bread is Christ and his word. He is the true bread that came down from heaven which gives life to the world. Christ comes to us in and through his word. That is why even Moses said: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3, cf. Matthew 4:4).

Yet we are no different than the Israelites. We grow tired of the wilderness of this world and long for greater earthly comforts and security. We quickly give in to our sinful inclinations even as they clearly work for harm and destruction for ourselves and others. Rather than find our identity and confidence in the Lord and his care for us, we trust in ourselves and our ability to make things the way we want them. Our trust in ourselves reaps destruction, and even what we have is taken away. As the rest of the Exodus story makes clear, we can often take out our frustrations on others, even those God has put in authority over us to lead us through this wilderness. They complained against God and challenged him. Even so they complained against and challenged Moses. In this way, we not only bite but cut off the very hand that God has given to feed us and make it more difficult for them to feed sheep needier than us.

But Jesus is the good shepherd. He has walked this wilderness ahead of us and has laid out a path by which we might navigate it. That path is narrow and hard, and few find it. But those who walk it will be led to life and to a heavenly land flowing with milk and honey. His word is sufficient to sustain us along the way. It is ours simply to trust in him and the power he has placed within it.

#17 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 17:1-16

In the Exodus, God brought his people a glorious deliverance. They would move from the bitterness of bondage to the sweetness of freedom. But that does not mean they would have to taste bitterness along the journey. Between the lands of slavery and liberty, there was a vast wilderness filled with trial and difficulty. In that place, they would be tested to see if they would trust the Lord and not in human strength. This testing involved being made dependent upon God for even the bare essentials of human life such as food and water.

In Exodus 16 we saw how God would feed them with bread from heaven to sustain them on their journey. This was to teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Freedom would be obtained by faith, not by works. Now in Exodus 17 we see God provide for the other essential necessity of human existence: water.

Israel had already seen God perform water miracles by the hand of Moses. With his staff, he changed the waters of the Nile into blood, a sign and portent of the judgment that was to come upon that wicked land. When he brought them out of Egypt God parted the waters through Moses. The waters of the Red Sea came crashing upon the Egyptians for their destruction but were parted for Israel's salvation. Surely God had already done much to reinforce Israel's faith.

We are no different than the Israelites. We have seen even greater wonders than they have in Christ, the fulfillment of all these things. Yet what do both we and Israel do when faced with a new trial? How do we respond when God strips us of earthly support in order that we might trust him more fully? With the Israelites, we grumble and complain--often against our earthly leaders--when we know full well that it is God who is bringing these things into our lives (17:2, 3). They are even ready to stone Moses, placing the blame for their trial upon him. How ironic that they seek to kill the very man God sent to save them from death! As it was with Moses the servant in God's house, so it will be with Christ, the Son over God's house!

On the one hand, it is easy to judge the Israelites and condemn them. But before we do that too quickly, let us remember that we are in the same position as them. If we are honest with ourselves, our reaction would have been no different. How would you respond if you were dying of thirst in a desert? Like them, our faith is weak, even though we know full well the power of God.

In mercy, God acts to sustain them in their sojourning. He tells Moses to take the same staff with which he struck the Nile and strike the rock at Horeb (Exodus 17). In this way, God will jog their memories in the forgetfulness of unbelief. God sought to test them to purify their faith, but they tested God in their unbelief. They doubted God's powerful presence even though he had performed wonder after wonder to save them. But could not he who turned water to blood and parted the floods of the sea also bring water in a desert?

After this God establishes Moses again as his appointed deliverer in working his power through him in the defeat of Amalek. Joshua takes some of the fighting men to go to battle against Amalek while Moses stands on the top of the hill raising his hands to bless the people in battle. When Moses's hands are raised Israel prevails. When they fall in fatigue, Israel begins to lose. Clearly, it is not by Moses's power that Israel is being delivered, but only through God's power in him. Moses himself is weak, but thankfully Aaron and Hur assist him by holding up his hands. What a beautiful picture of the support God's people can offer to the servants of his word when they grow weary shepherding God's people.

All these events are pictures of a greater deliverer to come: Jesus, the Son of God. He is the bread of life who came down from heaven to give life to the world. He declares to Israel: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:38). He calls us out of our slavery to sin and Satan. He moves us to a kingdom of liberty and righteousness. Along the way, we will be tried and tested, but promises to provide us with everything we need to make it to the Promised Land.

We have this all by faith and not by works. We must obey God and do his will. He will at times call us to fight even as Joshua fought Amalek. But even here we do not operate by our power but by God's power in us.

Our call is the same that God gave to Israel at the shores of the Red Sea: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today...The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

Let us then leave behind grumbling and complaining, putting our firm faith in the God of heaven. When we are hungry he will feed us. When we are parched he will quench our thirst. When we are attacked he will bring his strength to uphold and defend us as we remain steadfast in our journey to the Promised Land.

#18 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 18:1-27

By Exodus 18, Moses had reached the point of exhaustion. For years heavy burdens and responsibilities had taken their toll. While he was not alone in leading God's people, he had a unique role in the history of redemption that did combine many offices into one. Moses was Israel's chief prophet and teacher, the one through whom the word of God came. Up to this point, he also had a priestly function, offering both prayers and sacrifices to God on behalf of his people. He also served as a judge or king to settle disputes and administer justice for an entire nation. He did all of this under the constant complaining and grumbling of the people against him, which made his work a burden and not a joy (cf. Heb. 13:17). It was getting so bad that he himself was complaining to God about the complainers in Israel (Ex. 17:4), and even needed Aaron and Hur to help him in the simple task of keeping his hands raised to bless the people in battle. Moses had a lot on his shoulders. He needed some help.

Help would come through the voice of his father-in-law, Jethro. He had heard of all that God had done for Moses and Israel, so he came to the wilderness to see Moses. Jethro knew Moses well as they had spent roughly 40 years together during their time in Midian. Interestingly, Moses recounts both the successes and the troubles they faced. But the emphasis from both is on the blessedness of the Lord who delivered them from every trouble (17:8, 10). They both express steadfast faith in God's wisdom in bringing difficulties but also his power and faithfulness to deliver. There is nothing wrong with recounting our troubles, provided we do it in faith. There is a big difference between this kind of godly conversation and griping and complaining about unpleasant circumstances in a way that dishonors God.

But Jethro also sees the unbearable workload on Moses's shoulders as he sits alone to settle disputes before Israel. The burden is too heavy for Moses alone. So he gives him some of the most important advice in the history of the church--one that would have ramifications for thousands of years. In God's providential appointment, Jethro advises Moses to establish what essentially becomes a court system of tiered authority with Moses as a kind of "supreme judge." The easier matters will be handled by the lower courts, while the more difficult ones will be brought to Moses.

The word we use today to describe this way of governing God's people is "Presbyterianism." This term contains the Greek word "presbyter" which means "elder." The idea is that all the ordinary ruling offices in the church have equal authority as individuals. Power is shared among the members of a group who are all accountable to one another in the Lord. While we are not a political nation as was Israel, the principle that structured their lives in this way was the same. In the church today there are a series of "courts" in which disputes among Christians can be settled. First, there is the "session" of the local church, where disputes can be brought after the Matthew 18 process is pursued. If one party is not happy with this decision, they can appeal to the regional church or "Presbytery." This group consists of all the pastors and representative ruling elders in an entire region of a country. A final appeal can be made to the general assembly, which is the corporate assembly of the entire church.

Beyond this, this chapter is a reminder that both power and responsibilities are shared among all the officers of the church. We must also not forget that every believer has the general office of "Christian," and also has an obligation to use their gifts to care for the other members of the body. Among the officers, God has ordained that there would be pastors or "teaching elders." Like Moses, their main responsibility is to bring the word of God to the people. Likewise, there are ruling elders whose main job is to oversee the congregation to see that the Christian life is being faithfully lived and serious errors in doctrine or life are addressed. The pastor shares this task with the ruling elders, but no one man is sufficient for the entire work. God divides up the labor and the responsibilities among many so that no one man can carry the whole load.

Indeed, such an effort is impossible. Even in a small congregation, there are many needs, concerns, troubles, and problems. Even when a church is amply supplied by faithful officers, the task can be exhausting and discouraging. Even a man as great as Moses could not handle it on his own and needed help. How much more us lesser servants of the Lord!

But it is precisely when men are most weak that God's power and mercy are clearly shown. Christ continues to work through weak men so that his power might be perfected through us. The apostle Paul knew these things quite well. As a missionary evangelist, he carried many burdens as did Moses before him. But while he traveled from city to city preaching and teaching he made sure to appoint elders who could care for the church in his absence (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).

How thankful we ought to be for God's wisdom through Jethro which continues to help God's people to this day. Although Christ is absent from us in the body, he is present with us by his Holy Spirit. He works powerfully through the heart of every believer by the Holy Spirit, but also uses the officers of the church to encourage, guide, and direct in his name.

Let us then not grow weary or exhausted in this work. Our sins are great and many. There is no escape from this in our present lives. But we await the day when Christ the chief Shepherd will appear in glory. He will bring us safely through the wilderness of this world and to the glory of the Promised Land above.

#19 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 19:1-25

In this chapter, we move to the heart of the book of Exodus. When God brought his people out of Egypt he had a clear, declared purpose for their deliverance. It was articulated in the words the Lord gave to Moses: "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1). Later the latter part of this phrase is reworded to say "...so that they may serve (worship) me" (7:16). God called them to liberty, but this freedom has a purpose. They are not free to serve sin but bound to serve God.

It is against this backdrop that we must approach Exodus 19 and the following chapters. In it, we read of the events surrounding the giving of God's law. James tells us that God's law is a royal law of liberty (Jam. 1:25, 2:12). Its design is not to hold us in bondage but to guide us in the right use of our freedoms. On account of our sin, the law can be twisted towards an evil purpose and even be perverted to stir up sin by our flesh (see Romans 7). If we seek to be justified by the law it becomes our enemy and can only condemn us (see Romans 1-4 and Galatians). But God's design is different. He ordained that the law (rightly used) would ultimately be our friend and not our enemy. In the hand of grace, it would lead us to Christ and carve out a path in the wilderness in this wilderness by which we may walk to glorify him.

This gracious purpose of the law is revealed in this chapter in the various preparatory circumstances that lead up to it. To be sure, the terror of the law is clearly seen in the passage, even as the purity and holiness of God strike fear in the heart of every sinful creature. But the gracious purpose of God is a golden thread woven through every aspect of the fabric of this passage. Consider the following elements.

First, the passage begins with a reminder of God's act of gracious compassion to free them from the tyranny of Pharaoh. He carried them through every trial. God uses the beautiful picture of an eagle soaring above the wilderness. God was like that eagle, carrying his people on his back as he soared above everything that could harm them. The 10 Commandments begin with a preface that reminds them of this same act of gracious deliverance (Ex. 20:1). We obey God as a response to his grace. Our obedience is not a work to earn a reward. It is a response of thanks for a reward given by grace that we did not deserve.

Second, notice the description of God's people as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:6). To be sure, this description is tied to the outworking of their sanctification in a life of faith. But it is a description that is true only by grace. It is also a designation that is repeated by Peter to describe the NT Church (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; cf. Rev. 1:5, 5:10, 20:6). Although small, weak, and sinful, God has made Israel his treasured possession (19:5). He has set his love on them. In the law, he shows them how they might love God in return.

Thirdly, we also see in this passage the expression of the oath of God's covenant bond of union and communion. This is explicitly heard from the lips of the Israelites who recite the oath of the covenant: "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do" (19:8). But the oath is also taken on God's side and is reflected in the word we just considered in our previous point. The covenant is a bond of fellowship. This involves a commitment. On God's side, we see his gracious purpose in committing himself to a covenant union with his chosen people that cannot be broken. He keeps his promises. His word of commitment shall never fail.

Fourth, we also see in the passage the primacy of faith as the proper response to and way of life in God's covenant. In 19:9 God speaks to Moses and declares that he will speak to him from a thick cloud "that the people may hear when I speak to you, and may also believe you forever" (19:9). Moses was a minister of God's word, and also a type of Christ. The passage is not teaching that Moses himself is the object of their faith. Instead, it is the word of God that comes through Moses that is the focus of their trust. Nevertheless, the presence of faith as the proper response to God shows that this passage reveals the gracious disposition of God towards his sinful people. Faith puts trust in God instead of self. Faith involves the acknowledgment that we are sinners, and can only approach God if he freely and graciously allows us.

Fifth, we also see God's grace to Israel in the typical provisions for cleansing and holiness. To be sure, the external-typical character is emphasized in the passage. The external cleansing allows them to draw near to God, but limits are still placed on how close they can come (19:12). The washing of their garments with water in itself only deals with their external clothes. We need God's Spirit to wash our hearts. But the external was to direct them to their internal and the temporal to the eternal. One day

God will send the fulness of his Spirit who will complete the work of cleansing by which we will be able to fully draw near to God in a heart of faith (cf. Heb. 10:22).

Sixth, we also see God's grace in the presence of priests to serve on the people's behalf. Sinners cannot approach God directly. They need a priest to minister on their behalf. The Levitical priests were a temporary provision before the coming of Christ. When he arrived, he came after the order of a different priesthood (Melchizedek) bringing in eternal redemption.

There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He absorbed the wrath of God when he made himself both the Priestly offeror and the sacrificial offering on the cross. He perfectly obeyed the law of God and suffered its penalty in our place. He freed us from bondage--not simply the temporal bondage of Pharaoh but the eternal bondage of Satan, sin, and the kingdom of darkness. He fulfilled God's covenant oath and grants us his Spirit that we may (by grace) fulfill our side of this union and communion. Through him, we come not to a mountain that can be touched, but to Mt. Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 13:18-24).

Indeed, the best proof that this passage reveals God's gracious disposition to Israel is that every element comes to fulfillment in our gracious redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is greater than Moses even as a son is greater than a servant. He is greater than Aaron, offering a final sacrifice to procure eternal redemption.

Our lives in him are lives of grace and freedom. Like Israel, we have been set at liberty, not to use our freedom as a cloak for vice but to worship God and serve our neighbors in love (cf. Gal. 5:13). Let us then walk in God's grace and freedom navigating the hard path of the wilderness of this world. He will guide us as he guided them. It is ours to trust and rest in the freeing grace of his covenant love.

#20 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 20:1-26

This passage is of paramount importance in the history of redemption. It contains the law of God written on two tablets of stone by the finger of God. Theologically and practically, volumes can and should be written regarding their significance. Indeed, much of the rest of this book and the other books of Moses unpacks the details that flow from this summary of God's will for our lives. If you look through the shorter and larger catechisms of our church, you will see that explaining God's law in just its uses and application take up at least a third of their space. When we add to this the Christological and Soteriological importance of the law its significance only increases.

We do not have space in a single devotional meditation to unpack everything. But continuing the emphases of our study in the previous chapter, we will outline the different ways we see God's gracious purpose in giving the law. To be sure, the terror of God's holiness and justice does receive an emphasis in the surrounding context. There is fire, earthquake, thunder, lightning, and other sobering elements to its delivery. But even these serve a gracious purpose--to humble Israel and put them in a more receptive position of faith and trust. Even in its negative aspects that remind us of our sins and need for a Savior, the law serves an ultimately gracious purpose. It is our teacher to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). It cannot justify us. But it can point us away from ourselves and to the one who is both just and the justifier of he who has faith in Jesus.

But apart from its gracious purpose, we also see God's redemptive grace intertwined in the law itself. The 10 Commandments do not come to us as "bare" commandments. Instead, they are written in a covenantal form. Exodus 34:28 states that the Ten Commandments are, in fact, the "words of the covenant." Elsewhere Moses states that God "...declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on tablets of stone" (cf. Deut. 4:13). The Ten Commandments, therefore, are God's covenant delivered in summary form.

That covenant is essentially a gracious covenant. It contains legal elements that remind them that Christ has not yet come even as they point to his coming. But the heart of this covenant beats in a gracious rhythm.

This gracious dynamic is seen right up from in the preface contained: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (20:1). The law does not begin with what we are to do. Instead, it begins with what God has done. God says: "I have loved you. I have saved you. You belong to me. You were slaves and in bondage. I have now made you free. Walk now in this spiritual freedom in covenant union with me." This is the same dynamic we see in the NT. Paul declares the Gospel of God's grace. We have been loved and forgiven by Christ. He died for us and lives for us. Now we must, in thankful obedience, die and live with him. The same gracious dynamic is seen here in the Ten Commandments themselves. He is our God. We are his people. All this has come to us by grace. Now we must walk in that grace by following God's will. The law starts with grace!

But notice also in the third commandment that God is pleased to add a promise of blessing: "...showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (20:6). The phrase "steadfast love" can also be translated as "mercy." It refers to the kindness and goodness that God shows to his people in his undeserved grace to sinners. The reward is clearly not earned. It is a gift of grace. We ought to obey God simply for his own sake. But God promises a reward to his people for their obedience so that they might more easily know his approval of righteousness. The reward is not earned. It is a gift of grace. A similar reward is laid out in the fifth commandment: "that your days may be long in that land that the Lord your God is giving you" (20:12). Paul makes it clear that through Christ this promise still applies to us as it holds out our ultimate heavenly destination (Eph. 6:2 with 1:14).

The Sabbath commandment also reveals God's mercy and grace. Our lives on earth, even after the fall, should not be "work, work, work!" He grants temporal rest even to those of lowly and humble estate, whether servant or maidservant and even ox and donkey. In Exodus, this is explicitly rooted in the pattern of creation before the fall. This is an implicit reminder of God's gracious promises to return us to a sinless estate of Sabbath rest. In Deuteronomy 5, God repeats the 10 Commandments and links the Sabbath to God's grace in the Exodus. Although they were worked to death by the Egyptian taskmasters in their time of bondage, they have been given rest by God in the

Promised Land. God's grace in giving rest to them is the ground and basis for their giving rest to their servants.

Indeed, God's law is a gracious thing. The greatest grace it is to us is how in all these things it reveals Christ. He is our covenant redeemer and has purchased us with his own blood. Through him, we are freed from bondage to Satan, the world, and our flesh to walk in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Jesus kept the law's precepts perfectly, granting us his perfect righteousness in our justification. He also sends us his Holy Spirit so that we might be empowered to walk in the way of his commandments (albeit imperfectly). He has brought rest for our restlessness, mercy in our misery, and washed away our wickedness. Indeed, he who gave the law also fulfilled the law. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

#21 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 21:1-26

The Exodus is a story of moving from slavery to freedom. The 10 Commandments begin with a triumphant reminder of God's delivering his people from Egyptian bondage. The fourth commandment (as recorded in Deuteronomy) also reminds them of their slavery in Egypt and the sabbath rest to which God had brought them. Truly, the law of God is a law of liberty (James 1:25, 2:10).

This point helps us understand why Exodus 21 switches somewhat jarringly to the subject of slavery. So far the book has been a dramatic (even thrilling) narrative with a lot of action fit for a Hollywood production (thank you, Cecil B. DeMille). In Exodus 21 Moses slows things down and slams the brakes of the dramatic flow and begins a slow exposition of aspects of God's law (both moral and ceremonial). There is a reason this slow meditation on God's commandments begins with slavery. They were slaves in Egypt but now are in freedom. This must transform the way they think about the institution.

In the Western world, slavery seems like a bygone arrangement of a distant outdated world. It is difficult for us to comprehend the fact that in many countries slavery is still practiced in very brutal forms. There are still oppressive governmental regimes that essentially enslave their people.

But even in our country where slavery was abolished as an official institution over 100 years ago, we can still find forms of slavery. From time to time, you will hear of secret, underground rings involved in human trafficking, brutally forcing people into forced labor, and even prostitution.

Even with this in view, it still may be difficult for us to swallow the fact that the Bible contains several laws regulating slavery in the context of Israel's life in the Ancient Near East. This can become a stumbling block for many. It also creates difficulties that need to be addressed in the context of Christian apologetics.

What point can we make in this regard? First, it is clear that in the Bible and slavery as a practice is solely in only the result of sin. There was no slavery before the fall, and there will be no slavery in heaven. The only forms of slavery that exist because of human sinfulness and Adam's fall. As a general principle, it follows that insofar as sin is mitigated and overcome, the institution of slavery will also pass away. In heaven, there will be no slavery.

Secondly, this means that any laws regulating or limiting the institution of slavery are not an absolute endorsement of the institution. It was often the case in the OT that God patiently tolerated certain aspects of Israel's life that did not fully live up to his creational ideals. Polygamy is a famous example of this. Many of the patriarchs had multiple wives, although in the NT Jesus makes clear that God's intention in creation was for there to be only one man and one woman in marriage. God did not punish this sin at the time, but he was not approving it.

So it is with slavery. Slavery was a ubiquitous part of the ancient world, and Israel was no different. God was not endorsing the institution, nor was he requiring his people to perpetuate it endlessly. In fact, the drift of many of the laws regarding slavery is toward eventual manumission and emancipation.

Even here in this passage where slavery is dealt with in detail, most of the passages attempt to put strict limits upon it to soften its force in the life of those affected by it. Consider the following points in the passage.

In verse 2, it is stipulated that any Hebrew slave is to go free after seven years. This places a limit on this institution and indicates that the ideal situation would be freedom. If a daughter is sold as a slave, she is to be treated appropriately with certain rights befitting a female. If those rights are not maintained, she is to be given her freedom (11). In verse 26, the law of the talon (eye for eye, tooth for tooth) is explicitly applied to the mistreatment of a slave. In the eyes of God, justice does not end when slavery begins. All men are to be treated according to this basic principle of justice. In fact, injury to a slave is grounds for his emancipation (verse 27). This provision would have been a rarity in the ancient world, as slaves were often regarded as having no rights whatsoever.

The sin of "man-stealing" is explicitly prohibited in verse 16. This was the practice of capturing a person or group of persons and then selling them into slavery. This was the very practice that stood at the foundation of slavery in America and one reason among many that it was rightfully abolished. Groups would capture indigenous people in Africa, transport them to the New World, and sell them into slavery. It is true that many African tribes participated in this slave trade by capturing members of rival groups. But this doesn't change the main point. This kind of slavery is very different from the slavery often found in the ancient world, which often came about due to the inability to pay debts (although people could become slaves by being defeated in war).

Obviously, not everything in this passage is an indication of God's ultimate redemptive goals. Some laws are a reminder of the limitations of the theocracy. At the same time, God's gracious, redemptive provision in these passages points us to the day when Christ will come and free us from the slavery that affects us all, namely slavery to sin and death. And as the apostle Paul indicates in his letter to Philemon, it makes little sense for those who have participated in the fullness of God's liberating grace to perpetuate an institution that is the fruit of enslaving power of sin.

The Israelites were at one time slaves in Egypt. God graciously delivered them. Even as God thus lead them from slavery to freedom in their spiritual lives, so he was indicating a move away from the institution of slavery. So it is throughout our Christian lives. God has been merciful to us, and so we must be merciful to others. We cannot have our sins forgiven unless we forgive others when they sin against us. Christ was the Lord who became a slave so that we who are slaves of sin might become servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#22 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 22:1-31

In Exodus 22 we continue Moses's "interlude" in the narrative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt with an exposition of case law regulating their lives with one another. In the previous chapter, he dealt with the subject of slavery. There was a good reason for this. Theologically speaking, the Exodus was at its heart a gracious deliverance from bondage into freedom. They were slaves in Egypt, but God had mercy on them.

In Exodus 22, we see another set of case laws dealing largely with the eighth commandment ("you shall not steal"). As with the previous section, there is a theological reason for this. Israel's salvation is regularly referred to as "redemption," which involves payment to procure the liberty of the "prisoner" in need of deliverance. So Jesus had to make a real and proper payment or satisfaction for sins with his precious blood. These principles had to be satisfied in our redemption as they reflect the just nature of God. As God dealt with us, so we are to deal with our fellow man in matters of money and payment (i.e. the eighth commandment).

Granted, there are a few cases here that deal with other commandments, but this is simply a reminder that God's law is fundamentally one. In a way, every sin is a form of theft from God. It is to rob him of the glory, honor, and respect that is due to him. There are laws in the chapter against sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry (sacrificing to a false god). These may seem disconnected from the eighth commandment. But they are closely related in that they all abuse what God has given and misuse it for sinful purposes. Sin robs God of his glory and honor (cf Mal. 3:8-18).

One thing that stands out in many of these laws is the principle of restitution. If someone wrongs another in terms of goods or property, the proper response is to pay it back plus extra. Sometimes the restitution is fivefold or fourfold, as in the case of the theft of an ox or sheep that is then sold or dies. Other times the restitution is double, as when a stolen ox, donkey, or sheep is found alive. There are plenty of other examples sprinkled throughout the narrative. What binds them all together is this principle of restitution. What you have taken must be repaid with extra.

At first glance, this might seem to be contrary to the principles of justice. If God's basic rule is an "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," why does he require a fivefold, fourfold, or even double payment?

The answer is twofold. First, the loss of property due to theft obviously creates significant hardship for the victim. Often animals were used for work and harvest, and to lose one animal meant greater difficulty in these labors. Also, theft of property requires significant efforts to recover it, whether through the work of appropriate law enforcement or through one's own endeavors. In addition to the loss of property, there is hardship and difficulty that results from theft. All these things are accounted for in the law of restitution.

Moreover, this principle of extra restitution would also function as a great deterrent against thieves. If it were a simple one-for-one ratio, the thief would really not have much to lose. If he stole it and got away with it, he would be ahead monetarily. If he stole it and got caught, all he would have to do is give it back. By making him pay more, there's a great deal more risk for him in practicing his sinful craft.

But the scope eighth commandment in this passage extends beyond simple theft. It also touches on things like the mistreatment of the weak (widows and sojourners) and lending money to the poor with high interest. (This is clearly not a section of Scripture that credit card companies have read very carefully.)

Fundamentally, the laws of this passage are rooted in the just character of God. He is the one who distributes wealth as he sees fit. He is the one who has compassion upon the oppressed (22:27). It is not for man to take for himself what he believes in his own wisdom or sense of entitlement is rightfully his. Likewise, the laws of this passage are rooted in God's historical work of redemption in the Exodus: "You shall not wrong the Sojourner or press him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." Many of the things forbidden here by God were things that were perpetrated against them in the land of Egypt. God's people are not to be conformed to the pattern of slavery and oppression characteristic of the estate from which they have been saved. Instead, they are to be conformed to the Kingdom of Heaven.

And in this Kingdom, we see a full example of the principle of restitution. Jesus himself made real and true payment for our transgressions. In fact, his death is more than sufficient to pay for our sins, since it was the death of the infinite Son of God in human flesh. To paraphrase the Old Testament prophet, we have received in him from the hand of the Lord double for all our sins. This principle of restitution is not only fundamental for our lives as we deal with our fellow man. It is fundamental to our salvation in the work of Jesus, our Savior.

Thus when the kingdom of God came to lost sinners in Jesus's day, these principles were reflected in their repentance and faith. Most notably there is the figure of Zaccheus the tax collector. He was guilty of financial fraud and theft. When Jesus came the kingdom of God was in his midst. Jesus was the one who would offer redemption from sin and deliverance from the tyranny of the devil. He would pay the price for his sins and make restitution by his death on the cross. These principles were reflected in his repentance: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold" (Luke 19:8). He who was restored by the payment of Christ's blood makes restitution in his name.

That day salvation came to his house, and he became a Son of Abraham. He was lost and then was found. A slave of sin became a servant of God. We who believe share in the same things through the one who shed his costly blood for us.

#23 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 23:1-33

In this chapter, we once again have a collection of "miscellaneous" laws dealing with a wide range of subjects. It seems that the largest portion touch upon the ninth commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This forbids not only telling outright lies but also perverting justice, showing partiality, entertaining a false charge, taking bribes, etc. Nevertheless, God's law is one. To break one commandment is to break them all.

However, the passage is not simply a "shotgun" collection of random rules. The "theology" of God's Exodus-grace is deeply embedded in the "morality" of the Law. This comes to clearest expression in the reminder to be merciful to the sojourner--for they were once sojourners in Egypt (23:). The Feast calendar of Israel contained here also creates a perpetual cycle of reminders of how God brought them from slavery to freedom. God brought them from an estate of slavish work to restful peace. Thus we also see an emphasis on the Sabbath principle. God's morality is rooted in his theology of grace.

This point helps us see why the Law of God goes deeper than mere surface concerns. Many people look at the Ten Commandments and believe that they have kept at least some of them fairly well. This is often because they see the Ten Commandments as addressing only external behavior, and that only in the most severe forms. They will say to themselves: "I have not killed anyone, I have not cheated on my spouse, I have not pickpocketed anyone, and therefore I have kept a good chunk of God's law." But this passage shows that God's law addresses not only the most egregious forms of violating the commandment (physical adultery, murder) but also "lesser" sins that fall in the same category. God's law not only forbids murder but also the anger of the heart that is the source of murder. It forbids not only the taking of someone's life but also any kind of physical harm that is of a piece with murder.

Suddenly we are all confronted with the fact that far from keeping some of God's laws, we have actually fallen far short of any of them. The law certainly guides us in how we are to walk before the Lord. But in our natural state, it also exposes the sinfulness of our hearts so that we might be led to God's forgiveness. Someone who does not believe

they have sinned does not care about a forgiving God. Again, the point of the Law is to draw us back to the reality and theology of grace he has worked in our hearts. As he has forgiven, so we are to forgive.

This chapter also contains several laws about worship. This is an exposition of the second commandment. This commandment not only forbids the worship of idols, but it also requires us to worship God only in the way he has commanded us in his word. This means we are to worship at the times God appointed, such as the Sabbath or Lord's Day, or (as the case may be for ancient Israel) during the appointed festival days. It also means that we are to worship God with the things he has appointed, in terms of both sacrifice and offering. He is the Lord of his worship. We worship him when and how he commands, not when and how we please.

The final section of the passage contains the promise of the protection of the angel of the Lord upon Israel as they come to take possession of the promised land. In contrast to the angel of death that brought death to the firstborn of Egypt, this angel gives life and blessedness to them as they serve the one true God who was the source of all life and blessing.

But perhaps the most striking passage in the chapter is what we read in Exodus 23:4. This text speaks of what we are to do when we find our enemy's property--in this case an ox or a donkey. The passage is plain: we are to do for our enemy exactly what we would do for our friends. We are to help them and show love to them. The law of love does not end where our enemies begin.

This is a striking emphasis at this point in the narrative. So far in Exodus God has made it very clear that he has both friends and enemies. His friends are the object of his special care and protection, as Israel received when he brought them out of Egypt. But his enemies will come to utter destruction.

Now we read the other side of this coin: God also has grace towards his enemies! Indeed, part of the reason there were ten plagues was to give Pharaoh ample time to

repent. To be sure, this simply exposed his reprobate heart. But Israel, too, was not worthy of God's grace. Few and evil were the days of Jacob-Israel, their father (Gen. 47:9). Joseph's brothers were downright scoundrels in their treatment of their youngest sibling. Yet God brought his restoring grace to them. When they were enemies, they were reconciled to God!

This is why God's law obligates us ultimately to show love even to our enemies. A great mistake is often made in this matter regarding the differences between the Old and New Testaments. It is often said that in the OT we were required to love, but in the NT an additional element of "loving your enemies" is added. This error is based on a misunderstanding of Jesus's teaching in the sermon on the mount. Jesus told us at the outset of this sermon that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

The truth is, God's law has always required us to love our enemies. Exodus 23 is proof of that. This was what God did when he saved Israel from Egypt. In fact, it was part of Christ's keeping of the Mosaic law for our sake that he showed love to us when we were his enemies by dying on the cross to reconcile us to God. Think of the great love involved when someone dies for their enemy (Rom. 5:8-10)! Without this commandment, Jesus's sacrificial death for us would have had no backdrop in God's revealed will.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Praise God for this portion of his law, which called Jesus himself to love his enemies. And praise God for Jesus who obeyed it perfectly for our sakes, that we who were once his enemies might now be his friends.

And so we must live with one another. The command to "love your enemies" is sometimes easiest when we are faced with a clear and direct opponent of our Christian faith. Although Christians are technically "brothers" and "friends," they often act like

enemies towards one another. The same is true in our families, with children fighting one another and even spouses becoming established enemies instead of mutual helpers. It is at these moments that this commandment is hardest to follow. We must remember the grace of Jesus. He was not only opposed by the world, but rejected by his own people, betrayed by his friend, and abandoned by his own disciples. He loved us when we were his enemies so that he might bring us to God. As God has dealt with us, so in his law, he calls us to deal with one another after the pattern of Christ.

#24 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 24:1-18

The last few chapters have seen a dramatic slowdown in the story of the Exodus. The book began as a gripping narrative of near defeat to triumphant victory. It then slowed to a crawl in the last couple of chapters, with an "interlude" where Moses outlines several case laws on various commandments.

In this chapter, we return to the dramatic narrative with the ratification ceremony of the Sinai covenant.

The idea of the covenant has been the subject of much debate but the core idea of the covenant is summed up in a single Biblical statement: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." The phrase is sprinkled through the OT and is repeated in the NT (cf. Ex. 6:7; Jer. 31:33; Rev. 21:7). The covenant involves a mutual possession of the participants--they belong to one another. Out of this mutual identification and bond of fellowship flows particular commitments and obligations. The covenant involves a mutual possession: God becomes our God, and we become his people. God takes possession of us, and we take possession of him. God commits to provide everything necessary for our life and salvation. We pledge to place or trust fully in him to live a life of sincere, faithful, albeit imperfect obedience.

Generally speaking, it is not hard to see how this arrangement is the fruit of God's redemptive grace to sinners. But there is great confusion in the Christian world over the precise nature of the Sinai covenant. Some make it a kind of covenant of works. Israel obligates themselves to obey God such that their obedience becomes the ground, basis, or (meritorious) cause of the promised blessings. In this, they see the principle of merit operating here in contrast to a principle of grace. For some, this principle applies to the way of salvation. This is the case with what has been called "classic dispensationalism." Still others restrict it to merely temporal or non-salvation blessings, and also stress its typological character (i.e. their meritorious obedience points to the merit of Christ). But both see the covenant of Sinai as being, in itself, essentially a works-based covenant. Thankfully, both positions (especially the latter) also indicate that ultimately the only way of salvation is through grace in Christ and not through any merit of our own.

A careful reading of Exodus 24 shows that this position does not conform to divine revelation in Scripture. It is also a significant interpretive error in that (when worked out consistently) it can lead to a misreading of significant portions of Holy Scripture.

Exodus 24 from beginning to end positions this covenant in the context of God's gracious dealings with Israel. It is therefore to be understood as an administration of God's one covenant of grace begun with Abraham and fulfilled in Christ. But it doesn't simply operate in the context of grace. The covenant itself is filled with grace. Note the following aspects of the passage that indicate the substantially gracious character of this covenant.

First, this covenant was ratified with blood. Israel offered burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. Moses then took that blood and threw it against the basins and the altar. He later sprinkled that blood upon the people, declaring it to be the "blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:5-8).

As the book of Hebrews indicates, this blood signified and sealed to Israelite believers the blessing of the forgiveness of sins: "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22).

It is only in a covenant of grace that God promises to forgive our sins, and that only through the blood of Christ. The offerings that were part of the ratification of the Sinai covenant served as types of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who graciously obtains our redemption through his death. If we are looking for a type of the sacrificial obedience of Christ, we need to look not to Israel's tainted obedience but to their sacrificial substitute: a lamb without spot or blemish!

Second, there is the ceremonial meal before God on Mount Sinai. This is quite an amazing event. The text tells us that Moses and the elders of Israel went up to the mountain and "saw the God of Israel" (24:10). The description of God's appearance looks forward to what we will read in the book of Revelation (and elsewhere), with the appearance of the pavement having sapphire stone beneath his feet (Ex. 24:10; Rev. 4:3). In other words, we have here a preview of the perfect fellowship enjoyed between God and his people in the marriage supper of the lamb. This kind of heavenly fellowship

can only be a gift of God's grace and the fruit of his gracious covenantal dealings with his people.

Third, there is the mediatorial function of Moses. Throughout this passage and the narrative as a whole Moses functions as a typical mediator for Israel. It is important to realize that Moses is not the true mediator here. It is Christ himself that acts in and through him. He is just the type. But we do see strong indications of his priestly mediation, in which he stands between God and the people.

We do not have the space to develop this idea, but a mediator only functions within a gracious arrangement. As the rest of the Scriptures indicate, Christ becomes our mediator because we cannot come before him on our own. We need someone to do this on our behalf. Moses was but a faint, imperfect picture of this. But his mediatorial function points to the gracious character of God's dealing with Israel.

Israel here indeed promises obedience to God. She takes the oath of ratification, committing herself to live according to God's covenant. But this does not take place in abstraction from the rest of the passage. In particular, it takes place at the same time God sprinkles the blood of the forgiveness of sins upon the people. God knows that they are imperfect and sinful. He knows that they cannot keep God's law perfectly. Thus he includes a provision for the forgiveness of sins alongside their promise of faithfulness to him.

Although this covenant takes a more legal form in the Old Testament, it is nevertheless in essence a covenant of grace. And it can really be no other way. This God who is a consuming fire, who is perfectly just in his holiness and perfection, can only be approached and engaged by virtue of his sovereign grace.

And this grace has come in its fullness through Jesus Christ. He is a mediator greater than Moses, he is an offering greater than what was offered on the mountain, and he is the one that will graciously welcome us to the marriage feast of the lamb when he comes again. Out of this grace we live lives of committed obedience to God. Both we and know that our lives will not be perfect. But in sincere thanks we live to please him. Having been forgiven much, we seek to love much as the blood of Jesus cleanses us

from all sin. In this way the promise of God's covenant will come to full fruition when we finally arrive in heaven:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:3–4)

#25 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 25

In Exodus 25 we have another shift in the narrative. The next several chapters will be taken up outlining rules and instructions for the tabernacle. The shift is a little jarring for a reader. Previously it felt like we were reading a historical novel with dramatic tension, suspense, and resolution that carries us easily along. Suddenly we find ourselves reading something akin to an instruction manual for how to assemble something we bought online.

But these instructions are also a part of the redemptive drama. When God revealed the future exodus of the Israelites from Egypt he declared to Pharaoh: "Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness" (Ex. 5:1). The purpose of the Exodus was to free them from the tyranny of Egypt that they might worship the one true God. The tabernacle, therefore, takes up the heart of this book because it directed them to the heart of their lives: worship.

But there is more to the story than the simple fact of worship as a goal for Israel. Recent studies in the Old Testament have made much of certain parallels or similarities between the Temple/Tabernacle of God and the Garden of Eden. These patterns are evident even upon a cursory reading of the passage. Much of the furniture is made of wood, reminding one of the trees in a forest garden. There is gold almost everywhere, recalling the gold referenced in Genesis 2:12. The lampstand is made to look like a tree with almond blossoms and flowers, and branches that reach forth from a trunk (Ex. 25:34). There is much here that looks back to the images of the Garden of Eden. Paradise was closed to sinful man, but God will once again open its gate.

But we would be mistaken if we believe that this imagery was pointing to the fact that God was simply restoring Israel to an Eden-like situation. Israel is a sinful people. Everything in their life, including the temple in which they dwell with God, is adapted to this redemptive circumstance. It is not as if God fundamentally re-institutes an Edenic environment in Israel. That original arrangement has been broken, and can never be repaired. Only Christ himself can be a new Adam who can bring salvation to his people. As we saw yesterday, God does not reinstitute or reenact a covenant of works with

Israel. Instead, he reveals the Christ to come--the true second Adam--who will fulfill the broken covenant of works and bring us to heaven.

Instead, there is a deeper reason for the parallel imagery in these passages. That deeper reason is indicated in Exodus 25:9, where God says to Moses: "Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all his furniture, so you shall make it." As the book of Hebrews reveals, the pattern God is referring to is the pattern of heaven itself--the true and eternal temple of God. As Hebrews 8:5 states: "[The priests] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.'"

This means that the parallels between earthly Eden and Canaan, including those of the Temple are ultimately secondary or "accidental." They exist only because of a more primary reference that each of them shares to heaven and above. In other words, the reason there are similarities between Eden and the Temple is that both share a common, more fundamental reference to heaven above. Eden was the copy of the heavenly temple for the pre-redemptive situation with Adam, namely, the covenant of works that he violated. This Temple here is a copy of the heavenly temple now adapted to the redemptive situation, namely, God making a provision for the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with him through Jesus Christ, who is pictured therein. It reveals the fulfillment of the Adamic covenant of works through the perfect satisfaction and obedience of Christ, who was both the priest and the offerer. Through the veil of his flesh, he tore open the way to heaven so that we might have fellowship with the true God in the heavenly tabernacle (Heb. 10:20).

For this is the ultimate point of everything in the temple, including this furniture and everything written of elsewhere. It is to be a revelation of how God will dwell with and commune with his people: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). It is for this reason that God meets with his people in a special way at the mercy seat (25:22). For it is only through Christ, his holiness, his sacrifice, his blood, and his priestly work, that we can enter into the heavenly temple and commune with God and life everlasting.

This is what is ultimately revealed in these pages. He himself is not only our light and our food in this dark world, but in his incarnate state, he himself is the temple in which God dwells, and in whom we behold the glory of God (John 1:14). Through him believers also become the temple of God in both body and soul (2 Cor. 6:16).

The blueprint we read here and in the subsequent chapters is but a sketch of a sketch. These are the written plans for a copy of heaven. When we read them, they may seem technical and perhaps even boring. But think of them the way you would look at the blueprints for your dream home you might design with an architect. To the outsider, they may just look like blue lines on a page. But in the imagination of your mind, you can visualize the entire layout and picture yourself walking through every room and enjoying its accommodations.

So it is with these passages. God lays out our true "dream home" in heaven. This home is God's home, and he has invited us to live there with him. It is a sacred temple and also a king's palace. We see every room and all its furniture. The door to our dream home was locked, but Christ has opened it. He takes us into the most sacred places of joy and fellowship reserved for the royal king.

Between now and our final destination there is a treacherous wilderness to traverse. But in the end, there is peace and rest in a paradise above. We will one day enter into God's own house in heaven. For Jesus said:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be." (John 14:1-3_.

#26 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 26:1-37

Yesterday we noted that everything in the tabernacle was made after the heavenly pattern God showed Moses on the mountain. The tabernacle was thus a copy and shadow of God's sanctuary in heaven. The previous chapter dealt with some of the furniture in the tabernacle, like the lampstand, the ark, and the table. Furniture is placed in a home. God's heavenly temple is like the Garden of Eden, with gold, trees, fruit, and angels. But it is also a home with an architectural structure. The Church itself is a spiritual Temple. It is likened to both a growing garden and a structural home. It corresponds to both architecture and agriculture. The Apostle Paul mixes the two metaphors in his description of the Church in his letter to the Ephesians. Christ is the chief cornerstone of God's house. In him "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). The tabernacle is therefore God's garden-house. Christ is that tabernacle in his incarnate flesh. In him, we too become the temple of the living God.

Last time we consider a passage that described the furniture of the tabernacle. We considered some more general points regarding how they reminded us of God's grace in bringing us to a redemptive paradise.

Today we look at the curtains of the tabernacle. Everyone who has a home is familiar with the basic purpose of curtains. One purpose is to manage the amount of light that comes into the home. Perhaps more significantly, we also use them for privacy. Our home is like a "sanctuary" where only family members and close friends are allowed inside to see and experience what is happening. Strangers on the outside are blocked from participating and even viewing what goes on inside.

So it is in God's tabernacle. In the most basic sense, the curtains underscore the basic reality of the utter holiness of God's perfect being. Not just anyone is allowed to walk into God's house. Indeed, God is so holy that to even look upon his blinding glory is overwhelming for any mere creature. Even the angels have to veil their faces while they cry "Holy, Holy, Holy!" (Isaiah 6).

In themselves, sinful human beings have no way to enter God's house. It's like when we walk up to the door of a stranger's house and knock to see if anyone is there. Because they do not know us, they close the curtains, lock the door, and do not answer.

For those on the outside, the curtains remind us that the way to God is blocked for sinners. The angels on the veil near the Most Holy Place serve the same purpose. While they do remind us of the heavenly abode of God where the angels dwell, they also recall the angels that blocked the way to the Garden of Eden after the fall (Genesis 3:24).

But God has made a way for us to enter into his house and sanctuary through Jesus. He is the door by which we can enter the pasture and temple of God (John 10:9). If we knock on this door, it will be opened to us (Luke 11:9-10). Through him, the veil was torn open that reminded sinners that the way paradise of God was blocked by angelic guards. That is why at Jesus' death the Gospel writers tell us that the "curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Luke 23:45). As Hebrews tells us, Jesus opened up for us "a new and living way" "through the curtain, that is, his flesh" (Heb. 10:20). Through the priestly work of Jesus we have now been given free access to God's heavenly home and sanctuary.

And what a home it is! The gold and marvelous decorations of the tabernacle and temple pale in comparison to the glory of heaven. For in that tabernacle, there is not just visual glory beyond what we could possibly imagine. By forgiving our sins, Jesus has removed every misery. In heaven, there is also no mourning, crying, pain, sorrow, or even death. For in him this sinful order of things has passed away and new things have come.

We are still separated from being physically present in this temple through the veil that still separates our present sufferings from our future glory. But we do have access to it now by faith in Jesus. The Spirit that is the glory of heaven dwells in us already by the grace of Jesus. Our lives are made to reflect the glory, beauty, and purity of the home we occupy. We are the temple of the living God, the Holy Place where the Most High dwells. We must therefore walk in purity allowing no unclean thing to enter it. While we cannot perfectly cleanse ourselves in this life, we have the water of the Spirit that will

one day complete his work, even as the blood of Jesus cleanses us from the stains of sins that still cling to us.

#27 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 27:1-21

This chapter continues God's provisions for the tabernacle. This time we look at the bronze altar, the court, and the oil for the lamp.

The tabernacle actually had two altars. The golden altar of incense was inside the Most Holy Place. The bronze altar (considered here) was near the entrance of the tabernacle in the courtyard. This was the altar upon which burnt offering was made. Note especially how this is the first thing you see as you come into God's house. Before you can approach God, there must be a blood sacrifice. A substitute must be offered in your place. After that came the bronze laver, in which sacramental provision was made for ceremonial washings. Here we see a key element in the order of our redemption. Christ's sacrifice is our starting point. He is the only door by which we can have access to God.

Next comes the courtyard itself. We saw provisions for the curtains of the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place in the previous chapter. These are the curtains for the outer courtyard. God's house is so holy that there is a "buffer" in the form of the courtyard to make sure its purity is preserved. Note also that with the previous curtains, gold was used. With these outer curtains silver is used. It is a precious place, but not as valuable as the special place where God dwells.

There is rich symbolism here. The author of Hebrews reminds us that the curtains separating the division between the parts of the Temple was symbolic of the present age (Heb. 9:3). The way to the Holy Place is not opened as long as the first section is still standing.

Similarly, the division between the Holy Place and Courtyard reminds us of these distinctions. Consider this present creation. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. He made it very good. But compared to heaven it is nothing. That doesn't make the earth bad. It is silver and bronze. But heaven is gold! In these things, the tabernacle reminds us that while we can take godly delight in earthly things as gifts of the Creator,

our hearts must be fixed on the Most Holy Place where the source of every blessing dwells.

Finally, we read about the oil for the lamp. They are to regularly tend to it so that its light may not go out. This is symbolic of the perpetual light of God's presence. He is the light of the world. Everyone who believes in him will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. Christ is present to us through the light of his word. That lamp will never be snuffed out. It is not dependent upon the faithfulness of the minister or priest, as God will provide the fuel of the Holy Spirit to ensure it burns forever.

Today we enter into God's house in worship--not into an earthly place built with hands, but into heaven itself. We approach him covered with the blood of the sacrificial lamb, washed in the waters of his blood and Spirit. We enter not only into the outer courtyard of his house, nor even to the Holy Place, but through the torn veil of the body of Jesus crucified by now risen. Let us then with full assurance of faith approach our Lord in praise and worship, gladly receiving his word of grace. Let us not neglect to meet together, but encourage one another as we see the day approaching. For soon all veils of this created world will pass away and we shall be in the immediate presents of God the Father, through Christ our Priest, by the purifying fire of his Holy Spirit.

#28 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 28:1-43

In Exodus 28 we switch from the plans of the tabernacle itself to God's provisions for the priesthood. It's easy to get lost in the details of these chapters. One of the big, simple points is the fact that God's people need a substitute. If a schoolteacher is sick, they need to call in a substitute who can take care of their class while they are gone. As sinners, we are sick. We are so sick we can't even get out of bed. We need someone to do just about everything for us. We are more than sick: we are dead!

In these chapters, we see God's provision for a substitute in both offering and offerer. It's not just that we need a sacrifice to die for us. We need someone who can offer that sacrifice for us. In every respect, we are totally helpless. We need a substitute. This provision is made for God's people in the priesthood.

In Exodus 28 we examine the garments of the priests. The clothing they are to wear is special, even as the task they are given and the place it is performed is special and holy. Their garments consist of a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat, a turban, and a sash (28:4).

The substitutionary role of the priest is visually represented in the clothing of the priest. On the ephod, there are two onyx stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel (9-10). Likewise, on the breastpiece there are twelve different precious stones representing the twelve tribes (21).

Quite literally the priest symbolically carries on his body the entire nation of Israel. He is their substitute and representative. The acts of the Priest are accounted as the acts of the people.

Once a year this High Priest would offer a single sacrifice for sins. Bearing the whole nation upon his person, he would transfer their identity to the great sacrifice on the day of atonement.

In Jesus, we have the fulfillment of these things. In Christ, both priest and sacrifice will become one. He will appear once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin when he offers himself. Unlike Aaron, he will not offer this sacrifice with external robes of glory but will be stripped naked and crucified. Yet in his resurrection, he will bear greater glory than Aaron could ever imagine. In the book of Revelation the appearance of Jesus is described in terms reminiscent of the priestly glory of Aaron as he walks among the lampstands of his churches--the true Temple of God.

As you begin this day, apply these things to yourself. No work you accomplish, no task you perform, and no activity you complete can constitute your righteousness before God. You have nothing to offer God that can satisfy for your sins. You are disqualified in your unholiness to even bring it before him if you could. But in Jesus, you have one who is qualified: holy, harmless, and undefiled. He is separated from sinners by his sinless perfection, but near to us in the common experience of weakness and temptation. Having once offered himself for sin, he remains a merciful and faithful high priest, ready to help in our time of need. In him, our sins are atoned for, and our corrupt natures are purified. Through him, we can then begin to offer a true sacrifice to God--not a sacrifice of atonement, but a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.

#29 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 29:1-43

[Prefatory note: There are a lot of details in this passage. There is no way to cover everything in a devotional meditation like this. For the curious and adventurous you can listen to a sermon on a parallel passage in Leviticus 8 which covers the same material:

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=42192045261>

Here we simply consider some general points as to how Jesus is revealed in the passage as our final high priest before God.]

The narrative of Exodus has shifted. We began with the fast-moving, narrative drama of Israel's redemption. There was a lot of action. Dramatic tensions found satisfying resolutions. Israel was brought from the precipice of the cliff of destruction to the heights of victory. The last few chapters have seen a dramatic pause and slow down. Israel is now in the wilderness where they are to approach God in festive worship. Regulations for that worship are now being laid down. We first consider rules for the tabernacle itself and the offerings, and now the rules for the offerers (priests).

Chapter 29 contains the provisions for the ordination of Aaron and his sons. They are to be set apart from the others sons of Israel to serve as priests before God. In all these provisions we see a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ to come.

First and foremost we see again that we need a priest to serve on our behalf. Sacrifice alone is not sufficient to approach God. Cain sought to bring sacrifices before God, but they were not accepted by him. That is because they were not offered in faith (Heb. 11). Faith means that we do not trust in ourselves but in someone else. The priests bore on their clothing the names of the sons of Israel. We need someone to represent us before God. We have this representative in Jesus! He is the only mediator between God and man, our advocate before the Father.

Secondly, we also read hear about the anointing of the priests. In verse 7 we read about oil placed upon his head by which he is anointed. This is a preview of Christ's anointing that set him apart for his work as the Messiah. When Jesus was baptized he received the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was at work in the incarnation of Jesus, uniting the divine and human natures of Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary. Later the Spirit would come upon Jesus in his resurrection, fully glorifying him when he ascended into heaven. At his baptism, the Spirit came upon him with the power to equip him for his Messianic ministry. It was through the Spirit that he cast out demons, performed miraculous healings, and proclaimed the good news. It was also through this eternal Spirit that he offered himself to God as a sacrifice for our sins. He has shared this Spirit us, through which we are consecrated as priests before God in Christ. Our prayers and offerings of praise are through the continued priestly ministry of Jesus. In this anointing, we are separated from the world and constituted as "holy" to the Lord."

Third, Aaron's clothing also points us to Jesus. Yesterday we considered this in some detail. The clothing is mentioned in 29:5-6. Notice that here it is emphasized that the turban is a "crown" on the head of Aaron. This combines royal imagery with priestly. The description of the priest's clothing prefigures the appearance of Christ in his glory as beheld by John in the book of Revelation (see chapter 1). Note how John's vision draws attention to Christ's eyes being like a "flame of fire" and his face "shining like the sun." The turban of Aaron had a gold plate on it (Lev. 8:9) which would have reflected the light of the flames in the tabernacle that illuminated it. In his clothing and in his crown we see a picture of the glorified Christ! He was stripped of his external glory and died naked on a cross. But God raised him from the dead.

Fourth, we see also here a prefiguration of the sinlessness of Jesus. For Aaron and his sons, these things serve as a reminder of their sinfulness. The priests of old had to offer sacrifices for themselves and for the sins of the people. So the priest must have the blood of the sacrifice placed on his ear, his right hand, and on his feet. He is sinful. He does not listen to God (ear), do the works of God (hand), or walk in the ways of God (feet) as he should. But God will atone for him. When Jesus, the final high priest arrives, he will have no need to offer sacrifice for himself because he will be pure and sinless. We cannot look to any human leader for our ultimate hope or comfort. As holy as they are, they are fundamentally no different than us--in need of cleansing and sin. They need God's grace as much as we do. But Jesus is the spotless lamb of God. Because his

record of sin is "blank," he can take our sins upon himself. Because his obedience was perfect and offered in our place, we can have it credited to our accounts before God.

This passage contains many other indications of Jesus's greater high priestly work. These are sufficient for today. Indeed, how thankful we ought to be for the provision of Christ, our Priest. He once for all offered himself as a sacrifice to God, and now lives in heaven interceding for us. As a priest he both pays and prays. He has paid for sins with his final sacrifice. Now he prays for sinners before the presence of the Father. This Jesus meets our needs as he is our sufficient substitute. Through him we too are consecrated to God, offering ourselves as sacrifices of thanks and praise, the fruit of lips that trust in his name. Through him neither trial, nor suffering, or death can separate us from God. We can live lives of sacrifice here because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He has earned for us a prize that we could never purchase on our own: eternal life. All that we offer him can never equal the value of this precious gift. We are spiritual trillionaires through the free gift of Christ's grace. What we give up in this life for Christ's sake is a pittance compared to the precious blood and life of Jesus in us.

#30 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 30

In Exodus 30 we see further provisions for the tabernacle with regulations concerning the altar of incense, the census tax, and the bronze basin.

The altar of incense was one of two altars in the tabernacle. The first was the bronze altar. This was near the entrance to the tabernacle, upon which bloody burnt offerings were made. The altar of incense was just before the entrance of the Most Holy Place-- the special interior room where only the High Priest went once a year on the day of atonement.

These altars were different and signified different realities. One was bronze and the other was gold: both valuable but to differing degrees. One was the altar of initiation, while the other was the altar of consummation. On the first, blood was offered. But on the second incense was burned. The two altars were distinct, but not separate. They were part of a singular approach to God that took place in stages.

What does the altar of incense then signify? Throughout the Bible, incense is symbolically represented as a picture of prayer (Psalm 141:2, Rev. 5:8). As the smoke rises from the burning flame, so our prayers rise to God. This is striking because although the altar of blood sacrifice comes first on a bronze altar, it is not as highly valued as the prayers symbolized on the golden altar. This was, in part, to teach Israel that their acts of devotion should not consist simply in offering bulls and goats, but in the offering of our hearts in devotion and worship. Prayer is more valuable and nearer to God's heart in the holy of holies than acts of external sacrifice.

Theologically it also points us to the relationship between justification and sanctification. There can be no approach to God without the forgiveness of our sins. Thus the blood sacrifice comes first. But our salvation does not end there. It is the bronze beginning of our salvation. But sanctification (especially prayer) is the golden capstone of our redemption. As the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us, prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. These two benefits

(justification and sanctification) serve distinct roles. They cannot be confused. You cannot offer blood on the altar of sanctification. If you do that, you are trying to atone for your sin through your good works! Likewise, you cannot offer unauthorized first on this altar. Obedience is defined by God's will, not our own. Interestingly, in Jesus, both acts occur at the same time. On the cross, he offers his blood that we may draw near to God. Even as he does so he prays for his people. After his once for all sacrifice, he continues his eternal ministry for us in making intercession for his people.

Indeed, our lives in Christ are seen on this altar!

Next comes the census tax. This may sound odd to our ears since the NT places a special emphasis on giving freely and cheerfully. Forced taxation is not thought of as a duty of delight. However, when we see that the tax is only half shekel, the initial severity is significantly lessened. A half shekel was about 7 grams of silver. As of today, silver is worth about 21 USD per ounce. There are approximately 28 grams in an ounce, so you can see this is not a large tax (about 5.25 a person in today's dollars).

Interestingly, both rich and poor were to pay the same amount. It was not offered in proportion to their incomes, but a flat amount that was the same for all. This was a reminder to Israel that before God they were all equal: rich or poor, slave or free. They both stand equally condemned before God and require the same redemption. Riches will not make any difference. As the Proverbs remind us, both rich and poor begin and end in the same way. God is the maker of both, and both end up in the same grave (Prov. 22:2).

Finally, there is the bronze basin. This stood just after the bronze altar after you entered the tabernacle. In it, the priests were to wash their hands and feet when they brought a food offering to the Lord. This is a reminder that although the priests typified Christ, they were not the final priests. They too still had sins from which they needed to be cleansed. Both the offerer and the offering were imperfect, and could not fully atone for sin.

But in Christ, we have one who can bring us near to God. Through him, our prayers come up before the Lord as a pleasing aroma as we devote our hearts to him in covenant fellowship and communion. Through him, both rich and poor find their ultimate treasure in the giver of eternal life. In his sinless purity, he has made final atonement for our sins and sent his Holy Spirit to wash and cleanse us from the filth of our sins. The Spirit washes not the hands and feet of the body, but the filth and corruption of our hearts.

#31 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 31:1-18

This fairly brief chapter contains two "final" provisions for the construction of the tabernacle. The first concerns its builders, while the second points to its ultimate purpose (i.e. Sabbath rest).

Everyone who has embarked on a construction project knows that it is important to hire the right builders. If they are untrustworthy, they will overcharge you and things will get way over budget quickly. If they lack the requisite skills, the work will be shoddy and you may have to redo it.

In this case, God gave the people a special builder who would be with them to guide each step of its construction: the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of heaven comes down to guide earthly men as they construct a copy and shadow of heavenly things. The text tells us that Bezalel and Oholiab constructed the tabernacle and everything in it. God himself notes concerning Bezalel that "I have filled him with the Spirit of God" to equip him to do these very things.

Generally speaking, this is a reminder that God has created artistic ability and that this can be used to his glory and honor. This includes not only "high art" like painting and sculpture, but also other more "ordinary" tasks like making clothing, building furnishings, crafting metal objects, stonework, etc. Men who work with their hands to build reflect God's Spirit-image just as much as those who work more with their minds and mouths. The Ten Commandments prohibit the worship of images and the erection of images in the context of worship. But outside of worship artistic endeavors can be done to his glory and honor.

But the task in view in this passage is a special one. These men, guided by the Spirit, are to oversee the construction of the tabernacle. These things are a type of greater things to come. In the fullness of time, God would send his Spirit to the entire church, equipping them with gifts to serve one another in love. The beauty of God's final tabernacle consists in the faith, love, joy, and good works of the saints in which they

edify one another in love. The church is "God's building," and the apostles were gifted by God's Spirit to lay an apostolic foundation in the NT revelation now permanently recorded in the Scriptures (Eph. 2:20). Christ himself is the chief cornerstone who received the Spirit in fulness and has now poured it out on his church (Eph. 2:22). The Spirit of heaven (Eph. 1:13-14) is preparing us to dwell in God's heavenly temple through the continuing work of redemption in our lives.

The next passage deals with the Sabbath Day. The Sabbath is a perpetual institution. As this text reminds us, it was instituted in the creation and observed by God himself. It will continue until the end of the world when this first creation passes away to make room for a new heaven and a new earth. Even then the Sabbath will not pass away, but come to its full realization in perpetual rest.

While the Sabbath was a perpetual institution, it sometimes had special provisions, including the strictness with which it was to be observed. For example, during the wilderness wanderings, God provided bread from heaven in a special, miraculous manner. This meant that no food preparation could take place on the Sabbath day, because enough had been provided on the prior day. This does not mean that no food preparation can take place on the Sabbath (cf. Mark 2:23). That was a special provision due to the special circumstances of God's miraculous provision. Eating is a work of reasonable necessity.

Sabbath observance in a non-Sabbath observing world can be complicated. We don't live in a theocracy anymore. While the day is a day of rest for us it is still a day of work for the world. It can be difficult to sort out our competing duties in terms of our love of neighbor versus our observance of the Sabbath. We don't have space to discuss every "case law" that might arise. In these times, the fundamental principles of the law should guide us: love, mercy, justice, and matters of the heart. God knows the heart and is chiefly concerned about it rather than how we work through the most difficult applications of the Sabbath in our lives.

Similarly, we read here of the death penalty for Sabbath violations. While it is true that even the smallest sin deserves death (spiritually speaking), it is not the case that Sabbath violations continue to warrant capital punishment. This punishment was a

temporary "theocratic" provision that seems to have been in force only during the wilderness wanderings (see Num. 15:32). Again, this was a special time with special provisions. After all, God was visibly present with them at all times in the pillar of cloud and fire!

These provisions reflected the more "legal" character of the Mosaic era, but they did not change the substance of the Sabbath commandment. The purpose was not simply the avoidance of ordinary work (as if that had some inherent nobility to it). Instead, the purpose of the prohibition was to give time for festive worship and rest. Both the OT and the NT make very clear that works of necessity and mercy are permitted on the Sabbath. Incidental "violations" are not to preoccupy us inordinately when we are otherwise purposefully filling the day with worship, fellowship, and the love of God. Like all of God's laws, no one can keep the Sabbath perfectly. If we are chronically absenting ourselves from worship without just cause, that is another thing. Much less should we appoint ourselves "Sabbath police," hunting for errors in our brothers in this regard. This activity itself is often a Sabbath violation, and frequently reveals a heart that is not right before God. The Pharisee's preoccupation with the legal minutiae of this matter should give us pause if we find ourselves acting in this way. Ironically, in so doing they were out to destroy Jesus and put him to death when the Sabbath was a day of life.

The focus of the Christian Sabbath is worship. It is "holy" because in it we occupy ourselves with holy things. Worship should fill our day. God gave us six days to take care of all the affairs of this world. One day in seven he has made his own. In it, we should give ourselves fully to the worship of our God, especially in the public assemblies in the morning and the evening. We should approach it with the grace and love characteristic of the NT era, positively encouraging one another to take full advantage of the blessedness of this day.

The Sabbath was not given as a tool upon which we can establish our own righteousness. Much less was it given as a means to maliciously destroy our brothers when we believe they are falling short of God's standard. Instead, as the ultimate capstone of our redemption, it gives us a blessed preview of the day when we shall fully enter into our rest. Those who die in the Lord are blessed because they rest from their labors and their works follow them (Rev. 14:13).

#32 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 32:1-32

John Calvin famously quipped that the human heart is a factory of idols. There is perhaps no more dramatic display of this fact than the incident with the golden calf in Exodus 32. Moses has spent the last 40 days on the mountain of God. The Lord audibly summoned him to this place even while he was visibly manifested to the people in devouring fire on top of the mountain. The chief men of Israel ate and drank before the Lord and saw the God of Israel in his theophanic glory. Moses received directly from God the pattern of his heavenly dwelling place which they were to construct in a sacred tabernacle. They literally saw the Lord of Hosts with their waking eyes, hearing his thunder and quaking at his power. (See Exodus 24 for a fuller description of these things.).

And what was their response to these things? They constructed a golden calf to worship. They had plundered the Egyptians of their gold which they were to use in the construction of the holy things, but instead they used it to construct an unholy idol.

Interestingly, the golden calf was not to represent a foreign god. It was not the object of worship that was being changed, but the means of worship. After the calf was constructed they declared: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4). This is an important point, as many have tried to argue that the only images forbidden in worship are of false deities. This passage makes clear that even the worship of the true god through images is forbidden by God.

Note how quickly Israel had turned aside from the Lord! He himself points it out to Moses (32:8). Later the Galatian Christians would do the same and the Apostle Paul would lament how he is "astonished" that they are "so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel" (Galatians 1:6). This is one good reason church history and tradition cannot be a fully reliable guide to us, especially in matters of worship. There is utterly no mention of the apostles condoning image worship. Where it is mentioned in the book of Acts it is condemned by them. Yet the historical record indicates that images in "Christian" worship services can be found in the second century. But this is no proof of their apostolic sanction. Israel created idols

before Moses was even done receiving God's instructions for worship. False teaching can have the stamp of antiquity just as much as the truth. The devil is as ancient as the creation. Time is not the arbiter of truth--only God's word is.

But behold the mercy of God to idolaters! Moses already had grown frequently frustrated with the complaints and groanings of the people. Seeing the idolatry of the people, the Lord's wrath is kindled and he is ready to destroy them. Moses, too, is furious. When he sees the spectacle he throws down the tablets of stone and breaks them at the foot of the mountain. God's people break God's law before they even receive it!

Yet this is not the end for Israel. They have a mediator before God. As Psalm 106:23 beautifully summarizes: "Therefore he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them." Moses here functions as a type of Christ. Through his priestly intercession, the Lord relents from utterly destroying them. And note the heart of his prayer: "But now, if you will forgive their sin--but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (32:32). In both his act of priestly intercession and the offering of himself as a substitute we see an anticipation of the grace of Christ.

Yet Moses is only a type. The reality has not arrived. Israel will survive, but not without judgment. Three thousand fall by the sword in the divine judgment administered by the sons of Levi. The NT appeals to this scene as a warning of divine judgment against the sin of idolatry (1 Cor. 10). The sinful heart was and continues to be a factory of idols.

"These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). We must flee from idolatry in all its forms. God must be the chief treasure of our hearts. Many will argue that humans need a goal and purpose to function well in life. But if our chief end is not to glorify God and enjoy him forever, the end will only be misery and death.

#33 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 33:1-23

Sometimes God's judgment hides a mercy. If someone loses their job or their investments evaporate, it may seem that God's anger is burning against them. But what if these apparent "judgments" were actually sparing you from worse things? Perhaps success at your job or an increase in wealth would have turned your heart from the Lord and kept you away from eternal life. In the end, these "judgments" prove to be hidden mercies through God's infinite wisdom.

Something similar is happening here in Exodus 33. Israel has sinned a great sin in the golden calf incident. God was about to destroy them had not Moses (the mediatorial type of Christ) stood in the breach and interceded for them. "Final" judgment against them was delayed. Moving forward they would lose certain privileges, but these were intended for their good.

First, there is the command to leave Sinai. This meant that the glorious display of God's majesty would no longer be before their eyes. On that mountain, the elders saw the God of Israel, even eating and drinking with him. They received the law and the revelation of the heavenly temple of God in the instructions for the tabernacle. But now they are being sent back to the wilderness. The change of location is significant. It marks a short-term "loss" or judgment. The mountain is preferable to the desert. But in the desert there is a path to a better land, flowing with milk and honey. So it is with God's "judgments." The earthly loss is only a stepping stone to greater gain. God's judgment hides a mercy.

Secondly, there is the loss of their wealth in the stripping of their ornaments. When the Israelites left Egypt they plundered the Egyptians, taking their gold and precious metals (Ex. 3:22, 12:36). As with everything the Lord gives, a portion of this was to be used as offerings for the construction of the holy things of the tabernacle. Instead, they crafted a golden calf! Their wealth literally was the means that enabled them to idolatry! So God stripped them of it. The loss of wealth seems like an obvious judgment, yet in this case, it is clearly a hidden mercy. When money leads us astray, may it perish quickly! This is not a difficult point to see even in earthly things. Give a drug addict \$10,000 and it may just kill him. If he remains impoverished on the street, at least there is some

check on his self-destructive activity. If money leads our hearts astray from Christ, what a mercy that it be removed from us that he may remain!

Third, there is the loss of God's special presence among the Israelites. It is not that God's presence would be totally removed. Only now it would be mainly indirect through the person of Moses. The pillar of cloud would descend on the tent of meeting where God would commune with Moses, speaking to him face--as a man speaks with his friend (33:11). The loss of God's special presence (typically manifested) seemed like a judgment. But insofar as this meant that Israel would not be consumed by the searing purity of his holiness, it was a hidden mercy.

Finally, we must note more fully how Moses's continued mediatorial function shows God's grace to Israel and to him. As great as Moses was, he was not the final mediator. Israel had no faith, but Moses did. For this reason, he was the recipient of God's blessed presence with privileges that the people no longer enjoyed. Moses used those privileges to continually intercede for God's people, appealing to his promises to continue his favor toward them. Moses sought a clearer sight of the glory of God and received it by the rock. Yet Moses, too, had to be shielded from the glorious presence of God as the Lord hid him in the cleft of the rock.

These things were clear indicators that although God's final grace was present by way of anticipation, something greater was still needed. Moses was a servant in God's house. But Jesus is the Son over God's house. In his coming, we have one who shines forth with eternal permanence with the grace and glory of God. He has quenched the fire of the wrath of God by bearing the curse of the law for us. He has given us gifts more precious than gold which perishes.

Although he brings trial and suffering that may seem like a judgment against us, by his grace he makes it a hidden mercy. The fire of trial is painful. But in his hand, it becomes a purifying flame. Just as gold is refined in the fire, so too is our faith. Indeed, in Christ, we know that even the loss of all things is nothing next to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ, our mediator, our intercessor, and our friend.

#34 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 34:1-35

The Lord is a God of both justice and grace. In him, we see the searing purity of perfect holiness and the tender mercy of forgiving grace. These things seem contradictory to many. People will seize on one or the other and make it dominant in their conception of God. Thus God becomes either a harsh taskmaster more like Pharaoh than Yahweh, or an indulgent grandparent who enables bad behavior.

As Exodus 34:6-7 indicates, God is characterized by perfect justice and preeminent grace:

"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Note how God first emphasizes his grace and mercy, but not to the exclusion of his justice (emphasized later). God is most glorified in his expressions of grace. That is because grace involves the satisfaction of justice (but more on this later).

In this passage, we see several expressions of God's grace to Israel. This is important to remember as the legal aspects of the Mosaic administration have sometimes led Christians to view the Mosaic covenant as a kind of covenant of works in which Israel was to earn blessings from God through their obedience. We can also be tempted to fall into thinking of our obedience as "good enough" to earn something from God, or at least make us better than other Christians who do not work or try as hard as we do. This was the attitude of the Pharisees in Jesus's day, and even their pious-sounding prayers could not hide their sense of entitlement and superiority over others (see Luke 18:11-12). Even a cursory reading of Moses would lead them to see that God's grace was at the heart of all his dealings with Israel.

First, note how in this passage the broken covenant between God and Israel was renewed. In fact, in one sense, the covenant was broken before it was fully consummated. Israel had rejected the Lord while Moses was still on the mountain. Their sin with the golden calf broke God's covenant as they had violated their solemn oath. This was symbolized in Moses breaking the tablets of stone. But now new tablets are made, indicating a gracious renewal of the broken covenant. This is also an indication that the Mosaic covenant was not a covenant of works, as a covenant of works cannot be renewed.

Second, there is the continued promise of God to "be with" his people. To be sure, it comes with a clear warning to avoid aligning with the pagan nations whom they are to drive out. The snare of idolatry will be before them at every step. Nevertheless, God's powerful presence will remain with them as they battle in the name of the Lord. This is an act of grace.

Third, there is the giving of a yearly calendar that contains constant reminders of God's past faithfulness. Here God recalls the feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Firstfruits, and Ingathering. These are three major feasts where all males (i.e. heads of households) are to appear before the Lord. This rule regarding attendance contained a mercy within a mercy, as such a trip on animal or on foot would have been quite difficult for small children or pregnant and nursing women. But the deeper grace was the year-by-year reminder of God's past grace to them in delivering them from the Egyptians as well as the future hope of the fulfillment of his promises. Ultimately these things pointed them to the work of Jesus who is our Passover Lamb and the first fruits of the final resurrection harvest.

Finally, we see God's grace in the continual revelation of his glory through Moses. He met face to face with God in the tent of meeting. When he came out, his face visibly shone with the glory of God. To be sure, God also included a reminder that this was not his final, permanent manifestation of grace and glory to his people. The glory of Moses's face diminished with time, which was hidden from the Israelites due to their unbelief.

But in the fulness of time one greater than Moses would appear. Moses revealed the gracious glory of God, but only in a temporary, provisional way. Due to their unbelief, Moses's ministry became one that exposed their hardness of heart. It thus became a ministry of death. But in the fulness of times, God would send the fulness of his glory-Spirit and bring a final, permanent manifestation of his grace. The fading glory of Moses is replaced with the permanent glory of Christ and the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:7-18).

We have this Spirit in us. Christ has procured it through his death and resurrection and has poured it out on those who believe. In Christ, we see the manifestation of God's perfect grace and perfect justice. On the cross, he satisfied divine justice. He perfectly obeyed God's law and suffered its penalty. Having done so for his people, he then extends to them the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. In him, mercy and justice meet. In him, we come to the mountain of God and the paradise above. Once we enter that place, we will never again wander in the wilderness below. We have this now by faith and not by sight. Outwardly we are wasting away, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day. The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, but the God of heaven has opened our eyes to Christ and his glory.

God's grace is not only to Israel but has come this day to you. How often do we think of God in a way that does not reflect the fullness of his character! How easy it is to slip into thinking that God's love for us is dependent on our love for him, beating ourselves up that we are not "good enough" to be his child. Or we become presumptive of his grace, thinking that we can live however we please without consequence. Neither perspective matches the biblical presentation. God is a God of both grace and justice. We live with both the realization that we can never live up to the standard of God's perfect law, as well as the desire to serve him with all that is in us in thanks for his grace. Justice has been satisfied, so therefore we walk in faith and obedience. Those who have been forgiven much in the satisfaction of justice will also love much as we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

#35 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 35:1-35

This passage begins with another reminder of the principle of the Sabbath. The ultimate purpose of our lives is the worship of the one true God, even as it was the purpose of God's delivering Israel from Egypt. Christians sometimes complain that they don't have enough spiritual fellowship in their lives or feel empty and distant from God. If that is the case, the first thing we need to ask ourselves is: "Are we taking full advantage of the blessing of God's Day?" If we find ourselves hungry and malnourished, the first step is to make sure we are eating at proper mealtimes. We might also consider whether we are just showing up at the table and not eating (perhaps because we don't like the taste of the food). Like Israel, we live in a wilderness-desert. Thankfully, the Lord's Day is an oasis of both water and manna to nourish us in a hostile environment.

Our church has both morning and evening services. Attending both can be difficult, especially if you have infants or small children. Little ones do not like to cooperate with activities they only do once a week. Helping them adjust to the weekly pattern of worship will mean short-term difficulty and sacrifice. For a time the day of rest will become a day of difficulty! The short-term challenge will only result in long-term spiritual benefits for your family. At the same time, God is merciful. The exhausted mother should not shame or guilt herself if she is so overwhelmed she cannot make it to an evening service on Sunday. Those with infant twins should be granted even more understanding and grace! If there ever was a time when the principles of necessity and mercy applied, this is it!

The passage quickly transitions to a discussion of the contributions of the tabernacle. Interestingly, although God gives them clear instructions for how to build it, and appoints a select group of priests to service it, he calls the entire nation to contribute and participate in its construction. Men and women brought from their own possessions everything that was needed to build it. Worship is led by priests, but its purpose was for all the people. Each person had their own gift and used it to serve in love. This is a picture of the same principles that inform our service in Christ's church. Each has received a gift from God and is to use it to serve their brothers in love as we grow into a holy Temple in the Lord. Only now the type has passed away. God's tent is his people.

Furthermore, God emphasizes the willingness of each person to participate in the work. True, God-glorifying worship is not done under compulsion but flows from a willing, joyful heart (35:5, 21, 22, 26, 29). He desires obedience, not sacrifice. Even in an age where greater emphasis is placed on the external aspects of worship, the focus is still on the heart of the believer. The types and shadows are to move the Israelites to trust in the Lord, rejoice in him, and live lives of thankful obedience to him.

God has given his best to us. We are to give our best to him. He has given us his only-begotten Son, and the priceless gift of eternal life. We can never repay him for these gifts. He simply desires a glad and thankful heart devoted to him in worship.

That was the heart of our Savior while on earth, even as it is his heart today. May his heart be formed in us as we with gladness and willingness devote ourselves to him.

#36 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 36:1-38

We are in the thick of a section of the OT that can seem very tedious. We have a lot of technical details about the building of the tabernacle: their exact dimensions, and the specific materials from which they are made. At first, it might seem like the ancient equivalent of an instruction manual for an appliance or electronic device (some assembly required!). While necessary to get it up and going, and perhaps consult from time to time, a construction manual hardly makes for scintillating morning reading.

The passage is actually filled with great theological significance for today's church. It shows us in typological form how God goes about building up the church, which is his temple through Christ and the Holy Spirit. For we as living stones are being built into a Holy Temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:20-22, 1 Pet. 2:5).

At the end of Exodus 35, we were reminded of the two skilled workmen God had selected to oversee its construction: Bezalel and Oholiab. (If you think their names sound funny, just remember that they would think the same thing of ours!). Of these two men it says that the Lord "has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with craftsmanship" for artistic construction. In our devotional on Exodus 31 we reflected on the fact that the Holy Spirit was the giver of all artistic gifts as reflected in these men. They were joined by the rest of the skilled workers in Israel for the construction of the tabernacle. As each went about contributing their own unique skill, this magnificent Tabernacle quickly began taking shape.

These elements of the tabernacle construction provide a wonderful picture of the way God is at work today building his tabernacle-temple in the church.

The Gospel narratives clearly describe Jesus himself as the true temple of God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is recorded as saying: "...destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The temple of which he spoke was his body. Earlier John said: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The word for "dwelt" in the Greek language also means "pitched his tent" or "tabernacles."

The temple that is Jesus' body was produced through the direct work of the Holy Spirit, by which he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

But the NT also describes the church as the temple of God. Believers are in union with Jesus Christ, and as such, they are growing and being built up to be a holy temple in the Lord. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, and by his Holy Spirit, he has gifted and called men to serve as leaders and officers to see that this work is completed.

This is outlined in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (2:20-22). There he speaks of the "household of God," which is

"...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Later in Ephesians 4, he describes the gifts that the risen Christ showers down on his church through the Holy Spirit in the form of officers (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers). These teaching offices function as the primary way God builds up and constructs his people to be that temple built by the Holy Spirit.

This is the same pattern we see in Exodus. God gifts men through the Holy Spirit with particular gifts to build his temple. Every member has his or her part in supporting and promoting this teaching ministry, just every member had his part in giving offerings for the temple.

As every member does their part, the church is being built up to be that dwelling place of God through the Spirit. That work is extremely imperfect now while we are all still

tainted with sin. But one day that temple will be fully built, never to be destroyed, in which the Lord will do well with us forever.

For now, we give ourselves eagerly to the construction project God has given us. It is easy to get discouraged, especially when we are confronted with the incompleteness of the work being done. Anyone who has remodeled their home knows how tedious it is to live in a construction zone. That is our lives in Christ's church.

Nevertheless, we know that the work will one day be completed in heavenly glory. For now, we give ourselves eagerly to it. Note how the passage says that the people contributed so much to its construction they had to be told to stop giving (36:6-7). Can you imagine raising money for a ministry or church plant where instead of sending out letters to encourage giving you had to tell them to stop? What a contrast to the sluggishness that so often characterizes our lives! May the same Spirit that moved their hearts to eagerly serve the Lord fill us this day and move us to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

#37 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 37:1-29

This chapter repeats material we considered in our devotional in Exodus 25. The difference is that while the previous section detailed the plans for the tabernacle furniture, this one describes its completion. All was done exactly as God had described. The blueprints were perfect, patterned after a vision of heaven. The construction was faithfully executed as God guided his servants through the Holy Spirit. We will not repeat what we said earlier.

You can learn a lot about people from the furniture in their homes. You can probably get a good idea of their family income level, or how frugal they like to be. Based on how the chairs are arranged, you can probably estimate how much time they spend watching television. Depending on what open books are laying around you can probably if they have children and how tired mom and dad might be when story time is done. While it would be foolish to use this data to "judge" our neighbor, there are things we can learn about the family from their furniture.

Here in Exodus 37, we see some of the furniture of God's temple-house. In one respect, this furniture reflects important aspects of the special sanctuary where God is making redemptive provision for his people. In another important way, it reveals to us certain characteristics of God's heavenly abode and dwelling place.

First, note the presence of gold on much of the furniture. This reflects the riches and wealth of God's home. The ark, the table, and the lampstand are all either made of or overlaid with pure gold. Typically we only make things out of gold that are very special. We restrict its use to wedding rings, small pieces of jewelry, and perhaps a few pieces of bullion as a hedge against inflation.

But imagine walking into someone's house and instead of silverware, the forks and spoons are made of gold. Or greater still, imagine that their dinner table was made out of gold! This could only be the case if someone was so wealthy that gold was considered a common, ordinary thing (cf. Solomon in 1 Kings 10:21).

So it is in God's holy heaven. It is filled with the riches of his infinite nature and the eternal life he grants to his people. Compared to that gift, procured through the sacrifice of Christ, all the gold in all the world is an ordinary thing. It is as nothing compared to him.

Is this how we think of Jesus, our Savior? Of God our Creator and Redeemer? Of our faith, which is the gift of God by which we receive these things?

All the gold of the earth will perish, but these things will endure forever.

Second, consider also the beauty of God's furniture. In American culture, functionality is usually prized over beauty when it comes to furniture. But this furniture reflects the glory and beauty of the Lord. The Ark has handcrafted angels overshadowing the mercy seat. The Table and Altar were made with Acacia wood, which is still prized for its gorgeous color and grain patterns. It was also overlaid with gold. Normally if the wood is to be covered or painted, we do not worry about how beautiful it appears (no one will see it). Not so here. Even the unseen materials are of the highest quality and beauty. The lampstand is crafted to resemble a tree with branches and blossoms. Additionally, all the details of the craftsmanship likewise reflected the beauty of God.

The furniture reflected the beauty of the purity of God's holiness. There is no defect in him. There is no sin in his presence. In our homes, there is a lot that needs fixing. Appliances are dysfunctional. Heaters malfunction. Chairs break. Children (and parents) break things). In God's house, there is perfect beauty and order.

It is so because it is a reflection of heaven. As long as we are in this world our "homes" will be a sinful mess. The ugliness of evil pervades everything. But one day through Jesus we will be fully purified and welcomed into God's house in heaven.

#38 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 38:1-31

Like the last chapter, Exodus 38 repeats material covered previously in the narrative. The altar of burnt offering, the bronze basin, and the court were all discussed previously (cf. Ex. 27:1-8, 30:17-21, 27:9-19). The major difference is that before the Lord declared "You shall make [these things]..." and now it says that "He did make [these things]..." Copious space is given to clearly demonstrate the fact that what God commanded came to pass. After this, we have a careful record of the materials used for the tabernacle's construction, especially the gold, silver, and bronze. The point of the passage is perhaps best summed up in the middle of 38:22. There it simply declares that "they made all that the Lord commanded Moses."

It may at first seem difficult to discern what the Lord is teaching us in the passage. After all, if a preacher repeated himself like this it would probably get pretty taxing for the congregation. But it is not hard to find areas of our lives where it is necessary to double or triple-check our work. If you go to the doctor's office, they first sign you in with all your personal information. But after that they will ask again with the nurse arrives at your room. If you are having surgery on a limb, you will often be marked on the area that needs repair, but then asked again to confirm that it is really your right knee that is giving you trouble.

On the other hand, if we are this meticulous in the wrong area, we can manifest an ungracious and controlling spirit. How exactly do we apply this reality to the life of the church today?

It is certainly not a principle that governs our sanctified obedience in an absolute sense. We certainly must strive to obey God in all his commandments. But given the remaining presence of our sinful flesh, we know that continued sin is inevitable. The whole purpose of the ceremonial provisions of the tabernacle was to remind us of God's love and forgiving grace. Although we are sinners and cannot approach God, he gives us a way to come before him. Although we are impure he purifies us and receives us into his holy presence. In other words, we ought not to think of this passage as teaching us that in every instance of our lives, we will always be obeying God.

Instead, we need to appreciate that the strict standards of compliance outlined here are focused in particular areas. That took one form in the OT when the tabernacle or temple worship was in force but is applied differently under the NT order.

The first is the area of worship. In the Bible the Lord lays down a simple principle to guide us in how we are to worship him: whatever is not commanded is forbidden. We are to worship God exactly as he told us: nothing more, nothing less.

While this may seem "harsh" at first and freedom-limiting, let us remember that these strict provisions are actually a mercy to the Israelites. Indeed, before Moses even descended from the mountain they decided to worship God in their own way and built a golden calf. This led to their near destruction! Given their sinfulness and the factory of idols that is the human heart, it was a grace of God to limit their "creativity" in how they were to worship. Given their evil proclivities, it was clear that any proposals they came up with would inevitably lead to idolatry.

It is also a grace to the church in that worship can often become an area of conflict and argument. Many have experienced "worship wars" where members go to battle over their preferences, styles, and traditions for worship. Worship becomes about what "we want" and not about what God has commanded.

Worship is to be focused on God. All too often it becomes a way people can either stir up a nostalgic feeling that connected them to their past, or a way to manifest their independent spirit in doing something fresh and new. Worship certainly connects us with the past, and insofar as it brings us to the new order of things we experience something "fresh" compared to this evil world. But its purpose is to glorify God, and to do so in the way that he has commanded.

Many times people argue whether worship should be "contemporary" or "traditional." These are the wrong categories to assess the matter. Worship does not primarily take us back

in the past, nor is it something that needs to take its starting point by whatever is shaping the "modern world." "Relevance" is not measured by modern man but by God. Worship doesn't take us backward to forward in earthly history. It takes us upwards to the eternal realities of heaven. We neither abandon the past nor wholly reject something new. New sermons should be preached weekly. New psalms and hymns can be composed and sung. However, given that we are preceded by two millennia of church history, we should not be surprised if our worship contains mostly older material. The point is this: it is valuable not because it is old or links us to the past. It is valuable because it connects us to the same heavenly point of contact. The past and present is only relevant insofar as it leads us to our heavenly dwelling place.

The NT carries forward this principle. In the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, NT worship was very simple and focused on the word of God in the Gospel. The worship services contained a call, a greeting from God, songs and hymns sung by the congregation, prayers, offerings, sacraments, vows, and most importantly the reading and preaching of God's word. If we stick to these elements and seek to implement them in a God-centered manner disputes will quickly be settled and s people will be edified.

But there is another way this principle manifests itself. It not only affects the form of worship but also its substance. The tabernacle essentially contained the proclamation of the Holy Gospel in visible form. This was the reason God was so strict in the construction of the tabernacle as well as its service. If you alter one aspect of the service you can altar the Gospel itself. For example, if you approach God with a grain offering first you are coming before God on the basis of your sanctified obedience. Present a bloody burnt offering and you are declaring your faith in the sacrifice of another.

Thus in the NT strict standards are set for the preaching of the Holy Gospel. Paul speaks in shockingly strong language on this point in the book of Galatians: if anyone preaches a different Gospel, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9). What was pictured in types and shadows in the tabernacle is now openly proclaimed. What appears to be slight modifications can have huge effects.

The Lord is merciful. Even when Israel partially corrupts his worship he still maintains his love for them. Pastors will not be struck down with lightning from heaven simply

because they wrongly exegete a passage on a minor point. But the general pattern of the Gospel must be faithfully maintained. Some errors are more serious than others, but all have the potential to grow and corrupt the Gospel.

The pure Gospel proclaims that salvation is through grace alone, faith alone, and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alone. In particular, it proclaims Jesus as the sole redeemer of man, our only high priest, and the one mediator between us and God. We can only approach God through faith in this substitute, offering our entire lives in grateful, consecrated obedience to his glory. Even when this Gospel is purely proclaimed the church is still filled with much weakness and imperfection. How much more perilous will the situation be when this Gospel is impure or corrupt!

Christ is our only hope. We receive him only in the preaching of the Gospel. Let us then pray that this Gospel would be purely preached and that the light and grace of Christ may shine brightly to the world.

#39 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 39:1-31

This chapter contains the making of the priestly garments for serving in the tabernacle. As before, it repeats the same material outlined earlier in the book. What we read as an instruction in Exodus 28 we now read as an executed command in chapter 39. God's word comes to pass!

In our devotional meditation on the earlier section (#28), we noted how the clothing reflected the substitutionary and vicarious character of the priests. He bore on his body clothes that were symbolic of the entire nation. He was a kind of typical mediator between God and man, Christ being the true reality. In taking our human flesh he became one with us, bearing our sins in his body on the tree. We will not repeat that analysis here.

Today we reflect on the power of God's word as it executes what was previously instructed. Everything God had said came to pass. This emphasis is perhaps best articulated in 39:43: "And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so they had done it." What a beautiful and orderly description of covenant faithfulness and loyalty to God! Is this not what every believer wants in their lives? Yet this description of God's word at work in Israel strikes us for several reasons.

The description is quite uncharacteristic of the nation in this narrative. God gave them the law, but they quickly broke with their idolatry. God called them to faith in his power, yet they quickly turned to unbelief and complaint. Time and time again, God commands Israel and they do not obey. Yet here in a long section on the provisions for the tabernacle, we read that "as the Lord had commanded, so they had done it" (39:43). Why?

God clearly bestowed upon them a special provision of grace. He even gave a special measure of the Holy Spirit to see that the work would be done exactly had he had instructed (31:3; 35:31). That is because this work was essentially special revelation in

visible form. It was to be a means of grace--the way God would shower down his tender mercy upon a sinful people and give them access to God.

We find an analogy to this special guidance of the Holy Spirit in his work to inspire the Scriptures. Paul tells us that all Scripture is "God-breathed" (1 Tim. 3:16). The Greek word for "breath" is the same as the word for "Spirit." The Spirit is the breath of God who guides the writers to pen exactly what God tells them. Peter explains this process of "inspiration" in other languages, declaring that "...men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit is a person, not a machine. By his divine power, he can use the unique personality of each human agent to express his truth without error. This is what Jesus promised: "...the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what to say" (Luke 12:12). Interestingly Matthew adds: "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (10:20).

As with Bezalel and Oholiab so it is with the Apostles and the Prophets. The Holy Spirit brings a perfect revelation of the kingdom of heaven in visible type and shadow in the tabernacle and in audible words through the Holy Scriptures.

The personal sanctification of the believer does not yet reflect this exact perfection. But one day it will. Interestingly, this process is described in terms reminiscent of the construction of the tabernacle and the inspiration of Scripture. By the Spirit, the church is currently being built into a Holy Temple in the Lord. The process is still underway, but one day it will be complete. What God has declared will fully come to pass! Likewise, our renewal in grace is also described in similar terms to the inspiration of Scripture. Only this time the word is not written with pen and ink, but perfectly inscribed on our inner being:

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:33-34).

The Spirit that guided the building of the tabernacle and the inspiration of Scripture will also guide us in the wilderness of this present age. The work he has begun will certainly be completed through him who still ministers on our behalf in the temple of heaven above.

#40 - Devotional Meditations on Exodus 40:1-38

In this chapter, we finally see God's ultimate purpose in giving Israel the tabernacle. The whole structure and all its contents were to be a picture and sign of God's continuing presence with them as his chosen people. This presence comes to them in the person of the Holy Spirit. He may be the "last" person in the order of the Holy Trinity, but he is by no means the least. The plan of the Father, fulfilled by the Son, comes to eternal fruition in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We see his particularly "Holy" character pictured in the tabernacle as a whole. The first part of the chapter highlights the holy or "set apart" character of all the provisions for the tabernacle, its furniture, its utensils, and the priesthood. For example, Moses was to consecrate the tabernacle and all that was in it "so that it may become holy" (40:9). Every part of the tabernacle was stamped with the glorious purity of the holiness of God. God's Spirit is from his holy heaven and reflects the utterly holy character of the divine essence.

The priestly ministry in the temple, through sacrifice and offering, was also designed to offer a picture of that holiness as it was reflected among the people of God. A holy God dwelt among them. Therefore, they were to be holy in all their conduct. This holiness was in no way the ground, basis, or meritorious cause of God's continuing habitation with them. Instead, God's gracious presence itself became the basis for their conduct worked out in union with their covenant God. God does not dwell with them because they have made themselves holy. They are to be holy because God has made them so.

Although he called his people to be holy, he knew that they were by nature unholy. The tabernacle was also a reminder of the redemptive provision God made for sinners to come into the presence of the searing purity of God's holiness. Holiness only comes to sinners by the work of another acting on our behalf, and through a sacrifice offered on our behalf. Thus, the tabernacle and priesthood is a reminder of our need for a substitute and mediator to accomplish what we cannot do in ourselves.

But through this redemptive provision, God not only put forth a picture of himself in visible type and shadow but actually dwelt with his people through the theophany of cloud and fire. This presence was to be with them always. The cloud would protect them and lead them by day, and the fire would guide and illuminate them by night.

The same basic principles are true for us in Christ. He is the true tabernacle, the true priest, and the true sacrifice. In him, we have the perfect and lasting redemptive provision to remove our unholiness in God's sight. By his Holy Spirit, he continues to guide us, not only by day and by night, but eternally through his lasting presence. And what is true of Israel of old is even more true of us.

Because this holy God dwells among us through Christ and the Spirit, we also are to be holy in all our conduct. True religion according to James consists (in part) in keeping oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27). This does not mean that we leave the world or join a monastery to avoid others (1 Cor. 5:10). Instead, we must maintain our purity and holiness even as we interact with the world in all its sinful filth.

What a wonderful reminder in our day-to-day living. We live and dwell in the presence of God in his heavenly Temple by faith. In our words, thinking, and conduct, we are called to reflect what God has done for us through Christ. In this, we show the genuineness of our faith, edify our brothers, and adorn the Gospel of the Lord Jesus to those outside the household of faith. In our daily interactions with our spouses and families, we must reflect that we are members of the holy household of God.

God's Spirit dwells in us. He is the ultimate fruit of God's redemption. Christ bore our sins on the cross procuring our forgiving through his righteousness. But he then sends the Holy Spirit to really transform us in our hearts and lives to the image of his Son. He now lives and reigns in heaven, ministering on our behalf in the true tabernacle, made without hands. He is now preparing us through the work of sanctification to join him in that place. Until then we have the promise that through the Spirit Christ will be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

