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“The Book of Exodus”

by
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About the Author



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TUESDAY, JANUARY 1

EXODUS 1:1-4

HEBREWS 6:13-20

*“By thee have I been holden up
from the womb ...”*

WHY EXODUS?

The English title of the book “Exodus” is taken from the Greek word meaning exit or departure. The Hebrew title is taken from the opening words in Exodus 1:1, *“Now these are the names”* (*ve-elleh shemot*). The most likely date of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt and its record in the book of Exodus would be during the fifteenth century BC. Despite liberal critics’ denials, Moses is undoubtedly the writer God used because, among other evidences, the Lord Jesus attested to this (John 5:46-47; 7:19).

This second section of the Pentateuch begins with the word *“Now.”* It is the link to the book of Genesis. The last chapters of Genesis describe how God led Jacob and his eleven sons into Egypt to live with Joseph. God amazingly led them into Egypt where they escaped the famine that had struck other nations. In Exodus, God similarly led a later generation out of Egypt. God brought them into Egypt, why the exodus now out of Egypt? When God first brought Joseph into Egypt, it was never meant to be the final destination for his descendants, nor for those of his brothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun (sons of Leah); Benjamin (and Joseph, sons of Rachel); Dan, Naphtali (sons of Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah); Gad, and Asher (sons of Leah’s handmaid, Zilpah). God promised Abraham (Gen 15:13-14) that He would surely deliver his descendants from their 400 years of affliction under Egypt’s enslavement. This deliverance was not merely for their relief, but that the nation of Israel would be formed for the Lord Jesus Christ to be born into, and be the Saviour of the world! In other words, Exodus is part of the historical background of God’s working out and accomplishing His salvation plan for man.

THOUGHT: How do I view God’s promises?

PRAYER: LORD, I thank Thee for fulfilling Thy promises for my salvation.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2

EXODUS 1:5-7

GENESIS 26:4; ACTS 3:25-26

*“God governs all, from the greatest
even to the least.” (WCF 5:1)*

THE WOMB OF EGYPT

The seventy souls mentioned in Exodus 1:5 can be traced back to Genesis 46:8-27. With just seventy, can God form the nation Israel for the Lord Jesus, the Saviour, to be born into?

These seventy had passed away by now, including Joseph and his brothers. However, the children of Israel *“were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them”* (Exod 1:7). This is a picture of numbers multiplying and increasing without abating. Jacob’s descendants were fast filling up Goshen. Including the wives and children of the 603,550 (Num 1:46), it is estimated that the total number of people was over two million. Could this be attributed to “good luck” that these children of Israel could reproduce so well and probably had very low mortality rate? Certainly not! We must not forget God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The phenomenal growth and protection was from God alone. No one else can control the fertility of the womb or prevent death, both of which affect the population. This rapid growth was God fulfilling His promise to Abraham in Genesis 26:4, *“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”* This blessing is not to have descendants everywhere, but that into Israel shall the Saviour be born and bring the blessing of salvation to all nations.

God used Egypt as the “womb” to multiply the people needed for the formation of the nation of Israel. And God delivered this “baby” from this womb. This is the wisdom of God. No human plan could have achieved this.

THOUGHT: The births of man and nations are in God’s hand to accomplish His plans.

PRAYER: God of our fathers, we praise Thy sovereign power!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3

EXODUS 1:8

GENESIS 50:1-12

“And Joseph died
... now there arose up a new king ...”

THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON TO KNOW

A new Pharaoh arose to rule Egypt. This particular change of rulership was significant for the descendants of Jacob in Egypt for this new king was one “*which knew not Joseph*” (Exod 1:8).

Joseph has been mentioned twice since the beginning of the book of Exodus: he was first in Egypt (Exod 1:5) and his death was mentioned separately from the rest of his brethren and descendants (Exod 1:6). Genesis records the great achievements of Joseph in Egypt and how he attained rulership and the respect of the Pharaoh and people of his time. God had given him both the ability to interpret dreams and the wisdom to plan ahead, delivering Egypt from the great famine. Moreover, his astuteness earned great riches for Egypt in that period. He gained the trust of the rulers in Egypt, and was appointed a ruler, next only to Pharaoh. The great send-off funeral Egypt gave for Joseph’s father, Jacob, in Genesis 50 gives us an idea of Joseph’s revered position and power. But a great man still dies, and is forgotten. “*Knew not*” (Exod 1:8) does not mean that this new Pharaoh had never heard of Joseph. It meant that he was indifferent and oblivious to, had no regard for, nor concerned with Joseph.

Are you taken up with rubbing shoulders and building connections with the who’s who in this world? Do you think such connections important to get things done, get jobs, or get your children into the best schools? We learn here that our future is not dependent upon persons, no matter how able, how well known, how connected, how respected, how powerful, or how rich they are. God has absolute power or control over man and situations. Though God may use man, may we always lean on, and look to, God alone.

THOUGHT: Do I rely on man for security in life?

PRAYER: LORD, I need Thee more than anyone else in life.

THE TRIMESTER

The new Pharaoh was concerned about how the children of Israel had multiplied to become greater in number and strength than his own people in his own land. His concern was that this alien ethnic group might join Egypt's enemies and turn against them in the event of war. He thought the children of Israel might do this in order to free themselves from being slaves in Egypt. So, Pharaoh devised a scheme to reduce the rapid multiplication of the children of Israel. He put taskmasters over them to make their lives difficult by burdening them with building cities for Egypt. He probably thought that by keeping them busy and depressing them with heavy tasks, they would have no time, energy, or interest to have more children. But the opposite came true. The harder they worked them, the more babies were born! This made the Egyptians even more upset and anxious. So they ramped up the pressure on brick-making and the diverse tasks in the field. The word “*rigour*” is repeated. It emphasizes harshness, severe cruelty to the point of fracture in whatever tasks were given to God's people.

Doctors monitor the heart, lungs, kidneys, and brain of the baby in the mother's womb to ensure they are functioning well as the baby grows. In the final trimester, the baby is ready to come forth in time. The budding nation in Egypt, the womb assigned by God, was growing very well. As much as Pharaoh wanted to indefinitely retain and enslave these people, he was going against God's will. Would the children of Israel want to leave its womb despite the cruel slavery? The lesson we can learn is that God works things out according to His infinite wisdom and perfect timing. In the process, not even the most powerful king on earth can do anything to stem the development of God's unfolding plans. Who can control the birth of a nation? May we learn to trust Him!

THOUGHT: Am I troubled by increasing difficulties in my life and wonder why? Why is this so?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to be patient, obedient, and to simply trust Thy plan and power even if I do not understand it now.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5

EXODUS 1:15-17

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-3

*“... as the LORD God of thy fathers
hath promised thee ...”*

WHOM DO YOU FEAR?

The king of Egypt took on a new and more wicked scheme to arrest the enormous and rapid growth of the children of Israel. In his own mind, the threat of this foreign ethnic group, though his slaves, was growing to be a big threat. Having failed by using cruel, severe, and harsh labour to reduce the birth rates, Pharaoh resorted to killing newborn babies. To do so, he summoned the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah (meaning to be beautiful) and Puah (meaning a girl). It is unlikely that only two midwives delivered all the Hebrew babies. They were likely lead midwives with others under them. Pharaoh's orders were that when the midwives delivered the babies of the Hebrew women, if it was a male infant, then they were to kill him. Female infants were allowed to live. Given Pharaoh's fear that the Hebrews would revolt against Egypt, he felt especially intimidated by the Hebrew sons. Also, by reducing males, this ethnic group's descendant lines would be wiped out. He now resorted to genocide. Satan's objective was to wipe out the Jewish race.

We are told that the midwives feared God. Their fear of God caused them to disobey the evil command of Pharaoh. By doing so, they saved the male infants of the Hebrews. To have met Pharaoh in person to receive his orders and to defy it was not a small thing. Pharaoh could have ordered the death of them too. Being already under severe and cruel rule by the Egyptians, it would have been natural to fear Pharaoh. But God's commendation was that these midwives feared Him instead. They chose to obey God's commandment not to murder. God recorded their names for eternity but did not even mention Pharaoh's name. Having the fear of God is to be more concerned with what God says, how He views things, and what He would have us do. And if obeying man means disobeying God's ways, then we should obey God rather than fear the consequences of what man could do to us.

THOUGHT: Do I fear to offend God more than to offend man?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to have this fear of God in my decision-making in all situations in my life.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 6

EXODUS 1:18-21

MATTHEW 5:33-37

“... let your communication be,

Yea, yea; Nay, nay ...”

REWARDED FOR LYING?

The king of Egypt called for the midwives and demanded to know why they did not obey his commands, and why they let the newborn male babies live. One can only imagine the frustration and desperation of the king of Egypt at this point. In his exasperation, it is a wonder that he did not command the midwives to be put to death, considering he had no qualms ordering infanticide. The king of Egypt could have killed them to make an example of them and ordered other midwives to do his bidding. He did not even need to call for them, having found out what had happened. Is this not God's protection for those who fear Him instead of fearing man, even Pharaoh, the king of Egypt? How did the midwives reply to Pharaoh's interrogation? They stated simply that, unlike the Egyptian women, the Hebrew women were strong and full of vitality and delivered their own babies even before they could reach these women. God blessed these midwives and gave them houses.

Some believe God rewarded the midwives because they managed to save the babies. Some accuse God of inconsistency since He rewarded the midwives and Rahab, but punished Ananias and Sapphira for lying. There is an article, written in “defense” of God, that wrongly explains that the Old Testament God overlooks certain things. And that, unlike the midwives, Ananias and Sapphira's motives for lying were for financial gain, pride, and a desire for prominence. In addition, the article states that even if the midwives did lie, God still rewarded them for their works, not their words.

But God's Word is clear. He blessed them “*because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses*” (Exod 1:21). The Hebrew wives were full of vitality, and delivered easily and quickly, even before the midwives reached them. When we fear God, we do not lie, not even to save our lives. We do not sin to do good and think God will reward us. It is a false, dangerous, and sinful concept.

THOUGHT: Does the end justify the means in God's eyes?

PRAYER: Father, may I never lie to “help” Thee or to “do good.”

MONDAY, JANUARY 7

EXODUS 1:22-2:8

HEBREWS 11:23

*“... they were not afraid
of the king’s commandment.”*

WHO PROTECTS YOUR CHILD?

At first, Pharaoh made the children of Israel so busy and oppressed hoping that they would not have more children. Next, he tried to kill the newborn males using the Hebrew midwives. When both plans failed, he resorted to asking his own people to cast every male Hebrew baby into the river! A Levite couple bore a son in the midst of Pharaoh’s genocidal order. This Levite boy was Moses. Moses’ mother saw that the child was a goodly child and decided to hide him to save him from being thrown into the river. But after three months, she could conceal him no further. So she put the baby in a small vessel which she waterproofed, and put it among the bushes in the river. Miriam, Moses’ sister, watched from afar. At this point, Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe in the same location and spotted the ark. When she opened the ark, this baby started to cry. She pitied the child though she knew it was a Hebrew child. Miriam sprang on the scene and got Pharaoh’s daughter to agree to have a Hebrew nurse the child for her!

Are you thinking how “lucky” it was that this helpless baby in a box would float by Pharaoh’s daughter at her bath time and move her heart and be saved by her? Was it “luck” that baby Moses cried, and Miriam’s appearance was so perfectly timed? This was not “luck.” It was God who intervened every step of the way. Parents, you may think that you are protecting and providing for your child. But it is when you helplessly watch your child in a vulnerable situation beyond your control that you will realise it is indeed only God who is able to protect your child. God can care for your child better than anyone in the world. It is not the best insurance plans, the finest education, the connections in high places, nor the building up of a sterling resume that matter most for their future. God commended Moses’ parents for their faith (Heb 11:23). What matters most is that you are leaning upon God alone.

THOUGHT: What am I trusting in for my child’s future?

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to put my faith in Thee alone as I fulfil my responsibilities to my children.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8

EXODUS 2:9-10

PSALM 2

*“He that sitteth in the heavens
shall laugh ...”*

THE WRATH OF MAN MOCKED BY GOD

Miriam managed to convince Pharaoh’s daughter to get a Hebrew wet nurse for the little baby who had won her heart. This made it possible for Moses’ own mother, Jochebed, to be the guardian on behalf of Pharaoh’s daughter. When Pharaoh’s daughter met Jochebed, her instructions were to take and nurse the child for her. Pharaoh’s daughter even told Jochebed that she would pay her wages for this “job.” Jochebed nursed Moses, and in time, Pharaoh’s own daughter made him her own son. She named him Moses (meaning “to draw out”) since she drew him out of water.

Was Pharaoh’s attempted genocide of the Hebrew people merely to protect his own nation and keep his slaves? We must note that the growth of this people was critical for the formation of the nation of Israel from which the Saviour would come. Satan therefore had to eliminate this ethnic group in order to thwart God’s salvation plan. But God raised a man to lead these people out to form the nation. Neither Satan nor the most powerful king on earth was able to stop God’s plan. Pharaoh was wroth at not being able to suppress the births of the male children. He devised a devilish scheme to get his own people to murder every male infant boy. Could any Hebrew male child escape? God easily overrules man’s evil plots. God not only used Pharaoh’s very own daughter to rescue Moses (the future leader of the Exodus), He also used Pharaoh’s money to nurse this child. Moreover, this child was brought up and educated under Pharaoh’s nose, in his own palace (Acts 7:21-22)! Pharaoh’s own resources was used to raise Moses, and he would lead God’s people through and out of the parted waters of the Red Sea! Are you still concerned about evil schemes against you as you obey God and do His will?

THOUGHT: God will laugh at the schemes of man to destroy His plans.

PRAYER: LORD, I trust Thee for Thou art wise and powerful.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9

EXODUS 2:11-22

ACTS 7:20-29

“... a mighty man is not delivered
by much strength.”

FROM HERO TO ZERO

When Moses was forty years old (Acts 7:23), he went out to visit his Hebrew brethren. This meant that he knew of his origin. He wanted to see their burdens. When he secretly saw an Egyptian beating one of his own brethren, Moses came to the rescue. Ensuring that no other Egyptian was around, he killed and buried the body. The next day, he tried to stop two Hebrew men fighting. Instead of hailing Moses as their heroic rescuer from their Egyptian bullies, one challenged him: Who made him prince and judge over the Hebrews? Was he also going to kill him just like he had taken on himself to kill the Egyptian? Moses realized his act was no longer secret. When Pharaoh heard about it, he sought to kill Moses. Fleeing to the Midianites' land, Moses defended seven daughters of Reuel against some shepherds who tried to chase them away from a watering well. Reuel invited Moses to live with them. Moses married Zipporah and they had a child, Gershom.

Moses sought to be identified with his brethren. Being “*mighty in words and deeds*” (Acts 7:22) in Pharaoh's court, he thought he could deliver them from their bondage. Being eloquent, maybe he could speak up for his brethren. Being eminent in achievements, perhaps he could do something significant for them too. His distinguished role in Pharaoh's court, now aged forty gave him confidence that he could deliver his brethren from their burdens. Moses probably thought he could be the Hebrews' hero. But he found himself reduced to the level of a fugitive, he had lost the position and power that he could have used to help his brethren. Even when God intends to use us, He will not do so when we think we are capable because of our training, degrees, natural abilities, achievements, and position. Moses thought he was ready based upon his self-assessment, and took matters into his own hands. This is an important lesson for us: self-confidence renders us useless. Do not choose to learn the hard way.

THOUGHT: I may have training and achievements but they are still useless to God unless I humble myself.

PRAYER: LORD, humble me that I may be useful for Thee.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10

EXODUS 2:23-25

GENESIS 15:1, 13-16

“... *I am thy shield, and thy
exceeding great reward.*”

OUR COVENANTAL GOD

In time, the king of Egypt passed away. But the Hebrew people remained under cruel slavery. It was typical that new Egyptian kings who ascended the throne would release slaves and grant amnesty to prisoners as part of showing their kindness. The Hebrew slaves might have been hopeful that after forty years of heavy bondage, this might be the light at the end of their slavery tunnel. But there was no relief. This situation led them to feel great despair, they increased in sighs, cries, and groans. God heard these cries and groanings under their cruel and long bondage.

When the Bible uses the phrase “*God remembered,*” it does not mean therefore that God forgets things. He is omniscient. He knows all things, past, present and future, all at the same time. After 430 years, God had not forgotten His covenant with Abraham. God remembered the covenant He made not just with Abraham, but with Isaac, and also with Jacob. It was a very specific covenantal promise. It referred to the promise of blessings to all nations through Abraham’s line. It was about the blessing of the Saviour of mankind that was to come through this line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob’s descendants were about to leave Egypt to form the nation from which the Messiah would come. This is the Covenant of Grace! God had not forgotten His covenantal promise in Genesis 3:15 with Adam. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic covenants are all the same Covenant of Grace, revealed through different individuals. Here, “*God*” is repeatedly used in Exodus 2:23-25 instead of the covenantal name “LORD.” God, “*Elohim,*” reminds us of His power. His people were crying to be delivered, and He could deliver. What we are reading about is nothing less than God working out His plan and work to bring the Messiah.

THOUGHT: God kept His promises since Genesis and because of that I am saved.

PRAYER: LORD, may I keep my promise to love and serve Thee!

FRIDAY, JANUARY 11

EXODUS 3:1-10

ACTS 7:30-32

“... to throw down, to build,
and to plant.”

GOD’S CALLING

While tending sheep at the back of mount Horeb, Moses’ curiosity led him to investigate the burning bush which was not consumed. As he approached it, he heard the angel of the Lord (i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ Himself) call him by name, and he responded, “*Here am I*” (Exod 3:4). The Lord revealed who He is: “*I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*” (Exod 3:6). The Lord told Moses that He had come down to deliver them, and to bring them into a land of abundance. The specific call of Moses to lead God’s people out of Egypt is in Exodus 3:10, “*come ... I will send thee ... that thou mayest bring forth my people ...*”

Moses was then eighty years old (Acts 7:30). Because of their agony, the people were crying to be delivered out of Egypt. God had preserved Moses and now called him to this massive task of leading more than two million people out of Egypt. Moses’ calling was key to God’s salvation plan for mankind. God knew the way ahead was going to be difficult for Moses. So Moses had to be very clear about God’s calling so that he would not doubt and give up when faced with difficulties. We will see later how despite the rebellion and stubbornness of the people, Moses persevered. It is crucial that we know our calling clearly in life. When we do, we are assured of God’s help for any challenge. He will surely equip us with what is needed when we do exactly what He wants us to do and are where He wants us to be. He will grant us His grace to bear all. If you are called to the ministry, be sure of what and where God has called you to. Do not desire or emulate someone else’s ministry. Be sure of your own calling. It is the only thing you can cling on to when the storms and discouragements come. Every Christian is a full-time worker for God wherever He places you. Be sure of your calling and do it and you will see God’s power working in and through your life for His kingdom.

THOUGHT: I must trust in the Lord for my daily provision.

PRAYER: O LORD, give me this day my daily bread.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12

EXODUS 3:11-12

JOHN 3:26-35

*“He must increase,
but I must decrease.”*

ZERO, NOW READY

After the Lord revealed who He was and His plans for His people, He told Moses that he was to lead His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. After forty years in the desert tending sheep, what would be Moses' answer?

Moses' first words in response to God's assignment for him to be the leader of His people were, *“Who am I ...?”* (Exod 3:11). Moses felt he was nothing, zero. He asked God who was he to go see Pharaoh and who was he to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Was this not exactly what Moses wanted to do after forty years of the best training and having achieved great things in Pharaoh's court? Back then Moses thought he was ready to rescue, and be leader of, the children of Israel. He wanted to be their hero. What a change in Moses! God had prepared him. Moses was now ready to be used of God. He was now ready to be a leader of more than two million people. Why did God not use Moses forty years ago? Did not the prestigious training and powerful position in Pharaoh's court make Moses ready? No, for Moses was too full of self-confidence back then. The forty years in the desert tending sheep humbled him. Moses needed to realize he was nothing before God could use Him. This is the same for us. If we do not know we are truly nothing before God, we will be proud. We will depend upon our own abilities. We will think it is our training and life experience that makes us suitable for God's choice and use. We will then steal glory from Him when success comes. Now in answer to Moses, God assured him, *“Certainly I will be with thee”* (Exod 3:12), reminding him it was not about who Moses was, but who was with him. The world emphasizes self-esteem for success. But when we truly know we are zero instead of being full of self-confidence, then God assures us that He will use us. And as long as we remind ourselves that “I am nobody” despite the years of success, He will continue to be with us.

THOUGHT: What kind of person does God choose to use?

PRAYER: LORD, do what it takes to make me realize I am nothing.

REMOVE YOUR SHOES!

When Moses approached the burning bush that was not consumed, it was out of curiosity. However, the Lord's calling of Moses was deliberate as He called his name twice: “*Moses, Moses*” (Exod 3:4). He wanted Moses to meet with Him. Yet when Moses said, “*Here am I*” in response to God's invitation, the Lord told Moses firmly not to come close, and to put off his shoes.

The reason God gave was that the ground Moses stood on was “*holy ground*” (Exod 3:5). Though the Lord's intention was for Moses to meet with Him, yet Moses was to learn to approach the Lord with carefulness and not casual familiarity. Removing the shoes was to emphasize humility in reverence. The ground Moses stood on was not intrinsically and inherently holy. It was God's own presence there that made the place a holy place. Mount Horeb was not permanently holy before or after this incident. The lesson is for us too: How must we approach God, for example in worship and in prayer? He is the thrice-holy God. We must remember who we are and who God is. We must have genuine humility and reverence. Now when God invites us to come to Him boldly (Heb 4:16), it does not mean we can come to Him brashly. It means we can come to Him with confidence and assurance because we come through Christ. Coming late for worship is a sign of irreverence. How we dress reflects our inward attitude. In some cultures, removing our shoes before entering someone's home shows our respect. We ought to have the same reverence and honour for God when we come into His presence. We do not turn up late or dress carelessly before our bosses or customers, why then do we before our God to whom we sing “*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty*”?

THOUGHT: Am I habitually late for worship and fellowships and dress without thought?

PRAYER: LORD, I resolve to be humble and to show more reverence to Thee.

MONDAY, JANUARY 14

EXODUS 3:11-22

EPHESIANS 3:20-21

“... God will surely ...”

EXCUSES NOT TO SERVE (I)

The Hebrew slaves (sufficient to form a nation) were crying distressfully for deliverance. God's plan of forming the nation Israel from which the Saviour would come required that the children of Israel be led out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. God chose Moses to be the leader for this task. But did Moses go?

Moses was so contented being a peaceful shepherd in the laid back desert. Go and see Pharaoh? Lead a huge group of people? That would be asking for trouble. Who am I to ask Pharaoh to let his slaves (that provide free labour) go? This was Moses' first excuse in a series of excuses. It was good that Moses was humbled now, but to reject God's call to serve was a different matter. In response to Moses' reluctance, God patiently promised that He would surely be with Moses. Then came the second excuse: since he did not even know God's name he had no credibility with the people. In response, God repeated His covenantal name and promised to prove His mandate to Moses. He even foretold that the elders would listen to him (Exod 3:18), and though Pharaoh would want to hold on his Hebrew slaves, yet God would deliver them with miracles. And Moses would lead them out with the many riches of the Egyptians. Moses was to give more excuses later.

Many of us are happy leading a relaxed life, doing what we wish whenever we wish. So, when we are approached to serve, the reasons we give to decline would all seem to sound reasonable or even be truly valid. But deep inside, the true reason is that we do not want to disrupt our peaceful and self-centered lives of ease and comfort. God assures us that His grace is all sufficient (2 Cor 12:9), that He is “... *able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*” (Eph 3:20). Let us search our own hearts and not give excuses when God shows us where He wants us to serve.

THOUGHT: What are my reasons not to serve when approached?

PRAYER: LORD, search my heart and help me not to give excuses.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15

EXODUS 4:1-17

ACTS 7:25

“... But ...”

EXCUSES NOT TO SERVE (II)

Moses' third excuse was that the people would not believe God's appointment of him. This seemed like another reasonable concern. Why should they listen to an eighty-year-old shepherd from nowhere, believe that their God had commissioned him, and follow him out of Egypt? God gave Moses three miracles that he could use to prove to the people that God had indeed appeared to him and sent him to them. The first miracle was turning his rod into a serpent and back into a rod. The second was turning his hand leprous, and then healing it. The third miracle was turning river water into real blood. But Moses still had a fourth excuse: he was not eloquent. God patiently responded that He who made man's mouth could surely enable and would even teach Moses exactly what to say. Unable to win the argument with God, Moses flatly told God to send someone else instead of him. When all his excuses failed, Moses finally exposed his unwilling heart. Moses' refusal to go angered God after all of God's assurances. God told Moses to take Aaron his brother along with him to be his mouthpiece as Moses stood in God's place.

God repeatedly used “*I will*” to promise Moses, and to us too today. There should be no more excuses of fear or unwillingness. But we are very good at coming up with seemingly valid reasons not to serve. A time will come when our objections will anger God. God preserved our lives, saved us, and has been providing for us for a purpose. But having established our lives and families, we then refuse to serve Him when the time and need arise. When the call comes to step up and do something for God in church, we are very good at giving very seemingly valid excuses. But the bottom line is “I don't want to do it” because it is burdensome and will disrupt my peaceful and laid back life. Yes, Moses' life would be very different from here on. But it would be a life fully used by God.

THOUGHT: Am I too comfortable and just want to stay in my comfort zone?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to start taking up the challenges and be useful for Thy kingdom in this life.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16

EXODUS 4:18-23

ROMANS 9:17-18

“... whom he will
he hardeneth.”

DOES GOD HARDEN HEARTS?

Moses eventually relented and prepared to go, respectfully taking leave of his father-in-law. The LORD assured Moses that the people who sought his life for what he had done in Egypt before he fled were all dead. Moses loaded up his family and ensured he brought the shepherd's rod because God told him it would be used to perform signs. However, even as the LORD assured Moses that he would perform great signs and he was to tell Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go, yet the LORD said, “*I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go*” (Exod 4:21).

What does it mean when God said He would harden Pharaoh's heart? It should not be interpreted as the LORD working directly in Pharaoh's heart to make him unable to desire to obey Him. It does not mean that even if Pharaoh wanted to repent, the LORD would prevent him and make him incapable of doing so. As we shall see in later chapters, Pharaoh actually hardened his own heart (Exod 7:14; 8:15) despite the miracles the LORD did before him. Even when his own magicians acknowledged the power of JEHOVAH, Pharaoh continued to stubbornly oppose God's plan for His people. The moment Pharaoh saw there was respite, “*he hardened his heart*” (Exod 8:15). It was only during the sixth plaque that “*the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh*” (Exod 9:12). Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart prior to this. The LORD's continued miracles hardened Pharaoh. Pharaoh's own obstinacy despite the increased and continued miracles was the result of Pharaoh hardening his own heart from the beginning. This is what is known as judicial hardening. The more the LORD worked, the more hardened Pharaoh's heart became. This is how we are to understand the LORD's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. On the same note, one has also to accept the sovereignty of God (Rom 9:15-23) and not seek to question, challenge, and explain beyond what we do not understand now from God's plainly stated words.

THOUGHT: Do I fear when I resist God's revealed will?

PRAYER: O LORD, may I repent quickly when Thou speakest.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17

EXODUS 4:24-31

“... *Thou shalt keep my covenant*

GENESIS 17:9-14; COLOSSIANS 2:11-12 ... *and thy seed after thee ...*”

WHY INFANT BAPTISM?

What example would Moses be if he were to lead God's people when his own son was not circumcised? And why was this so critical?

The sign of God's covenant with Abraham was that of circumcision (Gen 17:9-14). But God's covenant was not just with Abraham alone. This was why God commanded Abraham to circumcise his seed after him, as a token of the covenant between him and God. Subsequently in the Old Testament, all, including the Gentiles who wanted to be part of God's covenant, were to circumcise themselves (Exod 12:48-49). In a covenant, there is a token, a symbol, or a sign and seal. Circumcision was this sign. The adults were circumcised when they believed. But the children were circumcised not because they had believed and chose to. It was the believing parents who brought them before the Lord. In doing so, by faith they claimed the familial covenantal blessings for their children. Refusing to circumcise a child was tantamount to the parents telling God that they were not interested in God's covenant for their families, neither were they intending to bring the child up as part of God's people, hence the serious warning in Genesis 17:14. This was how the sign and seal of God's covenant was administered in the Old Testament. Since God's covenant had a sign in the Old Testament, what is it in the New Testament? The answer is in Colossians 2:11-12. The bloody sign and seal of circumcision was replaced by the non-bloody sign and seal of water baptism. While claiming God's blessing of protection and familial care, parents are taking a vow that they will be explaining the Gospel to their children, teaching them God's Word and how to pray, to bring them to church to worship God, and to pray for their salvation. They vow to bring them up as godly seed, and themselves living a godly testimony before the child. At the same time, it must be noted that when the child grows up, he must proclaim his own faith in Christ in affirming before man in church.

THOUGHT: Can I take it lightly if God views it so seriously?

PRAYER: Father, help me to keep my covenant with Thee.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 18

EXODUS 5:1-19

ECCLESIASTES 5:8

*“Turn your eyes
upon Jesus.”*

TROUBLES - WHY SO MANY?

The request that God gave to Moses and Aaron to present to Pharaoh was a common one for slaves to make, one that the Egyptians would generally accede to. But Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews worship their God even for three short days. In fact, he accused them of wanting to skive. He told the taskmasters that since these Hebrews could cry for a trip to the wilderness for a feast to their God, they must be idling. So, he instructed that the Hebrew slaves were to find their own straw to make bricks and still produce their usual daily output. And when they could not, the Hebrew supervisors were beaten by the Egyptians. When asked, the Egyptian taskmasters told them they deserved the beating for they were idle and wanted to go on a religious trip. Why did they have even more trouble when they were just obeying God?

God was revealing how unreasonable Pharaoh was. If he would not even allow them to go to the wilderness to worship Him, why would he let them leave Egypt? And by the increased torture just for a basic request to worship God, the children of Israel would have known that Pharaoh was a wicked master that he did not let them worship and serve their Lord. It is a spiritual battle we face whenever we seek to obey God, to worship Him, and to serve Him. When you wish to do something for God (eg. be regular at worship, take leave to attend church camp, go for prayer meeting, attend fellowship, attend FEBC classes, or serve on a committee), suddenly your company, your boss, or teacher gives you extra work, or family crises arise, or some problem or other makes it almost too challenging to do what God desires you to do. God allows these things to show us our heart as well. How do you view all these setbacks? We must expect that difficulties will not let up in life. But will you give in and give up? View the increased burdens and difficulties with spiritual eyes. It will help you to persevere.

THOUGHT: When troubles in life increase as I seek to turn to God and obey Him, how do I view them?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to view such troubles with spiritual eyes.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19

EXODUS 5:20-23

PSALM 27

*“I had fainted, unless I had believed
to see the goodness of the LORD ...”*

TROUBLES – HOW DO I RESPOND?

The beaten Hebrew officers were furious. They confronted Moses and Aaron as the latter returned from having met with Pharaoh. The officers blamed Moses and Aaron for their increased misery and torture. They even used the LORD’s name to curse them for having brought misery upon all of them. To them, Moses and Aaron’s idea of seeking Pharaoh to release them made Pharaoh and his slave masters loathe them. They even said that Moses and Aaron had signed the Hebrew slaves’ death warrant by their actions!

But what was Moses going through at this time himself? Remember that although the people had believed his words (Exod 4:31), Moses himself had just been rejected by Pharaoh (Exod 5:1-4). Not only was the rejection and insult of Pharaoh a great blow to the mission, Moses must have been wondering how he was going to face the children of Israel. On top of that, he was confronted by the badly beaten Hebrew slave officers, and their great anger and deep resentment at Moses and Aaron. They thoroughly blamed Moses for everything. How did Moses react? How do you react when facing great troubles?

Moses too had many questions and he returned to the LORD (Exod 5:22). He sought the LORD for answers instead of going into a raging frenzy. No doubt, the unreasonable expectations on these slaves and the intensified cruelty on what was already an extremely distressful slavery was no small matter. The beatings were not trivial. But instead of asking Moses to cry to God for help, they called upon the LORD to judge Moses. How do we react in dire trouble at home, in school, and at work? Do we become angry? Blame, and curse others? There is a big difference between such reactions and returning to God to seek to understand from His Word.

THOUGHT: What is my response when I face difficulties in service?

PRAYER: O God, let me look to Thee when troubles come my way.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 20

EXODUS 5:22-6:1

HEBREWS 11:6, 24-28

“... he that cometh to God
must believe that he is ...”

TROUBLES – IS GOD STILL IN CONTROL?

The initial euphoria in Exodus 4:30-31 came to a screeching and painful halt. So Moses asked the LORD three questions (Exod 5:22-23). Why had the LORD brought trouble to the Hebrew slaves, why did the LORD send him on this mission, why had the LORD not delivered the people? Moses wanted to know why their troubles had gotten worse instead of better and why had the LORD not delivered His people yet despite him following God's instructions. Did God fail to anticipate Pharaoh's reaction? Was it a mistake for Moses to have agreed to go on this mission? Had God lost control? Do you often have similar questions in your heart when you face increased troubles just because you have chosen to obey God and trust His promises? What was God's answer to these questions?

God simply said, “*Now shalt thou see what I will do...*” (Exod 6:1). God assured Moses that He was just moving to the next phase. This was not a setback because He was caught off guard. The LORD would control the situation to the point that Pharaoh personally chased the children of Israel out of Egypt! Moses would see. Based upon the current situation it was difficult to see, yet God had brought the situation to exactly what was needed for His next phase. The “*high hand*” (Exod 14:8) Pharaoh used to increase the labour intensity set the hearts of the Hebrew slaves to the state God wanted them to be: “We cannot tolerate this anymore!” How sovereignly is God in control. Just because we cannot see how a situation is “good,” it does not mean God is not in control. Nothing happens by chance. God is omniscient. But our nature is that we are impatient and any apparent setback at any stage is often interpreted as being out of control. Is there some trouble that has just gotten worse as you obey God in your walk? Have faith that God is in absolute control of every moment and that He is still working, no matter how things may appear.

THOUGHT: What does God's omniscience mean to me?

PRAYER: LORD, I thank Thee that I can trust Thee fully as Thou knowest the future because Thou controllest it!

MONDAY, JANUARY 21

EXODUS 6:2-9

GENESIS 17:1-9

“... an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”

“I AM JEHOVAH”

The LORD had just promised Moses that He would cause Pharaoh to drive out the children of Israel. But Pharaoh had just rejected a reasonable request to allow them to go on a three-day journey to worship their God. And Pharaoh had just cranked up the cruelty on the people for even thinking of such a journey. It seemed far from possible. So God assured Moses further. The LORD began His assurances with “*I am the LORD*” (His covenantal name) in Exodus 6:2, and ended with “*I am the LORD*” in Exodus 6:8. He told Moses that He was known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name “*God Almighty*” (*Elshaddai*, Gen 35:11). But He told Moses to specifically introduce Him to the children of Israel as “*I am the LORD*” (i.e. “I am JEHOVAH.” JEHOVAH is the Hebrew word translated “LORD” which we have been reading all this while). And by this name, He assured them with seven “*I will*” statements: “*I will bring you out,*” “*I will rid you out of their bondage,*” “*I will redeem you,*” “*I will take you to me for a people,*” “*I will be to you a God,*” “*I will bring you in unto the land,*” and “*I will give it you for an heritage.*” What was the significance of the name God chose to use? It was not that the patriarchs did not know JEHOVAH but they had not experienced the covenantal fulfillment these Hebrew slaves were about to know. In the ancient near East, the names of gods stated their function, nature, and ability; and reflected their status and power. Invoking this Name was to stir confidence, awe, and to encourage them.

Are you demoralized, and wondering if God can and will help you in whatever you are facing as He calls you to trust and obey? His mission for you is: “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ...*” (Matt 6:33). Do you trust that the LORD can and will ensure that “*all these things shall be added unto you*” if you do? Remember His Name, “*I am the LORD*” in your studies, work, family, and daily walk. If you give up now, you will not experience the power and faithfulness of God.

THOUGHT: What does “I am the LORD” evoke in me?

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to experience Thy Name in my life.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 22

EXODUS 6:10-30

DEUTERONOMY 6:13-15

*“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God,
and serve him ...”*

GO IN, SPEAK!

The LORD instructed Moses to go directly to Pharaoh and specifically tell Pharaoh to let the children of Israel leave his land. This was tantamount to telling Pharaoh to obey the LORD to free his slaves and relinquish his rule over them. Moses expressed to the LORD that not only was he weak in speech, but it was also pointless for him to say those things. So far, the LORD had been responding to Moses' questions. But now, we simply have the record that the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and issued the same charge. There was no response from the LORD to Moses' question this time. In fact, what is included next is the genealogy of their families whom the LORD said Moses and Aaron were to bring out of Egypt (Exod 6:14-27). In Exodus 6:28-30, Moses again questioned the LORD's instructions to him to go to His people and Pharaoh, as the message he was to carry to them remained unchanged, and they probably would not pay attention to him. Having assured Moses of His promises and sending him on this mission (Exod 5), the LORD gave Moses a principle. God's plans and hence what Moses was to say was not contingent upon the children of Israel's great unhappiness nor his poor speech. They might be even more unwilling to listen and more resistant to what he said. But God still simply told Moses to continue to speak according to the words He gave. Neither was what Moses was to say or do dependent upon whether Pharaoh would pay attention to or agree with him.

Likewise, what is taught in church must not be based on what people want to hear. Pastors and teachers must faithfully carry the LORD's message and do God's will regardless of the response. As worshippers, we must not be like the children of Israel in this instance.

THOUGHT: It is not my abilities nor people's acceptance but God's message and His will that matter.

PRAYER: LORD, I pray that I will always say and do that which pleases Thee only.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23

EXODUS 7:1-7

NUMBERS 12:6-8

*“Thou shalt speak all
that I command thee ...”*

GOD AGAINST GODS

The LORD said to Moses, “... See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet” (Exod 7:1). Moses would stand in God’s position. Aaron was Moses’ prophet because Aaron was supposed to say what Moses said (as God commanded) to Aaron. The LORD forewarned Moses that Pharaoh would not listen to him. But He reminded Moses that it was not due to him but because God would harden Pharaoh’s heart as he performed the many miracles. Ultimately, the LORD told Moses, the Egyptians would know very clearly that “*I am the LORD*” (Exod 7:5) who had done all these and brought His people out of the land. Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three at that time. Pharaoh was on a collision course with Moses. He saw himself as a god and hence challenged this God of the Hebrew slaves saying, “*Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice*” (Exod 5:2). In his mind if he was already ruling the Hebrew slaves, then he himself must be a greater god than JEHOVAH. The Egyptians had to learn that JEHOVAH the great “*I AM*” alone was indeed the one and only Supreme God and that all other gods were false. But it was also very critical that Moses and God’s people saw, experienced, and knew this intimately for themselves. They had to be prepared for the journey before them. God would use this period to reveal Himself to them.

This is the same for us today. The gods of this world challenge our God daily to make us fear that if we do not kowtow to them, we will suffer and fail in life. Know that God will allow certain trials so that we will know Him and of His power more. This is to prepare us for the greater challenges which He knows are coming our way along life’s journey. Every trial and deliverance will strengthen our faith to trust Him when the trials grow greater. This can come at any age, even at old age like Moses, and during any phase of life. But if we run away from facing it, we will not know deliverance, and we will not grow.

THOUGHT: What god am I slave to today that I still fear?

PRAYER: LORD, may each deliverance increase my faith in Thee!

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24

EXODUS 7:8-25

PSALM 89:8-9

“O LORD God of hosts,
who is a strong LORD like unto thee?”

LESSONS FROM THE TEN PLAGUES (I)

The LORD promised that His miracles would display who He was, His power and glory to both the children of Israel (Exod 6:6-8) and the Egyptians (Exod 7:3-5). We shall see how He accomplished this over these few days' readings. There were ten plagues involved: 1) turning water into blood, 2) frogs, 3) lice, 4) flies, 5) cattle disease, 6) boils, 7) hail, 8) locusts, 9) darkness, and 10) the death of all the firstborn of man and beast. But before the plagues began, God set the stage to show who He is. The LORD instructed Moses to ask Aaron to cast his rod, which He turned into a serpent for Pharaoh had challenged them for a miracle to prove their power. Pharaoh's magicians managed to do the same, but Aaron's rod swallowed up all their rods. This was again God against gods. The Egyptians worshipped the cobra goddess and their rulers wore a cobra headdress. It symbolized both the protection of Pharaoh and swift death to enemies of the crown. The rod represented royal position and power. So by this act, the LORD showed He was superior to the many rods or serpents before Him. Let us remember that those who challenge His Crown face death. Pharaoh learnt it too at the end of the plagues. Our God is the Supreme Almighty LORD and King.

The LORD began His first plague with the warning: “*know that I am the LORD*” (Exod 7:17). When approached by Moses and Aaron at the river banks, Pharaoh did not agree to let God's people go. Moses' rod turned the river waters and even the collected waters in vessels into real blood. The fishes died, the river stank, and the Egyptians had no water to drink though they dug around the river. The Egyptians worshipped Hapi, the god of the Nile and water which when overflowed made the soil. The LORD crushed this god before their eyes for seven days. If Pharaoh's magicians had real power, they should have turned the blood back to water, and not turn more water into blood. Believer, know who supplies your needs and provisions.

THOUGHT: My LORD is Almighty and the Provider of all my needs.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for being my true Provider.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25

EXODUS 8:1-32

JOB 33:4

*“But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite,
he hardened his heart ...”*

LESSONS FROM THE TEN PLAGUES (II)

As forewarned by the LORD, He smote the land with frogs when Pharaoh refused to let His people go. Frogs were in the Egyptians' bedrooms, on their beds, and cooking areas. The Egyptians worshiped the frog-headed goddess of fertility and birth. The LORD showed them who controlled the frogs which they worshipped as gods. He is the true God of fertility that gave the increase of the Hebrew babies and preserved them whom the Egyptians sought to kill. The magicians also brought up frogs, which were hopping out everywhere, instead of stopping them. Pharaoh had to ask Moses to make the frogs return to the rivers. At that point, Pharaoh said he would let the Hebrew slaves go to worship their God. Yet when he saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart and broke his promise. Next, the LORD brought lice upon man and beast in the third plague without prior warning. This time the magicians could not imitate the act so they had to confess it was the finger of God, admitting defeat to the Hebrew God. But Pharaoh continued to harden his own heart (Exod 8:19) and would not listen. God sent the fourth plague of thick swarms of flies which destroyed their land when Pharaoh refused to heed God's prior warning. God made it clear that He, the God of the Hebrew slaves, was indeed the LORD on earth because He controlled the swarm of flies to avoid Goshen where His people lived. Pharaoh's own houses were attacked so he promised Moses to let them go make sacrifices as long as they did not go too far away. God removed this plague at Moses' request. But despite this clear sign, Pharaoh yet hardened his heart (Exod 8:32) after God removed this plague and broke his promise again.

Let us never forget how God can control armies of insects when man cannot even control one tiny insect's actions. Do you fear that God is unable to divert some terror to bypass you if He so wishes?

THOUGHT: The LORD is the true giver and protector of lives.

PRAYER: LORD, let me see Thee more clearly so that I will fear nothing.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26
EXODUS 9:1-35
DEUTERONOMY 4:32-35

“... *the LORD he is God;
there is none else beside him.*”

LESSONS FROM THE TEN PLAGUES (III)

The LORD warned Pharaoh that he had one day to decide to let His people go before He sent the fifth plague of pestilence which would again affect only the Egyptians. When the pestilence took the lives of the Egyptians' livestock, Pharaoh even sent people to the children of Israel to see if this were true. But his heart was so hardened that even when he found that the Hebrew slaves' livestock were absolutely unaffected, he would not let God's people go. This is a good example that miracles, contrary to the teachings of Power Evangelism, do not necessarily cause people to turn to God in repentance. By this plague God crushed the Egyptians' sacred animal gods. This time, Aaron was not told to use the rod as in previous cases. While God made it increasingly clear to the Egyptians about His judgment, He was also strengthening the faith of His children at the same time. In the sixth plague that followed, the LORD caused flying oven ashes (which Moses cast into the air before Pharaoh's face) to infect only the Egyptians with boils and sores. Human lives were severely impacted as well now. No magician could stand up before Moses, leaving Pharaoh to fight alone now. JEHOVAH made it unequivocally clear before Pharaoh's eyes that this, like all the other plagues, was brought by Him and every god they worshipped was no match for Him. Pharaoh's heart was judicially hardened by now.

Dear reader, do not resist or challenge God. In the seventh plague of hail mingled with fire, again only upon the Egyptians' land and lives, God mercifully warned them to take shelter. But those that regarded not the warning paid dearly. This time, Pharaoh admitted that he had sinned and said, “*I will let you go*” (Exod 9:28). He still thought that he held the power to keep God's people back! How sin and pride blinds! Once Pharaoh saw the hail stop, “*he sinned yet more*” (Exod 9:34) and hardened his heart. Does admitting sin reflect true repentance? His example hardened his servants' hearts too.

THOUGHT: As God's judgment increases He is also merciful.

PRAYER: LORD, let me not ever be blind and stubborn like Pharaoh.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 27

EXODUS 10:1-11:10

PSALM 76:10

*“Surely the wrath of man
shall praise thee ...”*

LESSONS FROM THE TEN PLAGUES (IV)

God forewarned Pharaoh that if he would not humble himself and let His people go, the eighth plague of swarms of locust would eat up whatever the other plagues did not destroy. Even Pharaoh's servants asked him if he still could not see that Egypt was already ruined and that he should let these slaves go. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and told them that only the men could leave to worship. Leaving the women and children behind probably assured Pharaoh of the men's return. The LORD sent such an immense number of locust which devoured the remaining vegetation that it was darkened by their coverage. Pharaoh quickly re-summoned Moses and Aaron and asked for forgiveness. But his judicially hardened heart did not release the people when the plague was lifted. The ninth plague of three days of total darkness upon only the Egyptian-dwelling area was so intense that the darkness could be felt (Exod 10:21). The darkness was so enveloping and fearsome, they could not move around at all. This was devastating to the Egyptians for they worshipped the sun as their most powerful god. The children of Israel, however, had light. The God of the slaves could control the light rays to shine only upon His people while the Egyptians endured petrifying doomlike darkness. But still, Pharaoh sought to bargain with Moses – leave the animals behind. Moses was so full of faith by now that he did not give in. They needed animals to make sacrifices. We must learn not to budge, fully obeying, without fear of man. Pharaoh prophesied that Moses would not see his face anymore because the next time they met, he would kill Moses. Moses, full of courage now, agreed with Pharaoh but for a different reason. For the tenth plague, Moses simply told Pharaoh that he would leave Egypt at midnight, and all the Egyptians' firstborn would die at that time, including Pharaoh's. Pharaoh's people would kowtow to him and send the Hebrew slaves away. Pharaoh's hardened heart was used to display God's power. Moses' faith had grown. What about ours? Let our faith be strong!

THOUGHT: The wrath of man will be used to praise God.

PRAYER: LORD, may I see beyond trials to behold Thy glory.

MONDAY, JANUARY 28

EXODUS 7-11

PSALM 9:9-10

*“The LORD also will be a refuge
for the oppressed ...”*

SUMMARY OF LESSONS FROM THE PLAGUES

It is useful to have an overview of the lessons to learn from the ten plagues: “... *that ye may know how that I am the LORD*” (Exod 10:2). Right from the start, Pharaoh challenged the LORD (Exod 5:2). It was god against God. And the LORD responded by showing him that He was the Supreme God by crushing one Egyptian god after another. The LORD knew how Pharaoh would behave throughout (Exod 7:4), and He planned to use his stubbornness to show forth His powerful miracles. To prove to the Egyptians (Exod 8:22) and to the world (Exod 9:16) that He was the Almighty God of this earth. Pharaoh’s stubbornness allowed the LORD to show forth His power through the plagues (Exod 10:1). He also would use it to show the Hebrews who their God was (Exod 6:1-8). He was a faithful covenant keeping God, and the omnipotent God. While the plagues would judge the unbelieving, at the same time it strengthened the Hebrews’ faith. The Egyptian god-king and their gods could not protect the Egyptians at all. The LORD showed the Hebrews His power and protection over them.

Let us not fear or trust in the gods of this world. Let us not worship grades, success, fame, money, our children, and even health. God will show us that these cannot help us. Also, let us remember in trials, He is still the God who controls the elements of nature, the hearts of man and beasts. If He has allowed difficulties, it is so that we will learn, experience His power and protection, and thus grow in faith. Let us not be impatient and give up. Have you obeyed some command in God’s Word only to encounter more difficulties in life? Yes, He can allow trials to intensify, but He also can cause the swarms of danger to bypass you. Moses’ faith and courage grew and he no longer needed Aaron but faced Pharaoh head on himself. His walk deepened with the LORD as the people and Pharaoh rejected him. If he did not press on, he would not have seen God’s power too. May these chapters increase our faith in God!

THOUGHT: The LORD has His timing and purpose as I obey Him.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to persevere and trust Thee all the way.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29

EXODUS 12:1-28

1 PETER 1:18-21

*“... a lamb without blemish
and without spot.”*

A FRESH START

The LORD gave the children of Israel a new calendar. The point of exodus from Egypt marked the first month, Nisan. This symbolized a fresh start for the Hebrews. With this fresh start, they left Egypt behind them. They began to observe new holy days and forgot the Egyptian religious days and ways. They began to worship the true God and formed a new culture. This is the same for us today. After salvation, we must have a totally revamped perspective of life and what we pursue. We must have fresh objectives and purpose based upon what God has planned for us. We must leave the lifestyle and idols of the unregenerate life behind once and for all.

The LORD set in place new religious practices for them. He instituted the Passover. A young male unblemished lamb stayed with the family before it was killed. With the personal attachment built up, imagine the pain when this innocent and adorable animal was killed. We also must not view the Lord's sacrifice ritualistically without personal identification. The unleavened bread signified being without sin. Anyone who was found disobeying this during the seven-day feast of unleavened bread would be cut off (likely meaning: to expect severe judgment). The bitter herb reminded them of the bitter life of slavery. Eating with clothes girded, shoes on, and staff in hand meant readiness to leave Egypt quickly. These principles still remain today. After salvation, we must keep sin out of our lives and be ready and quick to leave worldliness behind. The blood dabbed on the door posts and the bypassing of the destroyer taught them about salvation through the blood of the Lamb of God. All these were to be observed from this fresh start onwards as reminders of the LORD's deliverance (Exod 12:17). We too must remember all these as we partake of the Lord's Supper. The children of Israel left for a fresh start after 430 years of bondage. We were once in sin, now we are free. Live as new creation in Christ, the Lamb of God.

THOUGHT: I am saved to put off the old man, and put on the new.

PRAYER: LORD, help me live a fresh new life of holiness daily.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30

EXODUS 12:29-33

GENESIS 15:13-14

*“... and afterward shall they come out
with great substance.”*

TRIMESTER IS UP

As promised in the tenth plague, the LORD took the life of every firstborn of man and beast, both of the high and lowly among the Egyptians. Pharaoh's son was dead too. There were great cries in the night air across Egypt. Despite being warned, Pharaoh went to sleep as usual. Perhaps he thought that this plague too would be over after some time. But this time it was the irreversible loss of human lives. This is the danger of hardening our hearts when God repeatedly gives us chances to repent. There will be a punishment that we may never recover from. But the Hebrews obeyed the Passover instructions and were spared by the destroyer. Pharaoh suffered a great personal loss. He summoned Moses and Aaron and, without any negotiation, commanded them to leave Egypt. This time, Pharaoh told all to get out – all men, women, children, and their livestock – immediately. Even his own people wanted their slaves to leave as quickly as possible.

The trimester was up. Moses was initially unwilling and fearful to lead the people out of Egypt, but now his faith had grown. The Hebrews initially blamed Moses for asking Pharaoh to let them leave. But the intense and increased cruelty made them want to get out. Pharaoh would not release them. But with this final plague, Pharaoh and his people could not wait to expel them from Egypt. Just like when the timing is not right, when the baby is not ready, premature birth can be dangerous. God moved with infinite wisdom and control, bringing the situation to the exact conditions needed for Israel to be birthed out of the womb. Let us be patient and trust God's timing as He works out His perfect plan. He is in sovereign and perfect control, arranging the conditions to achieve His results. Any earlier or any later will be trouble. In His timing, you and those around will be in the best state of readiness, determination, and faith and the best outcome will result.

THOUGHT: The LORD is never late or early. His timing is perfect.

PRAYER: LORD, I put my hand in Thine, please lead me.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31

EXODUS 12:34-51

MATTHEW 6:33

*“And it came to pass at the end
of the four hundred and thirty years ...”*

GOD WILL PROVIDE

The baby nation-to-be was at the point of coming forth at the end of the birth pangs. In haste, the children of Israel used their clothes as bags to carry their unleavened dough and kneading troughs to leave Egypt. Just as the LORD had instructed through Moses earlier (Exod 11:2-3), they asked the Egyptians for jewels of silver and gold and clothing before they left. And the Egyptians handed over these items as requested. The Hebrew words “*borrowed*” and “*lent*” here are understood as “asked for” and “granted on request” respectively. The LORD moved the Egyptians’ hearts to give. In fact, the giving was so great that the children of Israel practically stripped them clean. This was truly a memorable night for they finally left Egypt after 430 years. The mixed multitude also took this opportunity to leave Egypt, but they had to be circumcised if they wanted to participate in the Passover.

How did two million people prepare to leave a place after being there for so long? Would slaves have the possessions and resources needed to set up a temple for worship, let alone be a nation? And to leave suddenly, practically overnight, would be quite frightening. They had no time to plan or to save up. But the LORD provided. He had already planned and would provide for them. These items were later used for the construction of the Tabernacle and the priestly garments. God would always provide for His work. Do you worry about the future? Do you wonder where provisions will come from? If you are doing what God desires for your life, family, and the church, you need not worry. Receiving expensive items from the Egyptians probably did not cross their minds, let alone the great quantity. If you are seeking His kingdom first, and not your own pleasure, promotion, and pride, God will provide.

THOUGHT: God can order situations and move hearts to provide in ways we cannot even imagine.

PRAYER: LORD, I thank Thee that I will not lack what is needed when I do Thy will.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1

EXODUS 13:1-16

DEUTERONOMY 6:20-23

“... that the LORD’s law
may be in thy mouth.”

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

The LORD instructed the people through Moses that all the first-born of man and beast were to be sanctified, i.e. set apart, unto Him. Also, in the Promised Land, they must continue to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the month Abib (later called Nisan).

The intention was that they may “remember this day” (Exod 13:3, cf. Exod 12:14), to “shew thy son” (Exod 13:8), as “a sign unto thee ... for a memorial” (Exod 13:9), and to have an answer “when thy son asketh thee ... what is this?” (Exod 13:14), and “for a token.” As they refrained from leaven, they must remember the day He brought them out of slavery and Egypt by His power alone. And it was He who would give them the Promised Land. As they redeemed the first born, they must remember God sparing their first born and not the Egyptians’ at the first Passover, and His redeeming them out of Egypt. Even before entering the Promised Land, the LORD wanted them to set up reminders. We are forgetful people. It is sad to think how easily we forget even great deliverance and help from God. We need constant reminders, so in the New Testament the Lord instituted the Holy Communion (replacing the Passover) in remembrance of His broken body and shed blood. The LORD also reminded them to teach their children. Parents must constantly teach the story of redemption and the LORD’s goodness and faithfulness to their children. This is so that they will come to know who the LORD God is and come to trust in, worship, and serve Him one day too. This is primarily the role of parents, not Sunday School teachers. Parents must know God’s Word well to teach their children, and back up their teaching with a life of obedience. Otherwise, partaking of the Holy Communion, speaking against sin, teaching about God’s power and faithfulness will all be empty and hollow. We must remember, and we must teach our children to remember.

THOUGHT: The LORD wanted Israel to remember what He did.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to always remember how and why Thou hast redeemed me.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2

EXODUS 13:17-22

PSALM 32:6-11

“... *I will guide thee
with mine eye.*”

TRUST GOD EVEN IF THE WAY SEEMS LONG

The LORD purposely would not lead the people through the land of the Philistines *“although that was near”* (Exod 13:17), i.e. it was a more direct and shorter route to Canaan. He took them on a detour instead through the way of the wilderness. Instead of just going eastward to Canaan, He led them out of Egypt from Succoth to Etham, i.e. south-easterly *“through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea”* (Exod 13:18). This route was unmistakably the LORD’s idea. *“God led”* is repeated in Exodus 13:17 and 18. Also, in Exodus 13:21, *“the LORD went before them ... to lead them the way.”*

God gave the reason for this route: The children of Israel would have to encounter many wars in the other route. They would become fearful, and discouraged, and would change their minds about leaving Egypt as a result. The people were spiritually not ready. It is sad for God to say such a thing after having just displayed His power so mightily. May our faith be stronger! Yet, the LORD knows us well, and He remains patient.

Sometimes we see an easy and direct solution to a problem we face at work, at home, and in our personal life. But God does not seem to take us through that easy route. Instead, we seem to have to go through a much longer way. *“Why can’t God do it this or that way?”* It is not that God cannot. Rather it is because God knows we cannot take what might come as a result if He led us by that way. He knows when we are not ready for what is ahead. Is there something in your job, family, church, or ministry that makes you wonder why God does not just provide the direct solution? Perhaps it is because you will return to the world if He gave you the money you needed, or returned you to health quickly, or solved your family problem immediately. The more direct and obvious route is not necessarily better. Trust God to know best.

THOUGHT: “He leadeth me, O blessed thought!”

PRAYER: LORD, I am glad Thou knowest the future and leadest me based on that.

TRUST GOD EVEN WHEN IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE

The LORD's instructions to Moses were for the children of Israel to turn towards Pihahiroth and make camp there, by the sea. Pharaoh would think that these inexperienced slaves had got themselves lost and confused. Instead of going eastward, this direction was south-westward. And this south-westward direction would put them between Egypt and the sea. This does not seem to make sense at all because if they continued south-eastward, they would not be sandwiched between Egyptian forces and the sea. But now, they were boxed in. The final judicial hardening of Pharaoh's heart led him and his people to pursue the children of Israel, thinking how foolish they were to release their free labour (who even plundered their people). The precarious position of their ex-slaves made them sitting ducks for recapture. So, Pharaoh led his 600 elite individually-captained chariots to do just that.

It was not a mistake or lapse of judgment. The LORD's intention was to show His glory and His power over Pharaoh and his army. They would know that He is the LORD. Chariots are repeatedly mentioned in this passage. These were considered very powerful and advanced inventions that struck fear in enemy hearts. With such a military force going after them, it really did not make sense for the children of Israel to be intentionally trapped in such a disadvantageous location. But the weaker the position of the children of Israel, and the more powerful the military might of the Egyptians going after them, the more clearly the LORD's power and glory would be displayed, and the more surely His children would know that God alone was all they need, regardless of the situation. God's commandments about how to live on earth may at times seem contrary to our perceived notions regarding how to succeed. The world may label us as irrational and think we are foolish to follow God. But the way God led the children of Israel here is an example and an encouragement for us!

THOUGHT: Do I trust my LORD's commands even when it does not seem to make sense?

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to live by faith and not by sight.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4

EXODUS 14:10-12

JOSHUA 24:5-7

“... Let us alone, that
we may serve the Egyptians? ...”

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DISTRUST GOD

When the children of Israel saw Pharaoh's fearsome army of horsemen and 600 elite chariots advancing towards them, they were very frightened. They cried out to the LORD. But they also wickedly accused Moses for taking them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness. They reminded Moses that they had told him before to leave them alone in Egypt. They said they would rather have continued as the Egyptians' slaves than die in this wilderness.

When we distrust God, fear takes over. Did not they go out “*with an high hand*” (Exod 14:8), meaning with confidence and victory? Have they not witnessed the LORD's miraculous protection over them while the Egyptians suffered in the plagues? The reason we fear is that we focus on the present situation and its difficulties rather than remember God's power and faithfulness. The LORD reminded the children of Israel (and told them to remind their children too) about His ability to deliver. When we distrust God's leading, we will panic at the first sign of trouble. We will want to give up and go back to the old life, forgetting the bondage that held us. We might even think it would have been better not to follow and obey our LORD. We will complain and whine. We will blame and accuse those whose godly counsel we have followed. We may cry to the LORD, but it will not be a cry for help that we may persevere, only a cry to remove all troubles because we do not like them. We will begin to think that it would have been better not to have put the LORD first in our studies, work, family, and even church. We will think in our hearts, “Look where obeying God has led us and the great troubles that loom ahead because of it.” We will think it is not worth following the LORD. We soon forget the sweetness of life with the close presence of our LORD, and focus instead on temporary and even apparent troubles.

THOUGHT: Am I quick to forget God's power when I face difficulties?

PRAYER: O LORD, help me to remember that Thou art able to do exceedingly abundantly more than I can imagine.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

EXODUS 14:13-14

PSALM 46

*“Be still, and know that I am God:
I will be exalted among the heathen ...”*

HAVE FAITH THOUGH OTHERS FEAR

What was Moses’ response when others trembled in fear and faithlessly complained against him? Moses simply gave three encouragements to them: *“fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD”* (Exod 14:13). Moses also told them that this would be the last time they would see their Egyptian slave masters. This was because the LORD Himself would fight for them there.

It would have been easy for Moses to also panic, fear, and feel regret. For though they were larger in number, they were unarmed, untrained, and inexperienced compared to Pharaoh’s elite force armed with advanced military weapons. Moreover they were in a most disadvantageous position, being stuck between Pharaoh’s powerful army and the sea. All this might end in being rounded up and returned to slavery. This would be detrimental for the elderly, women, and children. It was as if the people were saying, it was all because of you, Moses, you should have left us alone when we told you to. In this sense, Moses may have been facing more fears than the people. Moses could have focused on all these fears, but he did not. Moses’ response of faith though others feared showed how he had grown spiritually to trust the LORD from the time God called him at the burning bush. His response was truly commendable, and is a great example for us to stand firm (even if we are alone) when others fear, complain, and want to turn back. Moses must have remembered God’s ability to deliver and His faithfulness in bringing to pass what He promised (Exod 7-11). The LORD had told him that He *“will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host”* (Exod 14:4). Fear is focusing on circumstances. Faith is focusing on God. Fear sees how impossible the situation is. Faith sees how infinite God is. Fear is caused by forgetting what God has done. Faith is remembering what God has accomplished. When others fear, you must have faith, even if you are alone in doing so.

THOUGHT: Does my life encourage others to trust God?

PRAYER: Help me, O God, that my faith will grow and stand firm when trials come.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

EXODUS 14:15-16

EXODUS 4:1-4

“... I will shew thee my faith
by my works.”

FAITH AND ACTION

The people were in great fear and were very upset with Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. They were sitting ducks where they were situated. Moses had just told the people that the LORD would fight for them. At this point, the LORD asked Moses why he was still speaking to Him. He told Moses that he should instead be telling the children of Israel to move forward. They had little space to maneuver. Moving forward meant heading towards the sea, with Pharaoh's army at their heel. Why did the LORD ask Moses to stop speaking to Him and go speak to the children of Israel instead? Did not God tell us to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess 5:17) and “*in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving*” (Phil 4:6) to make our requests known to Him? Moses' exemplary faith was shown by his words of encouragement to the children of Israel. But more was required. His faith must lead him to act. It was time to keep going in Canaan's direction. The LORD had made it clear He would fight for them. He had also earlier made His call to Moses clear about him leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land. Moses had prayed already. Now he must go forth to do the work.

It is not wrong to pray without ceasing, but you need to act too when God's commands and promises are clear. At times we fail to take the next step in faith after having known God's will. We know the choices we need to make regarding a current situation about our job, God's model for our family, some relationship, or some financial commitment we have. We are convinced and may even speak with conviction to others. But we just keep going in a loop and maintain the status quo for weeks, months, even years. We may even keep praying about it individually and as a family. But we fail to take the steps needed to move forward towards what we have known from God's Word. Yes, the step forward may seem daunting. But take action in faith knowing God will fight for you.

THOUGHT: Actions speak louder than words.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to take action while I depend upon Thee.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7

EXODUS 14:17-31

JOHN 20:30-31

“... *blessed are they that have not seen,
and yet have believed.*”

WHY NO PARTING OF SEAS TODAY?

The LORD interposed with the pillar of cloud to stop the Egyptian army from attacking the children of Israel through the night. This pillar of cloud gave light on the side of God's people, but it was dark on the enemies' side. Moses stretched forth his hand and the LORD caused an east wind to blow all night, dividing and drying the sea for the children of Israel, creating a path of escape as they walked between the walls of water. Pharaoh's host gave chase. The LORD caused the chariot wheels of Pharaoh's host to come off, and these high-speed fighting machines became useless. The Egyptians knew again that the LORD was fighting for His people. They knew they needed to retreat but it was too late. When God's people were safely on the other side, the LORD closed the sea and drowned Pharaoh's entire host. Surely the sight of the dead bodies of the Egyptians floating to shore must have added to the children of Israel's fear of the LORD and to believe His servant, Moses.

Why doesn't God perform such miracles today? Would it not cause more people to fear and believe in Him? The Power Evangelism movement promotes the use of miracles to convince man. This is erroneous. Lazarus' resurrection did not change the Pharisees. However, the miracles during the exodus did have an impact on Rahab causing her to fear (Josh 2:10) and trust in the LORD (Heb 11:31). So, why not have miracles today? God did use miracles to cause man to fear and to believe (John 10:37-38), hence it is not wrong, yet He also rebuked a sign-seeking generation (Matt 12:39). God does not intend to reveal Himself by miracles in all ages. We are to be like Rahab. Remember that Rahab believed in what she heard happened to the children of Israel in the past. She did not witness the miracles herself. Her faith came from hearing, not from sight. All the miracles God would give that man may believe and be edified have been recorded already. They are sufficient, even much more than what Rahab heard. This is the point in John 20:30-31.

THOUGHT: The miracles in the Bible are recorded for my faith.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to walk by faith and not by sight.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8

EXODUS 15:1-21

EPHESIANS 5:19-20

*“Giving thanks always for all things
unto God and the Father ...”*

LEARN TO PRAISE GOD!

Having been delivered from Pharaoh’s army, Moses and the children of Israel sang unto the LORD. The beginning of this song extols God’s strength, His salvation, and exalts God and the rest of the song is similarly structured. They sang about the LORD’s power in separating the sea for them to cross over safely and His judgment of the mighty hosts of Egypt by drowning them all when He closed up the sea. The powerful army of Pharaoh was absolutely no match for the LORD. The god of Egypt, Pharaoh, is crushed too. Hence they praised God: *“who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods?”* (Exod 15:11). They sang about the LORD’s mercy in redeeming and purchasing them to be His people and guiding them to Himself. And all these mighty acts would cause the Canaanites to tremble. The song closes with praise and exaltation: *“The LORD shall reign for ever and ever”* (Exod 15:18). Miriam led the women with timbrel and dance as they sang.

We must remember to praise God after deliverance. We often tend to forget once we are relieved of our troubles. Remind your spouse, your child, your brethren, that you must pray and give thanks and praise God. Moses and Miriam did exactly that. Also, remember it is the arm of the LORD that saves, not man or the environment! We often say, “luckily,” or “if not for so and so.” We must turn our minds to God’s glory and goodness, and not to man. This song is quite different from today’s songs. Notice that the entire song is about God, not man, though it is about deliverance. The majority of songs today have man as the centre or focus, and God is expected to bless man. Choir presentations are meant to praise God, and must focus on exalting God. Yes, the hearers ought to be stirred to glorious and grateful thoughts about God, but they are not to be entertained. We must also note that Miriam’s timbrel and dance are part of this public celebration. Dancing at national celebrations (not in temple worship) is recorded in Scriptures.

THOUGHT: Do I forget to praise and thank God after deliverance?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to give praise after receiving Thy help.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9

EXODUS 15:22-16:15

EXODUS 14:11-12

“... and there
he proved them.”

THE TRUTH BEHIND MURMURING

The people could not find water after travelling for three days. And when they found bitter water at Marah (“Marah” means bitter), they murmured against Moses. The LORD turned the water sweet by telling Moses to cast a tree into the waters. The LORD reminded them at this point that if they obeyed His commandments, He would not put on them the diseases which He put on the Egyptians. The God who can turn bitter water sweet can also give them health. At Elim, they found abundance of water, and palm trees for shade. But when they ran out of food, they murmured again against Moses and Aaron saying they would rather God had personally killed them in Egypt than allow them to suffer hunger in the wilderness. At least they could die full while eating the meat and bread there instead of being hungry out here. The LORD spoke to Moses through the pillar of cloud and sent abundance of quails and rained manna from heaven.

It was only three days after their songs of praise to God for His power and deliverance that they murmured grievously upon experiencing difficulty. Many of us are like that. We are happy when things go well, but will immediately murmur when there are difficulties. It was not easy for the children of Israel to travel without water. But having just witnessed God’s miraculous deliverance, they should have learned to trust Him and ask Him for help, instead of complaining. God again showed them that He could provide. Yet they murmured again. God revealed the truth behind murmurings. When we murmur, we are complaining against Him and He hears it! Moses pointed this out three times (Exod 16:7-9). And the LORD Himself said, “*I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel*” (Exod 16:12). Dear reader, when we know God and we still murmur about life’s situations and people, it is a terrible thing! God orders all things. Trust Him!

THOUGHT: When I murmur, I am speaking against God Himself for what happens in my life.

PRAYER: LORD, forgive me for my murmurings against Thee.

SABBATH KEEPING REFLECTS YOUR FAITH

Specific commands were given to the people to collect manna. Each person was to collect one measure for himself and one measure for each of his family members. They were not to leave any till the next morning. But some disobeyed, and the leftovers bred worms and stank. The command was also that they collect twice the normal measure on the day before the Sabbath so that they would not have to do any such work of gathering food on the Sabbath. This double collection in preparation for the Sabbath would not rot. Moreover, Moses told them there would be no manna from heaven on the Sabbath. Yet there were those who went out to seek manna on the seventh day. Naturally they found none. They failed God's test again.

The practical lesson of the LORD giving manna on a day-by-day basis was to teach the children of Israel the lesson of faith. They needed to trust God for their daily provisions and realize that their provisions were indeed from Him. Likewise, they needed to trust and obey the LORD in keeping the Sabbath holy. The supernatural fact that the manna would rot if kept overnight, except on the sixth night, was intended to teach them that He would provide for them when they kept the Sabbath. This must be a clear lesson for us today. Keeping the Lord's Day holy unto the Lord instead of seeking to make a living is all about faith. May this very tangible daily occurrence, experienced by the children of Israel and described explicitly to us, transform our perception about keeping the Lord's Day. Some of us do not believe the LORD and are fearful that if we turn down jobs that require us to work on Sundays, we will suffer and not survive. Students may think that if they do not jump on every chance to study more (including on Sundays), they will not do well in school. But remember: the LORD can provide fresh manna, and He can rot manna too. Trust Him to provide. He can also withhold from you and have you return empty-handed should you disobey.

THOUGHT: Keeping the Lord's Day holy is trusting God by faith.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to lay aside my worries and keep the Lord's Day with joy.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11

EXODUS 17:1-7

DEUTERONOMY 6:16-18

*“Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God,
as ye tempted him in Massah.”*

THE DANGER OF MURMURING

The children of Israel journeyed on according to God’s command. Once again, the children of Israel encountered a lack of water, this time at Rephidim. They murmured grievously against Moses and again complained that he had brought them out of Egypt to kill them, their children, and their livestock with thirst. Moses cried to God about what to do. And as before, the LORD provided. He told Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with his rod and water came forth miraculously from it. Moses named this place “*Massah*” (trial, temptation) and “*Meribah*” (quarrel).

The children of Israel did follow the LORD’s command to sojourn on. But while doing so, they murmured at every sign of trial. We too are like that. We may obey God and follow His commands in our Christian walk. Yet, like the children of Israel, we expect to be on a bed of roses all the time. And when things are difficult or the going gets tough, we seem to quickly forget all that God has done and how He has faithfully helped us in the past. When we complain and murmur against people or situations, we are in reality murmuring against God Himself. We are grumbling against His leading, His choice of what He allows, and His timing. When we keep ignoring God’s proven goodness and keep murmuring, we are tempting God Himself. Moses said, “... *wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?*” (Exod 17:2). Their murmuring led them to the brink of committing the sinful act of stoning Moses. God reveals the heart of murmuring. It is tantamount to saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?” It is a terrible thing to murmur because we are in fact telling God, “If you are with us, why don’t you do something?” What danger we are in when we accuse God! Massah-Meribah was a fearful reminder that the children of God tempted and quarreled with God Himself. God has a blessed purpose for us and is always with us (Exod 17:6). When we find ourselves grumbling, complaining, and becoming displeased easily and repeatedly, let us mumble the words “Massah-Meribah” instead!

THOUGHT: Massah-Meribah: tempting and quarreling with God.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me not to grumble as I follow Thee.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

EXODUS 17:8-16

EPHESIANS 6:12-20

*“... we wrestle not
against flesh and blood ...”*

KNOW WHAT BATTLES ARE ABOUT

Moses sent Joshua (who is first mentioned in Exodus 17:9) with chosen men to fight the Amalekites. Joshua courageously obeyed. This would be their first external enemy since crossing the Red Sea. And this would be the first time the children of Israel would be told to fight using their own arms.

The LORD had always been intervening and fighting for them directly thus far. But the LORD needed them to understand that it was always He who aided them and fought for them. God made them realize this by having Moses up on a hill where they could see him with his hands lifted up and praying. They would be winning in battle when Moses' hands were up but losing when his hands hung down. Aaron and Hur aided Moses' tired arms. The children of Israel needed to learn that though they were fighting a physical battle, it was in reality a spiritual one. God does not constantly use miracles to achieve His purposes. He tends to use His people. Now when they face oppositions and trials in their way, they must remember it is a spiritual warfare. If the children of Israel could be prevented from entering the Promised Land by the Amalekites, then Satan would win in preventing the Saviour from being born into Israel. Life's trials and challenges as we walk with our Lord are spiritual battles that may discourage us and hinder us from going forward. Because we know we are obeying Him, we need not give in to avoid hardships nor run away from facing the battle. Since it is a spiritual battle no matter what you are facing (Eph 6:12), then keep praying (Eph 6:18). He will answer. But if we falter in prayer, the enemy will prevail. While we are doing God's will and obeying His commands, we must depend on Him in unceasing prayer. Satan will send oppositions and fearful difficulties. But fight on in prayer and stay your ground. The enemy will be vanquished if you persevere and depend on Jehovah-nissi, which means "God is my banner."

THOUGHT: Battles I face daily are in reality spiritual obstacles.

PRAYER: LORD, help me win my battles so that I can go forward.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN LEADERS

When Jethro (Moses’ father-in-law) came to visit Moses, he noticed Moses was overwhelmed with handling the people’s problems. So, he counselled Moses to focus on God’s ordinances and laws, and to select men to assist him with administrative matters. This group would help him bear the burdens so that he would not be worn out. Moses took Jethro’s advice and set up this judicial administration with able men.

What were the qualities of the men to be selected? These are useful principles for today’s church when it comes to choosing leaders. These principles apply to leaders of homes too.

(1) Able men: It is not just about people wanting to serve. They must first be proven to be capable and efficient.

(2) God-fearing men: Talents can make a person proud. His pride will make him self-willed. He will not obey God but will do things his own way instead. A leader must fear God. If he fears God, he will make decisions that please God rather than men.

(3) Men of truth: Such men will seek to obey God’s truth. They will always do what is right in God’s eyes. They are not moved by friendships but are guided by God’s ways. Neither will they lie but are trustworthy. They do not play political games, are not double-tongued, but speak and deal truthfully, not deceptively.

(4) Hate covetousness: A leader must not serve for personal gain, nor be swayed by gifts and favours to become partial.

No matter how capable a leader is, he is still limited and needs to delegate, or else he will collapse one day. But finding leaders with the above qualities is not easy. Be such a person for the Lord’s work. If you are a leader, ensure you have all of the above qualities. Churches must not simply appoint leaders out of desperation and pragmatism. Pray and believe God will raise the right workers instead of appointing any without carefully ensuring they have these qualities

THOUGHT: God defines the qualities necessary for God’s work.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to develop all these qualities and be useful.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14
EXODUS 19:1-9
1 PETER 2:9-12

*“... shew forth the praises of him
who hath called you out of
darkness into his marvellous light.”*

WHY GOD SAVED YOU

Two months (sixty days) after leaving Egypt, the children of Israel reached the foot of Mt Sinai. The LORD reminded them how He had powerfully led them out of Egypt's slavery. He gave a suzerainty covenant (where a superior party sets the terms and conditions of the covenant for an inferior party) to them. If they would obey Him according to the terms of the covenant, the LORD would protect them and they would be His special possession and treasure above all other people on earth. Moses told the people these words and returned to the LORD with the people's promise to obey the LORD.

The LORD explained why He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They would have the great privilege to belong to the God who owns the whole world. He would care for them and guard them as a treasure. They would be a unique people, different from the other nations. But they must keep the conditions of this covenant that they have entered into with God – that they would obey what He says. Israel was to be God's witness to the rest of the world, to bear His truth. By their obedience to God, they would be a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. Other nations would then come to know the LORD and be saved to worship and serve Him. This was God's purpose for saving them and making them His treasured possession. This is the same reason God has saved you. God did not save us to bless us and protect us so that we can be what we wish and do as we like. We have a purpose to fulfil in living a holy life in obedience to God, that others may see Christ. We are to be unique, and not try to emulate the carnal and sinful world. We are saved to worship Him and to serve Him, not to serve self and idols. Yes, we are saved by grace. Yet, God's command is that after salvation we obey His voice in His Word. When you read God's Word, ask: “How can I live so that I fulfil the purpose God saved me?” Not: “How will God give me what I want?”

THOUGHT: God saved me by the Covenant of Grace to worship and serve Him alone.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to fulfil my covenantal promises.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

EXODUS 19:10-20:6

LEVITICUS 11:44-45

*“For I am the
LORD your God.”*

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS AND YOU

God’s presence, accompanied by great and fearful sights at Mount Sinai, affirmed the significance of the Ten Commandments as the moral law. We must remember that though the ceremonial and civil laws are not applicable to us today, this moral law still stands. It is referred to by Christ (Matt 22:37-40) and the Apostles (e.g. Rom 13:9; Eph 6:2-3) in the New Testament. True believers delight in keeping the moral law because our lives will then please God.

The First Commandment emphasizes that God is the only living and true God because all other gods are false. You must obey His commandments simply because He is God! He is to be believed, obeyed, and feared as you walk humbly before Him. He is the Sovereign God. When you disobey His commandments, you despise Him. It is a terrible, daring provocation to put any gods before Him. You must exalt, esteem, reverence, and honour Him as the infinite and almighty God. It is wonderful to trust, love, and adore Him! The Second Commandment stresses the purity of worship. It forbids both the making of images of idols and the bowing down to them to worship and serve them. God is a Spirit. He is infinite. Crafting any image to represent Him immediately demotes Him to a god of our imagination and making. You must not have any superstitious dependence upon any crosses, statues of Jesus, or of angels. Any desire to “help you focus and remind you of God” is an excuse, and is to be rejected. Your children will pick up your idols and God will judge their idolatry too. But He promises mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. You may not have physical idols, but beware of the unseen ones in your heart that steal your heart from Him. It could be a person, your studies, your job, or your family. “Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish for spiritual things ... whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind; that thing is sin ...” (Susanna Wesley).

THOUGHT: What takes first place in my heart?

PRAYER: Help me to honour and worship Thee aright, my LORD.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16

EXODUS 20:7

PSALM 61:5-8

*“... that I may daily
perform my vows.”*

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The “*name of the LORD*” (Exod 20:7) does not refer to God’s titles only, but also to His Word, character, attributes, works and commands. Taking His Name in vain is to be irreverent to Him. It is sinful to use His Name as a swear word or exclamation. “OMG” (which stands for “oh my God”), “Gosh” (“sh” in place of “d”), “Jeez” (shortened form of “Jesus”) are not any less sinful just because we do not use the word “God” or “Jesus.” These are certainly examples of taking of God’s Name in vain.

We also take God’s Name in vain when we break any vow that is taken in His Name. Such vows are taken, for example, at baptism, at marriage, at church membership entrance, and when taking up leadership roles in church. Have I been living out what I have vowed? Have I lived up to His Name as a “Christ”ian? We also break this commandment when we use His Name for something that is not true. For example, you say, “I thank God for giving me this job” when the job causes you to break God’s commandments (eg. working on the Sabbath). Or, “I praise God for giving my child this talent to play the piano” when your child plays pop music at competitions. Or, “May God be glorified by my good results and success” when you gain these at the expense of attending church. Or, “I thank God for providing this for me” when you live beyond your means, take huge bank loans, and hardly come to church because you are too busy working to ensure you can service your loans. We think just because we use God’s Name, everything is suddenly acceptable and even holy. Also, when we propound false and erroneous teachings, we take His Name in vain. Be careful how you teach or handle God’s Word. Do not say what He has not said. Do not misrepresent Him and Who He is. Each one of us needs to evaluate carefully before we use His Name or Word in our speech. God will surely judge and we will not escape His punishment or chastisement.

THOUGHT: The Third Commandment is more than just using God’s Name carelessly in speech.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to sincerely live up to Thy Name.

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 17

EXODUS 20:8-11

ISAIAH 58:13; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:2

“... call the sabbath a delight

... honour him.”

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The LORD brought in the creation order to emphasize that keeping the Sabbath is not a temporal but an ongoing command for His children. God used the Apostle's writings and practices in the New Testament (1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10) to show us that Sunday, the Lord's Day, replaces the Old Testament Saturday Sabbath.

Keeping the Sabbath holy means to set it apart wholly for the LORD. It is the whole day, not just a few hours during worship or Bible studies. Do your best to finish your homework, jobs, and family chores from Monday to Saturday so that you can keep the Lord's Day in worshipping and serving Him, studying His Word, and in private and family devotions. Avoid unnecessary work that can be done on other days. Works of necessity and mercy continue, but do not purposely take on Sunday duties for the extra pay. Recreational activities and games must be avoided. We must be aware of what fills our thoughts and speech. It is not a day for long conversations about our jobs, hobbies, politics, or favourite food. Let our words be about our Lord and His Kingdom. Does this sound very legalistic and constraining? If so, you miss the point. His commands are not grievous. “*Remember the sabbath day*” (Exod 20:8) reminds us that we easily forget. It is set apart for your spiritual good when you spend it with the Lord. It keeps you from being overwhelmed by the world and its ways. It cultivates delight in worship and service to your God. How can you grow to love someone more when you hardly take time to know and do things with the person? Without keeping one day apart for the LORD, we will forget Him easily and grow apart from Him. Do not rush off after Sunday worship and Bible studies. Stay back and serve in the outreaches, attend the evening services or fellowships. Sabbath rest is not going home to catch up on sleep. Have faith that God will help you with your work and studies when you put Him first. God is faithful.

THOUGHT: Keeping the Sabbath involves the entire Sunday.

PRAYER: LORD, I resolve to keep the entire Lord's Day to worship and to serve Thee.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18

EXODUS 20:12

PROVERBS 30:17

*“... The eye that mocketh at his father,
... the young eagles shall eat it.”*

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Fifth Commandment contains the duty towards father and mother. God has set father and mother over us. He has chosen them for us. Honouring them is honouring the LORD's choice. It is in God's eternal moral law! View and respect them as our superiors. To respect our parents means we have to be aware of how we think of them, and speak and behave towards them. Showing impatience is not honouring parents. Often young people think they are smarter so they become intolerant towards their parents. They like to think that their parents are not as up to date or in the know as they are. We are to obey our parents, even unbelieving parents, as long as their commands are not sinful. Knowing this, Christian parents must inculcate in their children from young reverence and honour for them through respect and obedience. A child who hits his parents, screams and shouts at them, is defiant, or throws tantrums will grow up ignoring the Fifth Commandment. Let us teach our children from young to submit to correction. To honour is also to show love and care. This is displayed in how we take care of them and help them. They may become slower, weaker, less alert and more infirmed as they age. This is the time especially when we have even more opportunities to obey this commandment by showing patience, love, and care. God used them to bring us into existence. They cared for us.

This is very lacking today as young people are increasingly disrespectful and resistant to any form of authority. Christians ought not to be. Besides natural parents, the Westminster divines include all who are our seniors, superiors, authorities beyond our family. These are superiors and authorities God has set over our life. Obey, respect, and be grateful to them. This command also expects that parents and superiors ensure they live and act in ways that earn honour through love and care, and not provoke to anger and disrespect.

THOUGHT: What have been my speech, attitude, and behaviour towards my parents?

PRAYER: LORD, forgive me for not honouring the authorities Thou hast set over me.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

EXODUS 20:13

MATTHEW 5:21-22

*“Whosoever hateth his brother
is a murderer.”*

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Sixth Commandment emphasizes the prohibition of the taking of life. The aim is preservation of life. It is against intentional, premeditated, unlawful, and unjust killing, and even accidental killing (Deut 19:4-6). However, killing someone in self-defence (Exod 22:2-3), or in lawful wars, or capital punishment (Rom 13:4) are acceptable, for these aim at and bring about the preservation of life, in fulfillment of the commandment. Some are against capital punishment, but this law preserves innocent lives from being taken.

You may think you have not committed murder and are unlikely to. But God says that you have committed murder when you hate someone unjustly (Matt 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15). So you must be very careful about sinful anger and hatred, which happens so often, hidden in our hearts. Instead, be forgiving, kind, forbearing, and seek reconciliation instead of harbouring grudge and bitterness. Remember that the desire for revenge is sin too. Character assassination through gossip and maligning others are such behaviours.

Negligent and irresponsible acts that lead to loss of life makes one guilty of bloodshed (Deut 22:8). So be careful when you drive, cycle, or play sports. We must not be reckless towards others and self. Certain sports that put you or others at risk of death or danger are to be avoided. It is also important that you realize suicide is murder of self. God gave you life, so you have no right to take your own life. Euthanasia contravenes this commandment and Christians must not be tempted to bow to pressure, no matter how difficult the circumstance. It is also called medically-assisted suicide, which is just a nice-sounding medical term for breaking this commandment. This means we must also not be careless with our bodies in how we work, what we do, eat, and drink, so that we do not destroy our health.

THOUGHT: Do I harbour hatred against others and am reckless in how I live and what I do?

PRAYER: LORD, forgive me for my sinful hatred which makes me a murderer.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

EXODUS 20:14

MATTHEW 5:27-32

“... whosoever looketh on a woman to lust

... hath committed adultery ...”

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Seventh Commandment points to maintaining sexual purity and chastity. It definitely forbids not only extra-marital affairs, but also condemns fornication, pornography, rape, incest, and all unnatural lusts. Dirty jokes, speech and behaviours with sexual innuendos are also sins against this command. Christians, do not tease your friends about physical contact between men and women.

Perhaps you think since you are not guilty of any of the above, you are fine. Yet, Christ defines adultery as having occurred when you lust after another (Matt 5:28). Hence, it is equally important that you dress modestly and not sensuously so as not to stumble others to fall into this sin. Some clothes are designed to accentuate certain body parts to arouse lusts. However, do not blame others for your impure thoughts. Job was very careful in what he allowed his eyes and mind to dwell on: “*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*” (Job 31:1). No one may know or see, but you may be committing adultery in your heart all day long. These lusts arise from what you see, what you read, what you hear. Movies, television, magazines and the internet are highly effective for Satan to tempt you to sin in this aspect. He plants his trap there. Also, many worldly songs are carnal, lascivious, promoting premarital sex, and adultery. It is hardly possible these days not to be bombarded with provocative sexual visuals wherever we look. You must watch your eye gate and ear gate because unclean sexual thoughts arise from these. We live in a sex-crazed age and society where almost every advertisement is lustful and sensual. Be very careful of allowing lusts to dwell in your heart because it will take over your mind such that immoral thoughts arise in whatever you see. “*Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin ...*” (2 Pet 2:14). This is a sin that is addictive and controlling. It ruined Samson. It can ruin you too.

THOUGHT: Adultery already begins in my heart when I lust.

PRAYER: LORD, convict me and give me strength to resist impurity.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Eighth Commandment forbids stealing. This is about theft of properties that belong to others or withholding from others what is rightfully theirs.

Dealing deceptively in your business to make gain by cheating others and by not being truthful is stealing. Exploiting others is stealing from them. You must enter into any business or contract honestly even if it means you might lose out. Make sure you do not hike prices unfairly just because you are in an advantageous position. What do you do when the cashier returns more cash than is correct? Make right immediately or go back to return it. What if a restaurant forgets to charge you for a dish? You must correct them and pay the right amount. Do not take office or church things and utilize them for your own personal uses. Also, do not steal time from your company by not putting in the proper number of hours, or by idling, or watching YouTube while at your desk, or chit chatting all the time. If you are late for work, stay back after work to make up for it. Do not cheat on your taxes for it is stealing from the government. Using things without permission is stealing. Borrowing without the intention to return or keeping something for longer than necessary is not only lying but stealing too. Do you have such things in your home? Do you have computer software with stolen intellectual property rights or which were obtained through ill-gotten means? Return it or make restitution now. Also, do not accept or even buy goods you know are stolen or gotten through illegitimate means. What if there is an online offer but you know it is not fully legal to purchase and use the product? Do not buy it no matter how much you can save. Students, copying is stealing someone else's work. Taking credit for what your colleague did is stealing the credit that belongs to someone else. And do not take or keep what rightly belongs to another. Enriching ourselves at the expense of exploiting others is stealing.

THOUGHT: Stealing involves more than just theft of things.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to be mindful of taking what belongs to others.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22

EXODUS 20:16

REVELATION 21:8

*“... them that speak
lies shall be stopped.”*

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Ninth Commandment emphasizes speaking the truth and only the truth. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). When Christians lie, we once again act like Satan's children. God hates lies and condemns constant unrepentant lies as deserving hell fire (Rev 21:8). Satan's deception of Eve led mankind to plunge into sin.

Generally speaking, the world considers lying a small thing, and accepts that everyone lies. To the children of God, it does not matter that it is common behavior for the world. The world classifies lies as black lies, white lies, and grey lies. But in God's eyes, all lies are sinful. This commandment surely forbids telling falsehoods about another person. Spreading rumours, slander and gossips to bear tales lead to character assassination. Flattery is also lying. So is vain boasting because we are often exaggerating. When you embellish your achievements or situations you are lying. These are subtle forms of lies, but are still lies. When we fail to admit our fault, we lie. Blaming others is lying too. Speaking half-truths to deceive and paint a less than accurate picture is lying. For example, when explaining an argument, you are lying if you only emphasis the error of the other person while concealing your own. Dishonest dealings with others are lies too. Taking oaths and not keeping them is lying. Have you been keeping your baptismal, membership, and wedding vows? Saying something without the intention or failing to keep it is lying. Situational ethics justifying lying is still sinful. One lie must lead to another in order to cover up the previous lie. Spurgeon wisely pointed out that liars need to have a good memory to keep track of their lies. Why do you lie? Often it is because of fear. For example, the fear of losing face or the fear of consequences that will result if you tell the truth. The other common reason is pride and gain. You desire to impress or please others. Just remember, fear sinning against God rather than fear man. Be more concerned about what God thinks than to impress others with lies.

THOUGHT: Satan is the father of lies.

PRAYER: Father, help me to speak only the truth from now on.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

EXODUS 20:17

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10

“... godliness with contentment
is great gain.”

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT AND YOU

The Tenth Commandment emphasizes contentment. You should be fully contented with what God has given and ordained for you.

Discontentment leads to envy and being dissatisfied with what you have. This makes you long for and lust after what others have. Many other sins and the breaking of the Ten Commandments can be traced to this sin. You have extra-marital affairs because you lust after someone else's spouse. You are dissatisfied with the spouse God has given you. Because you are discontented with the possessions God has given you, you covet what others have and so you steal. Some would fight and even kill to obtain. Living beyond your means is a covetous life of sin. The constant desire to possess more, hoard more, and even borrowing money in order to buy what we do not need is covetousness. This sin leads us to idolatry. We bow and serve what we covet. We neglect God just to obtain or maintain a certain lifestyle. We break the Sabbath to earn more to pay for the idols we covet. We put the gods of mammon, worldly pleasures, position, fame, and success before God. Money is not evil but the love of money is. A covetous heart cannot be contented. Ultimately, this sin idolises self.

The cure for this sin which should help us obey God's commandments is to be contented, and accept what God has chosen to give or not give. The Apostle Paul learned to be content in every state. God said that as long as we have food and raiment, be content. And we need to set our hearts on things above, not things on earth (Col 3:2). Hebrews 13:5 reminds us, *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”* Having Christ in our life and His promised presence must cause us to be content because He will never leave or forsake us.

THOUGHT: Covetousness leads to many sins, breaking all Ten Commandments.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me contentment.

LORD'S DAY, FEBRUARY 24

EXODUS 20:18-26

ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14

*“The fear of the LORD
is the beginning of knowledge ...”*

SHOULD BELIEVERS FEAR GOD?

When the people saw and heard the thunderings, lightnings, loud trumpets, the ground quaking, and the mountain billowing smoke, they moved backwards and stayed there. They told Moses they would rather hear from Moses than have God speak with them directly lest they die. They were then told specifically how to approach God.

Here in Exodus 20:20, Moses responded to the people's fear: *“Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”* Should Christians fear God or not fear God? Some like to quote 1 John 4:18 (*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love”*) to teach that Christians should not fear God. Yet Proverbs 1:7 says, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* This may confuse some. Wrong understanding leads to wrong living. Some Christians think that there is no need to fear God at all since our past, present and future sins are forgiven, and if we sin, we have an advocate and mediator in Christ. So the believer need not have any fear even when he lies, steals, or commits fornication because God has “already factored forgiveness in our future sins too.” This is part of the false gospel. Moses was telling them not to have a mere servile fear of God. But he told them that God intended *“that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”* They needed not fear God as if He was out to kill them. But yet they indeed were to fear sinning against Him. The true believer need not fear eternal judgment in the lake of fire. But as true believers we must have a reverential fear of not displeasing God who has delivered and saved us. Moreover, in this scene, God reminded the people He was a holy God and they should fear sinning against Him for He would chastise sin in this covenant. 1 John 4:18 teaches God's genuinely saved ones that if we love God by reverence and obedience, and we love the brethren, then we need not have fear of eternal judgment nor chastisements.

THOUGHT: (Read Ecclesiastes 12:13.)

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to fear Thee aright.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25
EXODUS 21:1-32
LEVITICUS 25:35-55

*“... the children of Israel
... are my servants ...
I am the LORD your God.”*

DEAL RIGHTEOUSLY WITH OTHERS

The Bible is often criticized for supporting slavery because it is erroneously thought to be like the bondage and oppression experienced by African Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the contrary, we see that it is not so in Exodus 21:1-11. This master-slave arrangement was out of care to help those who were poor because they could not survive on their own (Lev 25:35-37). They were not kidnapped or forced (Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7). It was temporary and sometimes voluntary (Exod 21:2, 5-6; Deut 15:12-15). These slaves were treated kindly (Lev 25:43, 46, 53). This writer had to explain this to someone during an evangelism session because the hearer could not accept Christianity citing this wrong impression. Exodus 21:12-14 deals with murder and manslaughter. Exodus 21:15 warns severely against striking and cursing father or mother. Exodus 21:16 warns against kidnapping. Exodus 21:18-22 commands compensation for injuring other persons. Exodus 21:23-25 emphasizes fairness in meting out punishment. Exodus 21:26-27 instructs proper treatment of servants. Exodus 21:28-32 commands proper care (to ensure the protection and safety of others from injury) and due diligence.

The essence of all these commands in the last five commandments is love towards man. We have a duty to others to do what we can to care and help. We must ensure we show respect to parents because God views dishonouring them as worthy of death. Kidnapping is stealing in the worst form. But even in punishing a crime, God expects that the punishment is fair and just. Those in authority (eg. parents, teachers, church leaders) must take note. Moreover, God demands that we treat those under us carefully and not abuse a servant. God also expects that we realize it is our duty to prevent injuries to others. Any with domestic helpers must realize their duty towards them. In short, we are to treat others righteously.

THOUGHT: The LORD expects me to treat others righteously.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to always treat others as I would want to be treated.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

EXODUS 21:33-22:15

LUKE 19:1-10

“... if I have taken any thing

... by false accusation,

I restore him fourfold.”

DEAL RIGHTEOUSLY WITH OTHERS' PROPERTIES

This passage concerns properties. Exodus 22:1-4 commands full restitution and more for theft or killing of someone's animals. If the apprehended thief cannot repay, he will be sold for his theft. There is no excuse for not making restitution. Exodus 22:5 forbids taking advantage of and damaging other people's properties. Restitution must be made with the best of what one owns. Some like to use other people's things so we get to keep ours or not wear ours out. This is wrong. Exodus 22:6 commands restitution for damage of others' properties due to malice, vandalism, or negligence. Even if we accidentally knock into someone's car or damage someone's property, we should leave our contact so that we can make restitution. Exodus 22:7-13 teaches that if someone claims that the money or properties lent to him have been stolen, then the thief, if apprehended, must make two-fold restitution. If no thief is caught, the case is brought before a judge. Whoever the judge condemns must pay two-fold. In the case where there are no witnesses to corroborate the claim, an oath will be taken and no restitution is to be made. But if there are any grounds for suspicion and it is indeed proven true that there is fraud, restitution must be made to the owner. If there is proper evidence to prove there is no foul play, then no restitution is needed. Be responsible when you borrow things and do not lie that you have lost it. Exodus 22:14-15 further teaches that we must use what we borrow as if it were our own. But it teaches responsibility of the lender too. If you are present and fail to also exercise due care when what you own is being used by the borrower, you may not expect him to make good. This passage prevents irresponsibility, fraud, and also enforces responsibilities of both borrower and lender.

We are to be responsible, faithful keepers, and respectful of other people's properties whether they happen to be in our possession or not. This is our duty towards man in obedience to God.

THOUGHT: I am to care for other people's properties.

PRAYER: LORD, may I make restitution where I have sinned.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

EXODUS 22:16-20

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2

*“... the younger as sisters,
with all purity.”*

BE PURE

Exodus 22:16 teaches that if a man entices a single girl, who has not been betrothed to any man, to have sexual relationship with him, then this man must marry the girl. But if the father refuses to let her marry him, this man must pay dowry according to the custom amount for virgins. Every man must be warned against “grooming” a girl to take advantage of her physically. Every man should court a girl with pure motives and with the proper intention of consideration for marriage. This is why students should not be dating yet. Most at that age do not have the maturity, let alone stability to even think about marriage soon. Dating is not a “buffet” spread to taste as many as possible. Dating with sexual intent is very wicked. Fornication is not only sinful but it steals someone’s virginity. That is why the injunction is to get married. Here is not an excuse to simply “pay off” the family today and move on to another girl. The emphasis here is the virginity is the highest prized possession of a girl. You must be responsible to the girl. Girls, beware the enticement of men, and vice versa. Do not be tempted to be alone in places where petting and fornication can occur. Enter into a relationship with clear knowledge of the other’s intent. Fathers should guide and assess objectively too and help to advise their son or daughter alike. Purity of intent and actions are emphasized here. Young men, never be a “groomer.” Girls, beware of being “groomed.” Parents, be watchful too. Watch for physical purity. What is lost cannot be regained. More hateful sexual sins, like bestiality, are highlighted here too.

We are also warned against spiritual impurity. Witchcraft is promoted as harmless fun and even alluring. Harry Potter and other similar books and movies have gripped the hearts of even Christians. God hates such things and commands death. Do not play along with these and do not emulate them like many do at Halloween.

THOUGHT: Physical and spiritual impurity must not be a part of me.

PRAYER: LORD, help me as I seek to be pure in all my ways.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28

EXODUS 22:21-27

DEUTERONOMY 23:7

*“... for ye were strangers
in the land of Egypt.”*

BE GRACIOUS IN YOUR DEALINGS

The LORD gave specific instructions that the children of Israel must observe towards particular groups of people. His people must not mistreat these because they must be gracious (Exod 22:27) like Him.

The children of Israel were not to ill-treat foreigners who lived among them by oppressing them. God reminded them that they too were once foreigners in Egypt. They should remember how it felt to be abused. We must not mistreat others because we were once mistreated. Instead, we should understand how the vulnerable ones feel and be kind to them. Be protective and caring towards those new among us, not bully them at school, at work, or at home. The culture of “ragging” in some universities should be avoided by Christians. They were not to look down upon and make life difficult for the widows and orphans. We must be especially thoughtful and helpful to these defenseless ones. Do not vex them by despising or ostracizing or bullying them. God pronounced serious warning and curse to kill such oppressors with death and making their wives widows and children orphans! This was how protective He was of these ones. Neither were they allowed to take advantage of the poor by exploiting them in times of their need. We are to lend freely, not try to make money through charging interest. God is not against making interests (Luke 19:23), but this is a case of exploiting those in need. We must be ready to lend and help those in need, not take the opportunity to exploit them. In fact, they were to return the clothes put with them as security so that the borrower had something to wear at night.

These laws would make Israel different from other nations and people that may oppress these helpless groups. Christians today must show the same kindness to these groups of people. It is what differentiates us from others in a “dog-eat-dog” world, where people will do anything to be successful and make gain for self, even if what they do harm other people, especially those in weaker positions.

THOUGHT: God’s laws reveal His character.

PRAYER: LORD, help me as I aim to be gracious, like Thou art.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1
EXODUS 22:28-31
ROMANS 13:1-5

*“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,
resisteth the ordinance of God ...”*

BE READY TO FULFIL OBLIGATIONS

In Exodus 22:28-31, God commands that His children must not revile gods or curse the rulers. The “gods” here refer to judges like in Exodus 21:6 (same word in Hebrew). The point is that His children are to respect civil authorities. We are commanded to do the same in Romans 13:1-5: *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.”*

Christians must realize that God appoints even civil authorities and rulers. We ought not join in conversations wherein others criticize and scorn authorities, nor join demonstrations. This is not to say that we are to obey them when we are asked to sin or that we cannot respectfully submit petitions. Rebelliousness against authorities is all too common today. God will deal with unjust authorities. All the more He expects the children of Israel to promptly offer their tithes as instructed by Him. All that we have is from Him and we must not hesitate or give excuses. Do not say, “I will tithe when I have paid up my loans, or when my children’s education is paid for.” But it is not just the outward obedience and physical giving that God demands. They were to be a holy people. What He forbade them to eat, they must avoid as unclean. They were to be an obedient and separate people from others both in their outward lives and with an inward purity of a genuinely holy life. So must we.

THOUGHT: God expects ready subjection to His commands.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to obey, and not to be rebellious.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

EXODUS 23:1-9

MATTHEW 7:12

*“... whatsoever ye would
that men should do to you,
do ye even so to them ...”*

BE HONEST IN YOUR DEALINGS

Continuing on from the last five commandments on loving your neighbour as yourself, God instructs honest dealings with others. They were not to bear false witness or gang up with the unrighteous to bring false reports against the innocent. Exodus 23:2 strongly forbids running with the crowd to do wicked things to pervert justice. The Christian must not follow the majority but must be sure that what we are part of is just and fair. It is easy to be part of a crowd to bully the weak. While Exodus 23:6 commands that we must not pervert justice against the poor, Exodus 23:3 also reminds us that we must not simply take sides with the poor just because they are poor. The lesson is that truth must guide all our actions, not majority or minority, rich or poor. Exodus 23:4-5 expects that we act rightly when we find something. We are not to pretend and keep it for ourselves. There is a great temptation to keep an expensive animal such as an oxen or a useful work animal such as the ass. Do you return only cheap and useless things but keep expensive and useful things? That is not being honest. Exodus 23:5 even expects us to take care of belongings of our enemies if we find them. Christians must endeavour to return what we find to its rightful owners under any circumstance, no matter who they are. Do not make excuses. Look in your drawers and book shelves. Are you keeping something that you know belongs to someone else? Exodus 23:7 is explicit about not being part of anything that is untrue which can impact others. Have nothing to do with the wicked plots and lies of others. There is the temptation to jump on the bandwagon of falsehood especially if it can mow down someone we dislike. Exodus 23:8 warns us to be honest and not be tempted by gifts. A person who loves gifts can be easily bribed. Such a person will take sides and not be honest. Are you an impartial person who cannot be bought over by gifts or privileges? Exodus 23:9 again reminds God's children not to oppress strangers because they were once strangers. The lesson is to put ourselves in others' shoes and be honest – would we like to be treated that way?

THOUGHT: God commands us to deal honestly with all matters.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to always deal with others rightly.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 3

EXODUS 23:10-13

LEVITICUS 25:20-22

“... the seventh year thou shalt let it rest
and lie still ...”

GREATER TEST OF FAITH

The LORD commanded that when they were in the Promised Land, they should sow the land, vineyards and olive yards for six years but stop every seventh year. This is to let the land rest, and for the poor to eat off their land, and also the animals could eat of their leftovers. Then He reminded them again about keeping the Sabbath day holy.

We have learnt in Exodus 16 that keeping the Sabbath Day holy is about having faith that God will take care of us when we obey Him instead of trying to make money or do our secular work on that day. It is one thing to have faith for not working for one day in seven, but here they were told to stop all farming for an entire year! In fact, God expected them to wonder at this. In Leviticus 25:20-22, He said, *“And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.”* It is again about trust. This is a greater test of faith. If they could not even keep the weekly Sabbath Day, they certainly would not have the faith to keep the Sabbatical Year. They knew that even if they started farming after the Sabbatical Year, their crops and orchards would still need at least a year or two to bear fruit. But God promised them that the crops of the sixth year would be sufficient for those periods. Keeping the Lord's Day holy builds our faith. When we experience how God helps us when we remember the Sabbath and spend the day in worship, service, and spiritual retreat to draw close to Him every week, we will not fear but trust Him when greater trials come. But if you avoid keeping the weekly Sabbath, you will not know how to trust God when challenges of life intensify. What are the gods that keep you from obeying this command?

THOUGHT: Keeping the Lord's Day holy helps me know God better.

PRAYER: LORD, increase my trust in Thee through the proper keeping of the Lord's Day.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

EXODUS 23:14-19

EXODUS 13:4-11

*“... this do in
remembrance of me.”*

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

The LORD commanded that the children of Israel kept a feast, three times a year, unto Him when they were in the Promised Land. The feast of unleavened bread is one of them. They were to eat only unleavened bread for seven days just like the time they did when the LORD took them out of the land of Egypt in the month of Abib. This month was also the beginning of the new calendar God gave them. In fact this is another reminder of what occurred in Exodus 13:4-11. The repeat of this feast shows how important it was to the LORD and for them to ensure they did not forget. The significance of this feast was to remind them of their deliverance from bondage. It emphasized living a holy life of separation from sin and to practice biblical separation. They must remember they were not to be like the people of the world in their sinful ways. In the feast of the harvest, they were to bring in their firstfruits of their labours in the fields. The firstfruits represented the LORD's provision for them. And in the feast of the ingathering, they must bring to the LORD, at the end of the year, what they gathered also. These must remind them of their covenantal relationship with the Holy God. All the males were to present themselves before God three times a year during these feasts. These were joyous occasions of important spiritual reminders. But in these reminders, there was the warning not to seethe a kid in his mother's milk. Using the kid's life source to kill it was an act of utter disregard for proper respect and gratitude.

We celebrate special occasions through the year because we believe reminders are important. Though we do not have these feasts today, Christians must still constantly remind ourselves that God saved us to live a holy life instead of a worldly life. We must remember His covenantal faithfulness towards us in providing for our needs, and we must show our gratitude by living for Him, and not for self, to fulfil His purposes.

THOUGHT: God desires that we remember His goodness.

PRAYER: LORD, help me not to forget why Thou hast saved me and Thy goodness towards me.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

EXODUS 23:20-33

DEUTERONOMY 8:5-11

*“Beware that thou forget not
the LORD thy God ...”*

I WILL, YOU SHALL, OR ELSE

God made many “I will” promises to the children of Israel if they obeyed the Angel and did all that He said. He would be an enemy to their enemies (Exod 23:22) and cut them off (Exod 23:23). He would take away their sicknesses and ensure plentiful harvests without barrenness, and would ensure they lived out their days in the land (Exod 23:25-26). He would destroy the enemies they met and they would fear the children of Israel (Exod 23:27). He would send hornets to drive out the enemies gradually so that the land would not be desolate before they could possess the various parts (Exod 23:28-31). However, God also ensured that they understood this would be contingent upon their obedience. They shall not bow down to or serve their enemies’ gods, but shall thoroughly pull down and completely destroy their idols (Exod 23:24). They must only serve the LORD their God (Exod 23:25). Moreover, they shall drive their enemies out, and not make any covenant with these people or their gods. They must ensure that these enemies did not dwell in the land (Exod 23:31-33). There was the warning too that if they disobeyed God, they would be dealt with (Exod 23:21). They must drive out their enemies or else they would cause them to sin against God and be a snare to them (Exod 23:33). The LORD’s covenantal conditions for blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience are clearly stated.

Today, we must realize also that we too have the promises, duties, and warnings. Yes, we will not lose our salvation. But the promises of blessings in this life are contingent upon our obedience. And the blessings are given for serving Him and fulfilling His purposes. God’s blessings are not for our selfish enjoyment or for us to use them to sin. God will remove the blessings when we abuse them. That is why when Israel disobeyed God and abused His blessings, there was no more purpose for them to stay in the land. There will be chastisements for disobedience. Chastisements are meant to bring us back to do His will so that God can continue to fulfil His promises.

THOUGHT: God’s covenantal blessings are to be used for Him.

PRAYER: LORD, bless and chasten me so that I will do Thy will.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

EXODUS 24

2 CORINTHIANS 3:3

“... written...in fleshy tables
of the heart.”

THE COVENANT RATIFIED, WHAT NEXT?

When Moses came down from the mount, he told the people all of God's words (commands) and judgments (judicial laws). The people responded that they accepted and would obey all of them. By this they affirmed their acknowledgment of God's covenant with them. Moses then wrote down all of these oral words of the LORD, which began the writing of Holy Scriptures. Thereafter he set up twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. These would likely serve as silent witnesses of the covenant between the children of Israel and the LORD. Moses instructed young men to prepare the burnt offerings and peace offerings. The blood was divided into two parts, one for each party in this covenant. He sprinkled one part on the altar, and then read the book of the covenant to the people. After the people again affirmed their obedience to what God had commanded them, Moses sprinkled the other half of the blood on the people. With this, he pronounced the sealing of the covenant with the LORD. After this, God allowed Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders to have sight of Him in some form. However, there was only a description of what was under His feet. Now that the covenant was ratified, God then called Moses to the summit to receive the commandments which He personally wrote on tables of stone. The purpose was that *“thou mayest teach them”* (Exod 24:12).

God gave the Ten Commandments immediately and asked Moses to teach His new covenantal people. After being saved in the covenant of grace, God's intention is that we, His people, learn His law. We must be interested to be taught His Word with the intention of learning to obey it. Salvation is not just to escape hell but to live in obedience to God so that we will fulfil His purpose for saving us. God did not make Israel His people to give them a good land to enjoy it for themselves. Their lives must reflect God. Likewise must we today shine for God wherever He puts us after saving us.

THOUGHT: What is my view of God's law after salvation?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to obey Thy Laws so that I may fulfil my covenantal obligations after salvation.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

EXODUS 25-27

HEBREWS 9:1-11

*“... See ... that thou make all things
according to the pattern shewed to thee ...”*

THE TABERNACLE REFLECTING CHRIST

With the covenant ratified, God gave detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle. The purpose was that God may dwell among the people (Exod 25:8). God is Infinite and Omnipresent, but the LORD used the Tabernacle to signify His dwelling presence among His covenantal people. The articles God included in this earthly Tabernacle included the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat (Exod 25:10-22), the table of shewbread (Exod 25:23-30), and the golden candlestick (Exod 25:31-40). The cladding and structure for housing these items were given (Exod 26:1-37). There was the most holy place, within the inner veil, where only the ark was placed. Outside this most holy place was the outer veil of the holy place for the placement of the candlestick (southside) and table of shewbread (northside). The brass altar and its instruments (Exod 27:1-8), the outer court (Exod 27:9-19), and the concoction of oil for the candlestick were specified (Exod 27:20-21). The most holy place, the holy place, and the outer courtyard and the completed structure would be about the size of half a football field.

The Bible teaches us that this Tabernacle and its contents, while wonderful, point to a greater and more perfect tabernacle (Heb 8:5; 9:1-11). We are not to allegorize the details. But broadly we see Christ and His ministry. For example, the shewbread reminds us of Christ as the Bread of life, the candlestick pointing to Christ as the Light of the world. The sacrifices on the altar remind us of Christ who died for us. The inner veil was rent when Christ died, making it possible for us to approach God's mercy seat personally through Christ alone because His blood cleanses us of our sin. When we read all these details, we must be thrilled and grateful and see the glory and grace of Christ our Saviour. And we must hence be evermore grateful and give our redeemed lives to Him.

THOUGHT: Do I see how wonderful and gracious Christ is through the Tabernacle?

PRAYER: LORD, may I understand more of Christ's work of salvation.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

EXODUS 28

1 PETER 2:9-10

*“... ye shall be unto me
a kingdom of priests ...”*

LESSONS FROM THE PRIESTS' GARMENTS

Exodus 28 describes Aaron's (the high priest) and Aaron's sons' (ordinary priests) garments. The design, materials and placements for each part of the high priest's attire was given: the ephod (Exod 28:6-14), the breastplate with Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:15-30), the robe (Exod 28:31-35), the mitre headdress (Exod 28:36-38), and the outer coat (Exod 28:39). Then God emphasized the gravity of the priesthood by warning of death (Exod 28:43) if they served bearing iniquity.

Two onyx stones, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on them (six tribes on each), were to be carried upon the high priest's shoulders (Exod 28:9-12) before the LORD. In addition, the breastplate, worn over the high priest's heart served as a memorial before the LORD continually (Exod 28:29). On it were twelve precious stones, each engraved with a tribe's name. It reflects how Christ, our great High Priest today, bears His people on His shoulders and has them very close to His heart. We must be greatly encouraged by this picture of His love and concern for us and hence always trust and have faith in Him. Under-shepherds must always have the same heart for God's people and not be hirelings. The Urim and Thummim which reveal God's will were placed in this breastplate and Aaron was to bear the judgment of God's people upon his heart before God. God's Word today reveals His will and judgments to us. Pastors today must diligently make known God's Word to the flock so that they will know God's ways and what God expects and desires of them. This responsibility must be close to the heart of all pastors. Engraved on the frontlets of the headdress was "HOLINESS TO THE LORD." Holiness must certainly characterize all in God's service but also all believers today because we are a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9). When we serve God, we must do so with genuine love and concern for His people, and not harbour any known sins as we serve Him. Only then will we be useful for and accepted of Him.

THOUGHT: I am a part of a royal priesthood.

PRAYER: LORD, may I have concern for others as I serve Thee.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

EXODUS 29-30

1 PETER 1:15-16

“... be ye holy in
all manner of conversation.”

LESSONS FROM THE PRIESTS' CONSECRATION AND SERVICE

In Exodus 29, God instructed Moses to consecrate the priests who were entering office. The materials to be used in the washing, robing, and anointing of the priests and the sacrifices needed were specified. The word “*hallow*” (Exod 29:1) is the same Hebrew root word for “*sanctify*” (Exod 29:27, 33, 36-37, 43-44) and “*holy*” (Exod 29:6, 29-30, 33-34, 37), and is also on the frontlet of the mitre. The washing signified cleansing. Before entering the priesthood office, the priest must be consecrated. Sanctification and holiness is a clear theme. But having the specified outward garments alone did not make Aaron and his sons fit to serve. They were reminded to serve with clean hands and pure hearts. Holiness is not just correctly doing outward acts, but by being wholly pure and not harbouring known sins. Being holy is immediate repentance of every known sin in us.

Exodus 30 describes the construction of the altar of incense and the brass laver, as well as the concoction of the anointing oil and incense. The priests must wash their hands and feet before they served, emphasizing again the imperative to serve God with clean hands. It was absolutely forbidden to use the anointing oil (Exod 30:32-33) or the incense (Exod 30:36-37) for any other use except for the LORD. They were holy, set apart for the LORD’s use only. No strange incense was allowed. Everything must be done God’s way. The underlying idea of the word “*holy*” and “*sanctify*” is that of putting aside, reserved for, dedicated entirely for the LORD alone. Every true believer is a priest in the royal priesthood. He must be holy. He must be fully set apart for his Lord’s use. Being holy is consecrating every part of oneself, not living partly for God and partly for self and the world. Are your faculties, talents, and being all for the LORD’s use only? Do you study, work, do all things for the LORD only? Are you serving the LORD with clean hands? Have you set yourself apart from the sins of the world and live wholly for the LORD?

THOUGHT: Am I pure and fully set aside for God only?

PRAYER: “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 10
EXODUS 31:1-11
1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

*"... I have filled ... I have given
... I have put ..."*

SPIRIT-FILLING NEEDED

The design had been given by God for the Tabernacle, the items in it, and the priests' garments. Now God told Moses He had specifically called Bezaleel to do the work. And He had filled Bezaleel with His Spirit for the tasks. Wisdom, understanding, and knowledge had been given to Bezaleel so that he knew how to work with metal, stones, and wood for the job. God also raised Aholiab to help Bezaleel and gave wisdom to other workers for this particular work.

As we have read so far, God gave detailed specifications to achieve His design for the items. Each item and the whole structure must be built precisely according to God's design for it to be accepted by God. It was not a simple task. It would take great genius and ability, humanly speaking. But here God reveals to us how these men would have the needed skills for the elaborate and complex tasks. God was the source, He filled them with the Holy Spirit. When God has a task, He not only provides the necessary manpower, He also endues them with the relevant and needed abilities. We must never fret and wonder how God's work will be done and by whom. And we should never worry if we are tasked to do His work. If it is His will and His calling, He will enable. We must also depend upon the Holy Spirit and not on our own flesh when we do anything for God. Therefore, we must not be proud and boast about any achievements lest we steal God's glory from Him. God reveals very explicitly where skills come from. The believer must be very aware of this fact from this chapter. This does not mean we do not need to study or learn skills. But even with our education and training, unless God grants the abilities to apply them, we will fail. We must constantly lean upon Him to help in all that we do. Like the Old Testament believers, we have the indwelling of the Spirit permanently after salvation. But we must learn to pray for and depend upon the filling of the Holy Spirit to do His work.

THOUGHT: I need the filling of the Holy Spirit to do God's work.

PRAYER: LORD, fill me with Thy Spirit for Thy service.

MONDAY, MARCH 11

EXODUS 31:12-18

EZEKIEL 20:10-13

“... *it is a sign between me and you
throughout your generations ...*”

IS KEEPING THE SABBATH STILL RELEVANT?

God told Moses to remind the children of Israel to keep His Sabbath. Those who refused to and defiled the Sabbath would surely receive the death penalty. They must do their regular work for six days and rest on the seventh as commanded in the Ten Commandments. Thereafter God gave Moses His handwritten tables of testimony. Note that God highlighted the Sabbath Law at this juncture after giving the Tabernacle design. The Tabernacle would represent His presence with them. It would contain the ark of the covenant. Notice what God defined keeping the Sabbath as: “*it is a sign between me and you*” (Exod 31:13), it is “*for a perpetual covenant*” (Exod 31:16), and again “*it is a sign*” (Exod 31:17). Covenants have a sign. The marriage covenant has rings as the confirming sign between the husband and the wife. The covenantal sign between God and His people is the Sabbath! It is so that they know that He is the LORD who sanctifies them. Keeping the Sabbath is what sets them apart from others, clearly distinguishing them as Jehovah’s people.

Being saved by the covenant of grace, you are in a covenant with God who sets the terms and conditions. Keeping the Lord’s Day is the universal sign that you are in this covenant with God. That is what differentiates you as a Christian from unbelievers. A Christian who refuses to keep the Sabbath Day holy unto the LORD is like a spouse refusing to wear the wedding ring and who breaks his marriage covenantal vows. We have covered what it means to keep the Sabbath in Exodus 16, 20, and 23. Keeping the Sabbath Day holy is not just going to public worship and then go on to our secular work, playing games, watching television, mindless chatting and so on. But rather to set the entire day apart in worship, serving God, ending it with personal or family worship. Note: keeping the Sabbath Day holy is the sign of the covenant. Would you not be upset if your spouse refused to wear the wedding ring?

THOUGHT: Keeping the Sabbath Day holy (set apart) purely unto the LORD is my covenantal sign with the LORD.

PRAYER: LORD, may I set apart the entire Lord’s Day for Thee.

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

EXODUS 32:1-6

DEUTERONOMY 4:15-19

*“Take ye therefore good heed
unto yourselves ...”*

IS THE GOLDEN CALF YOUR GOD TOO?

When Moses was still up on Mt Sinai with God, the people got impatient and wanted to proceed to the Promised Land since they were not sure what had happened to Moses. But they wanted God to be with them to lead them in their journey. So they told Aaron to make them a representation of God (the word “*gods*” in Exodus 32:1 and 4 and the word “*God*” are the same word in Hebrew) and let it lead them on instead of waiting for Moses to come down. Aaron acceded and told them to bring their golden earrings to him. Aaron made a golden graven image of a molten calf and proclaimed that it was their God which led them out of Egypt. He even made an altar and proclaimed a feast to Jehovah. The people rose up early and presented offerings to the LORD. “*Rose up to play*” (Exod 32:6) is a euphemism for fornication. They did so in front of Mount Sinai, after witnessing God’s fearsome power.

They recently heard the Ten Commandments (Exod 20). Yet Aaron and the people wilfully and blatantly broke the Second Commandment. Their intentions were seemingly right (to have God go before them) but breaking God’s commandment was sin. The bull typically symbolized strength and fertility which suited the image they had about Jehovah in their eyes thus far. They were not associating the golden calf with other gods per se but wanted a symbol that they could see as Jehovah. This sin led them to other terrible sins. The lesson for us is that we must never break God’s laws even if it seems to help us associate with Him. Otherwise, we end up creating our own image of God. Many today are serious about wanting God to be with them but not serious about obeying Him. Do not take His commandments lightly. You know you have a golden calf as your god when you make up your own ideas about how to have God in your life but do not obey His commands (eg. partial keeping of the Lord’s Day). There will be consequences.

THOUGHT: Have I turned God into something He is not?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to know and obey Thee rightly.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

EXODUS 32:7-14

DEUTERONOMY 9:26-29

“...not unto us, but unto thy name
give glory ...”

WHAT CONCERNS YOU MOST?

The LORD told Moses to leave the mountain because this stiffnecked people had now corrupted themselves by making and worshipping a golden calf. Remember this is how God views us when we want Him only to help us in life's journey but will not obey His commands. He told Moses that He would destroy the people and make Moses a great nation because they were stiffnecked. Moses pleaded with God not to do so because: (1) the Egyptians would mock God that He had made a great display of His glorious power to take His people out of Egypt to kill them in the desert, and (2) to remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel to bring them to the Promised Land. The LORD “*repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people*” (Exod 32:14), meaning God spared the people of the terrible (“*evil*”) consequence which they rightly deserved.

God is not less loving, less patient, and less wise than Moses. God will keep His covenant. But this conversation He led Moses into gives insight into: (1) what we really deserve when we behave like them, and (2) Moses' heart, so that we can learn valuable lessons. Do not think that just because we go to church and speak of Him as our God, He is very pleased, and we can just decide which commandments to obey and which to ignore. Also, learn from Moses about what concerned him the most. He could get a great nation named after him instead of Jacob. His life would be easier for not leading a stiffnecked people who had often ungratefully threatened him. Yet he cared more for what others would say about God. His main concern was God's glory, not an easier life for himself. And Moses always saw God's people and work as belonging to God, not for Moses' own name or ownership. Are we most concerned about our name and our comfort? Or God's reputation, His people, and for His glory? Will you be upset if God takes away the ministry you are involved in and gives it to another if it benefits them more? Are you more concerned about promoting your own name or God's?

THOUGHT: What am I most concerned about in life?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to be more concerned about Thy glory.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14
EXODUS 32:15-20
DEUTERONOMY 9:15-21

*“Woe unto them that call evil good,
and good evil ...”*

WHAT ANGERS YOU MOST?

Having heard what God said about what the people had done and that he must return to base camp, Moses went down with the two tables of the Ten Commandments. He met Joshua where the latter was told to wait. Joshua thought that the noise the people made was battle cries. But Moses told Joshua it was singing, not the cry of people who were winning or losing in battle. What kind of music was this that sounded like noise and wild screaming of people? When Moses saw the calf, and the dancing, his *“anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount”* (Exod 32:19). He ground the calf to powder, and made the children of Israel drink it with water.

Moses' breaking the tables of stone was not a rash, impulsive, hot-headed act. This act represented how the people had just broken the covenant which was recently ratified with them. *“Waxed hot”* (Exod 32:19) was used to describe Moses' anger. These are the same words that described God's anger (Exod 32:10). What this reveals is that Moses viewed sin as God did. Moses reacted with the same holy anger as God. What angers you most? Is it sin? Do you see sin as God sees it? Does sin grieve and anger you? The people viewed breaking the law of God as a trivial thing so as to get what they wanted. They even celebrated the outcome. It is a very sad and fearful state for a believer to willfully and repeatedly break the Ten Commandments and still go to church, sing praises and think that God is pleased. Does that describe any of us? When sin is committed, few bat an eyelid. Nor are they angry at sin being promoted and encouraged by believers by the way they live, dress, pursue the world, and deny the purity of God's Word. Church leaders, instead of having holy anger and preaching against the heinousness of sin and disobedience to God, act as if nothing is wrong. We must examine our view of sin.

THOUGHT: Have I become immune to the sinfulness of sin?

PRAYER: LORD, give me sensitivity to, and holy anger against, sin.

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

EXODUS 32:21-24

GENESIS 3:9-13

“... *The woman whom thou gavest*

... *The serpent beguiled me ...*”

STOP BLAMING OTHERS!

Moses sought Aaron and asked what the people had done to him that he would allow so great a sin to come upon them. Aaron told Moses not to get so upset as he should be familiar with how the people were like in their tendency to sin. Aaron then explained that the people asked him to make an image of God to lead them on because they did not know what had happened to Moses who had not come down yet. He quoted their calling Moses as “*the man*” (Exod 32:23, versus how he just called Moses “my lord”). He admitted that he asked for the materials to make the calf, but he hid the fact that he came up with the design and made it himself. Instead he claimed he just threw the gold into the fire and “*there came out this calf*” (Exod 32:24).

Moses rightly confronted Aaron. He was tasked to look after God’s people (Exod 24:14). He had seen the fearsome power of God and even saw God (Exod 24:10). What then could the people have done to him that would make him fear them and let them and himself sin so terribly? Aaron indeed had no excuse or reason to sin. What was wrong with Aaron’s replies? Aaron sought to minimize his sin by pushing the blame to the people’s character. He tried to diminish his own culpability by intimating that Moses took a long time to come back so it was his fault that the people got impatient and sinned, and that Moses should have known better. Then he covered sin by saying that the molten calf simply popped out by itself, taking him by surprise too. Let us learn not to be like him.

Stop blaming others and situations when we sin. Aaron blamed the people, Moses, even the fire and the self-created molten calf! Who was he deceiving when God knew the truth even before Moses came down and saw and asked what happened. Do you have a habit of blaming your friends, siblings, spouse, circumstances, the church when you fall into sin? If we do not own up and confess our sin, we will make up excuses and blame others. We will remain unrepentant.

THOUGHT: Who am I fooling when I blame others for my sin?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to take responsibility for my sin.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

EXODUS 32:25-29

MATTHEW 10:37-39

*“He that is not with me
is against me ...”*

AM I TRULY ON THE LORD’S SIDE?

Moses saw that the people were naked. He stood at the gate of the camp and asked, *“Who is on the LORD’s side?”* (Exod 32:26). The sons of Levi responded and moved to stand with Moses. Moses then gave instructions from the LORD for them to go through the camp with their sword and slay all the guilty ones, even if they were their companions, neighbours, sons, or brothers. 3,000 died.

Was this too extreme? This was spiritual warfare. The enemies within the camp are far more dangerous than external enemies because of the influence they had. They could do great damage. If these internal enemies were allowed to live, God’s plan for salvation would be thwarted. Idolatry is very serious as we can see from its fruits. Even as Moses stood at the gate, God’s people were still nude before one another, having been dancing and fornicating. Can one imagine that the people (with Mount Sinai and the cloud in full sight, the barriers still in place to remind them of God’s holiness) could be in this wicked and unimaginable state? What is the proof that you are on the LORD’s side? It is when your obedience to God exceeds your love for relations, even the closest relatives and friends. It is easy to practise biblical separation from our enemies and be on the LORD’s side. The test is when our closest relations sin and refuse to repent. We do not kill people today, but we are called to expose, rebuke, and correct the unrepentant. If we do not, more will be drawn to follow their false teachings and sin. It was not just about joining Moses. It was needing to slay even close relatives. Many are willing to join sound churches. But not all are willing to take a stand for the truth in taking action against falsehood and sin, thus condoning sinful teachings and practices that lead others to fall. The false Gospel propounded from within Christianity will lead many to hell. The sinful lifestyle in churches will lead more to follow suit. Will you take action?

THOUGHT: Being on the LORD’s side may mean taking difficult action.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to love Thee above all else.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 17

EXODUS 32:30-33

ACTS 20:26-35

*"... I take you to record this day,
that I am pure from the blood of all men."*

A PASTOR'S HEART

The day after the slaying of the 3,000, Moses told the people in no uncertain terms that they had sinned a great sin. They had blatantly broken the Second Commandment. He told them that he would go to the Lord to make atonement for their sin. Moses admitted to God the people's sin. He asked God to forgive them, and if He would not, then to blot him out of His book. The LORD's response was that He would only blot out those who had sinned against Him.

From this event, we see Moses' pastoral heart for God's people. He dealt with sin thoroughly and objectively. He had great anger towards sin. He was greatly concerned for God's plan of salvation. (Moses knew by faith regarding God's plan of salvation through, for example, the Passover in Exodus 12.) When sin occurred in the camp, he could have justly blamed the people and left them to suffer the consequences on their own, considering also that these people had not been particularly nice to him. But instead, he chose to quickly go to God to plead for mercy for them. Moreover, he was willing to exchange his own life for theirs. But his pastoral love was not merely so that these people lived, else he would not have killed the 3,000. Moses was willing to die for them for the sake of God's salvation plan. He wanted the remainder of God's people to fulfil God's salvation plan for which He chose them. Moses wanted the spiritual best for God's flock he was tasked to lead. What kind of pastor do you want? One who will point out your sin so that you will be useful to God and please Him? Or one who pleases you despite your sin? Do you want a pastor who loves souls enough to expose false doctrines? Or one who is friendly to all teaching a false Gospel that leads to hell, and teaching Christians to live in ways that shame God's Name? Or one who is willing even to be disliked so that God's church will be pure and have God's presence by dealing seriously with sin or one who is popular and nice with everyone since he does not deal with any sin because it may hurt someone?

THOUGHT: What kind of heart must a pastor have?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to appreciate what true pastors should be.

MONDAY, MARCH 18

EXODUS 32:34-35

HEBREWS 12:5-11

“... I will visit their sin.
upon them.”

GOD WILL DEAL WITH SIN

God told Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land, just as He had said when He called him. He also promised that His Angel would be ahead of them. However, He must still deal with the people for their sin. As a result, the LORD plagued the people because “*they made the calf, which Aaron made*” (Exod 32:35).

Moses was to continue with the mission God had called him to fulfil: to lead the children of Israel to the promised land. Yes, Moses did plead with God on the basis of the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. But God had every intention to keep it in the first place. He would honour His side of the suzerainty covenant. Yes, God had forgiven the people, but it did not mean that there were no consequences. God will deal with sin even though He has forgiven. When King David sinned and confessed, God forgave him, but David would still have to face the consequences of his sins (2 Sam 12:1-14). God will deal with sin and allow the consequences to serve as a warning or reminder to any who may consider committing the sin again.

A true believer who has genuinely turned to Christ for salvation in repentance is saved to the uttermost. Once saved, always saved (John 3:16; 10:27-29). But we must not confuse the consequences of eternal punishment with the chastisement of God. The saved believer must not think that he can keep sinning with impunity. God will deal with you because you are saved. You are now His child. For your own good He will not allow you to shame Him and to go on sinning without consequences. David learned and did not go back to the sin of adultery again. The consequences were painful but had a good spiritual effect. Did the children of Israel learn? Well, sadly, the later generations did not. What about you?

THOUGHT: God has forgiven but that does not mean He will not deal with my sins through consequences.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to learn from the consequences of my sins.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

EXODUS 33:1-3

REVELATION 4:11

*“... for thy pleasure they are
and were created.”*

A SAD COMMENTARY

The LORD told Moses that he and the people he had led out of Egypt would go to the land which He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He reiterated that He had promised to give the land to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He would send an angel before them to drive out their enemies. But He Himself would not go with them, because they were a stiffnecked people and, being such a people, He might have to consume them along the way there.

What a sad commentary. The LORD basically pointed out to the people how unworthy they were to be given the Promised Land considering how stiffnecked they were. Yes, He would make sure that their enemies would not be able to stop them from entering by providing an angel to escort and fight for them. But He would not be personally with them anymore. Is it not very miserable to hear someone say to you that he is doing something for you not because of anything but because of obligation to the promise he made to someone else? And to hear him say what a disappointment you are and how you really do not deserve what he will do for you? After salvation, the believer must strive to not disappoint God. This is not about striving to maintain our salvation or to be worthy of heaven. We can never be worthy of God and heaven in this sense. But as God's children we must seek to please Him and bring joy to His heart, and not constantly upset Him with our stubbornness. Would it not be far more wonderful for the LORD to be able to say that He is looking forward to leading them and being with them in their journey to the Promised Land, and what a joy it is to Him to have them inherit the land He has prepared for them? Let us not be a disappointment to our LORD.

THOUGHT: Have I been a disappointment to my LORD?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to be the child I should be to please Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

EXODUS 33:4-6

PROVERBS 29:1

*“... if a man sin against the LORD,
who shall intreat for him?”*

AM I STIFFNECKED?

When the people heard from Moses that the LORD, rather than going with them in their journey to the Promised Land, would send an angel instead, they mourned. The LORD told Moses to tell the people specifically that they were a stiffnecked people. They deserved to be consumed in a moment by Him. They were told also to remove the ornaments they wore on them and He would consider what He ought to do with them.

The LORD made it very clear what He thought of the people. What does it mean to be stiffnecked? When plowing, the farmer sometimes uses a pole with a spike to prick the neck of the ox when it refuses to move in the right direction. The stubborn ox is said to have a stiff neck when it is uncontrollable and refuses to go in the direction indicated by the farmer. The children of Israel would understand this expression. It means that they were a stubborn people bent on going their own way instead of responding to God's direction and leading. Stiffneckedness is an obstinate stubbornness not to obey God or do His will.

Do you have a stiffnecked spirit? You know you do when you refuse to obey and do what is right in God's sight whenever it does not suit your liking. You want to have your way and achieve your own aims. No matter how often you have been told in sermons and in your own Bible reading, you will not respond to God's commands and guidance. Maybe God has spoken to you about a wrong relationship, wrong job, or wrong pursuit but you still think you know better. Included in a stiffnecked spirit is to go on in life as if all is fine despite having been disobedient. The people were still dressed with their ornaments, looking nice outwardly. The LORD told them to humble themselves, then He would consider how to deal with them. Let us stop being obstinate before God deals severely with us.

THOUGHT: Do I stubbornly refuse to obey God's direction?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to respond to Thy Word instead of going my own way.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

EXODUS 33:7-23

PSALM 16:11

*“... in thy presence is
fulness of joy ...”*

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE?

Moses pitched the tabernacle of the congregation outside the camp. This is not the tabernacle for which the LORD gave specifications in earlier chapters. Each time Moses went to this tabernacle, the pillar of cloud would come upon it and God would speak face to face with Moses as a friend would to his friend. Moses humbly pleaded with God to be gracious to go with them in their journey to the Promised Land. He said if the LORD was not present with them, then there was no point for them to go. Moreover, the key evidence that they were different from everyone else was the LORD's presence with them. The LORD then promised to go with them. He also let Moses see only His back when Moses requested to see His glory.

Is the presence of God in your life, in your family, in whatever you do, and wherever you go so important that you would find it pointless if He were not with you? The only reason for God's intimate fellowship and abiding presence in your life to be absent is when you continue to live carnally with known sin. What are health, wealth, possessions, and family without God's presence except just meaningless living? What is a church with many people and activities if God is not pleased to be present to bless spiritually? A true believer will find true joy, usefulness, and purpose only when he knows God is pleased to be with him every step, guiding every decision, and helping along the way. A life without God's abiding presence is sad and directionless. But when God is present in your life, in family, in church, no matter how difficult, dangerous, and unpleasant things may be, you will have full assurance, joy, and peace knowing He is near and is a present help. Choose to be where God leads you, live obediently, and He will be with you all the way. Sadly today, many believers are less concerned with God's presence but would think that life without the presence of the internet, TV, handphone, school friends, job, money, health is unimaginable.

THOUGHT: Without God's abiding presence, life is meaningless and purposeless.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to treasure Thy presence most of all.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

EXODUS 34:1-9

PROVERBS 18:10

*“And Moses ... bowed his head
... and worshipped.”*

KNOWING GOD’S NATURE

To replace the two tables of Ten Commandments which Moses had broken, God instructed him to now hew two tables of stone and write the same words on them. The next day, Moses rose up early and went up to Mount Sinai with them. Then the LORD descended in the cloud, stood with Moses, and proclaimed the name of the LORD as He passed by saying, *“... The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation”* (Exod 34:6-7).

God chose to proclaim His attributes at this point, reminding us that the Ten Commandments are closely linked to and reflect who He is and His character. The more we understand God’s character, the better we are in responding to Him and all of life’s situations. Memorizing, meditating on, and looking at life through the lens of who God is will enable us to have faith and trust in Him, instead of having fears and complaints. The Westminster Shorter Catechism’s biblical answer to what is God: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” This reflects Exodus 34:6-7. How can memorizing this statement of God’s nature help us? When faced with situations and trials that we cannot understand, and that seem insurmountable, we can be reminded that God has the infinite power to solve our problems if He wishes, and if not then, in His infinite and unchangeable goodness, He has a reason and purpose. And since He is infinite in holiness, justice, goodness and truth, what He chooses to allow is always the best for us and He never does anything sinful, unjust, and unrighteous. His promises are always true and we must trust Him by faith. God revealed His nature for a purpose: that we may know Him and respond to Him rightly always.

THOUGHT: I should memorize WSC#4 and see life through it.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to know Thee better through Thy nature.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

EXODUS 34:7

EXODUS 20:5-6; NUMBERS 14:18

“... to give every one according to
the fruit of his doings.”

DOES GOD JUDGE YOUR SINS ON YOUR CHILDREN?

Exodus 34:7 often raises the question: Does God punish children for their fathers' sins?

God has just proclaimed that He is “... *The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth*” (Exod 34:6). We memorized that He is infinite and unchangeable in His holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. So how could He be so sinful, unjust, unkind, and unrighteous as to judge children for their fathers' sins? We must also remember when Moses told God to blot him out of the book, when he had not sinned but the people had, God told Moses, “*Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book*” (Exod 32:33). The clearest verse that God does not judge unjustly is, “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him*” (Ezek 18:20).

So what does Exodus 34:7 mean? God warns that when children learn and follow the sins of their parents, He will also have to judge the children. The warning is to parents that their children will learn their sinful ways. Neither can the children blame their parents when God deals with them. Parents must be very mindful of their influence and impact on their children. If you break the Sabbath by how you live now, your children will spend the Lord's Day the way they learned from you. If you lie, cheat, commit adultery, divorce, or lust after the world and status, and are profane in speech, they will likely develop the same character. Do not moan about how they have no interest in church fellowships when you too have no interest in fellowships. And children, you cannot blame your parents even if you did learn it from them. You are accountable for your own sinful choices.

THOUGHT: Have I been a godly or sinful influence?

PRAYER: LORD, help me to remember the serious reality of how I can influence my child.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 24

EXODUS 34:10-35

DEUTERONOMY 4:23

*“Take heed ... lest ye forget
the covenant of the LORD your God ...”*

COVENANTAL COMMITMENT EXPECTED

The LORD affirmed that He had made a covenant with the children of Israel. For His part, He would do marvels which had not been done before on the earth, which the people would witness for themselves. The LORD promised to drive out their enemies for them. Then He gave a list of warnings and of what the people must observe to do.

With the Decalogue on the new tables of stones ready to be given to the people again, the LORD reiterated His covenant with the people and reminded them of what He would do and what their covenantal requirements were. They must remember that what God would do for them was contingent upon their fulfilling their obligations. God would surely fulfil His promise regarding the Promised Land. But the blessings the people were to enjoy depended upon them fulfilling their covenantal duties. Covenants have a list of terms and conditions, like a contract. The LORD told Moses to write down this list with the reaffirmation: *“Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel”* (Exod 34:27). The LORD also made it clear that in His covenant there were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut 28). Similarly, when a person takes up a job, he signs a contract in which the company dictates the terms and conditions the person should abide by if he wishes to join the company. And if he meets the terms and conditions, he will enjoy the benefits the company provides. But if he breaks them, punitive measures will be exercised. Some believers today have subscribed to antinomianism. They believe that the Ten Commandments are not to be enforced upon the believer in the New Testament. Beware also of the hyper-grace Gospel that turns God's grace into a license to sin. In the Covenant of Grace, all believers are saved for eternity. But God's present blessings as we live for His kingdom are contingent upon obedience. And God will chastise His children when they disobey.

THOUGHT: Blessings for obedience, chastisement for disobedience.

PRAYER: LORD, I want to fulfil my duties as Thy child.

MONDAY, MARCH 25
EXODUS 35:1-36:7
2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

*“... God loveth
a cheerful giver.”*

A WILLING HEART'S OPPORTUNITY

The LORD gave instructions that whosoever had a willing heart, let him bring offerings for the building of the Tabernacle. After the people heard what was needed for the construction work, they left Moses' presence. Those whose hearts were stirred returned and willingly offered to the LORD that which was needed for the work of the Tabernacle. Men and women willingly came back with jewelries, precious metals, spices, and other materials. As days went on, they would continue to turn up every morning with more freewill offerings. Eventually the workers told Moses the people had brought more than enough for the work. So Moses gave the command to be proclaimed throughout the camp to stop bringing more. Thus the people were restrained from giving. Where did they get these materials? They received them from the Egyptians whom God moved to give to them in abundance before they left Egypt (Exod 12:36). God gave them these possessions way ahead of time, knowing that these materials would be required for the building of the Tabernacle.

Do you ever wonder why God gives you possessions, pay increments, and business successes? He is providing for His work through you. You are stewards. The time will come, or it could be now, when His project or work requires resources. But, why are we not willing to give? Well, it is likely because we see our possessions as ours, needed for our own use. We fail to understand that we are just stewards, safekeeping them till God requires it. We are often earnest to return something to its owner when it is sitting in our house, taking up space. Why do we not feel that way with money and precious things? Because we want them for ourselves. This is why we must not offer interest-free loans to church. It is lending to God what is His in the first place. Those who hesitate to freely give, lose their chance eventually. Giving is really returning. God gave to us so we can have the privilege and ability to give back. We will be willing when we have the right view of our God-given possessions.

THOUGHT: Do I really believe that all I have is from God?

PRAYER: LORD, I willingly return to you when Thou callest for it.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

EXODUS 36:8-39:31

PROVERBS 2:6-8

*“For the LORD
giveth wisdom ...”*

WISDOM IS FROM GOD

Exodus 36 to 38 details much of the construction of the Tabernacle and its contents. We read about the complex construction of the Tabernacle with its curtains, board walls, vails, the ark of the covenant, the table of shewbread, the golden candlestick, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering, the brass basin for washing, the outer courtyard, and the summary of the materials employed in the construction of the Tabernacle and the priests' garments.

Notice in these chapters, before the details to construct each item is given, the commentary is: *“And he made,” “And Bezaleel made,” “And they made.”* God had earlier told Moses that He had filled Bezaleel with the Holy Spirit to do this work of building (Exod 31:3). Hence, Moses introduced Bezaleel (Exod 35:30-31) to the people as being specially filled with the Spirit for the project. It was made explicitly clear that his wisdom was from God. The LORD specially identifies, selects, and fills a person with the Spirit to endue him with abilities, talents, and intellect. So firstly, when we are able or uniquely capable and achieve much in church, in school, at work, at business, even at home, we must never be proud. We must not entertain secret thoughts that our flesh, our own cleverness, our own training and preparations brought the results. And secondly, since wisdom and talents are from God, then it should be used for Him, not for self or worldly aims. Parents take God's name in vain when they say to their child, *“Thank God you are using your God-given talents to do this”* when the child is doing something sinful, carnal or worldly. A child who wins top prize for some music competition on the Lord's Day is using God's gifts sinfully. And thirdly, we must lean upon God for wisdom instead of our own flesh and training. Education is needed, but it is still God who grants wisdom.

THOUGHT: Am I secretly proud of my, or my child's, intelligence?

PRAYER: LORD, remove Thy wisdom if I become conceited.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

EXODUS 39:32-43

EXODUS 25:1, 9, 40

*“Trust and obey
for there’s no other way ...”*

DO ACCORDING TO GOD’S COMMAND

The workers constructed every item exactly as Moses commanded them. Then they brought each finished item to Moses for his inspection. Every item that God had given instruction for was examined by Moses, down to the smallest details of the very sockets and pins. And Moses did not casually gloss over them or miss checking any item. He looked upon all the work. It was recorded that they had done as the Lord commanded, even so had they done it. Then only did Moses bless them.

They were given great skills and abilities, and every item was constructed as the LORD instructed. No one dared to apply personal ingenuity and creativity with the talents they knew they had. It was emphasized that everything was done to the exact specifications that the LORD had given to Moses who in turn instructed the workers. If any single item was not as the LORD specified, they had failed. The Tabernacle symbolized the LORD’s presence with them. They must learn that He dictated the conditions for His presence. All of God’s work must be done God’s way. There is no place for human interpretation on what God likes or to seek to improve on God’s ways. If we want God to be present in our church, our lives, and our family, we must learn from this lesson. We have no right to change God’s directions and expect God to be pleased. He has stipulated what the church should be, the qualifications for leadership, the roles of husband and wife in the marriage model, and clear principles about personal choices. When we change them because we think we know better and can improve on God’s ways, we will face problems because God will not bless. Never think God’s commands are not practical or realistic. The artificers could have belittled God’s design, but they just focused on following God’s command. Their aim was to produce exactly what God had designed. It always pays to trust and obey, to be the exact church and family according to God’s Word.

THOUGHT: Always do things God’s way according to His Word.

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to be strictly obedient to Thy command.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

EXODUS 40:1-15

EPHESIANS 4:22-24

“... the temple of God is holy,
which temple ye are.”

BLESSED HOLY THINGS?

It would be the second year from the time they left Egypt when the individual parts of the Tabernacle were completed. The workers had brought their finished work to Moses. After his careful inspection, Moses was instructed by the LORD to now put the various items of the Tabernacle in their respective places. While doing so, Moses was told, *“And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it. And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office”* (Exod 40:10-13).

Only the Tabernacle and its items were made untouchable after Moses anointed them and God accepted the Tabernacle. There are no holy things per se today. Some Christians today believe in asking the Pastor to bless or anoint their properties, shops, and personal items. They think that the act will bring protection or blessings to them when they use them. Some believe the act will make something holy and hence ward away evil. This is pure superstition. In fact, some may secretly, without admitting, have such superstitious trust in crosses (worn or hung at home), a special pen for exams that “always helps me do well”, a “lucky” shirt or dress, some “picture of Jesus” that will ward off evil in your home, or a cross on the car dashboard for “safe journeys.” God does not give instructions to bless anything, neither does any religious leader have the power to bless items and make them holy. The only thing we must make holy is ourselves – *“Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Pet 1:16).

THOUGHT: Am I superstitiously trusting in some “holy” item?

PRAYER: LORD, teach me to trust in Thee, not some “blessed” item.

AS THE LORD COMMANDED

The workers had brought their individually finished items to Moses. Now Moses was to be the one who put the pieces together and stationed each item in their exact location. Regarding the people's obedience, Exodus 39:42-43 states, *“According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel made all the work. And Moses did look upon all the work, and, behold, they had done it as the LORD had commanded, even so had they done it: and Moses blessed them.”* Compare this with Moses, *“Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he”* (Exod 40:16).

Moses himself was very careful when it came to his turn to do his part of the work. He did not just demand that the people do everything according to God's commands but ensured that he himself also faithfully did God's work. He walked the talk and was absolutely careful to obey God's instructions as was commanded. The phrase *“as the LORD commanded”* (Exod 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32) is repeatedly used to emphasize this attitude of Moses. And then the phrase, *“So Moses finished the work”* (Exod 40:33). Every detail down to tying, direction of items, even placement of the bread, was strictly followed despite its seeming insignificance. Dear reader, how do you read God's Word? Do you seek to know His commands thoroughly and commit to live strictly by them? Do you tell your children to do so but are careless yourself? Do you watch and scrutinize other's actions but are lax with your own walk? Moses knew better than to take God's instructions lightly even in the minutest detail. He understood that when it came to doing what God commanded, there could be no compromise or negotiation with God. That was why he applied the same standard of careful obedience to himself. Church leaders, parents, and every Christian must walk the talk.

THOUGHT: Do I set a high standard for others but a low one for myself?
PRAYER: LORD, I want to be serious about doing as Thou commandest.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

EXODUS 40:34-38

PROVERBS 3:1-8

“... *Be not wise in thine own eyes:
fear the LORD.*”

GOD'S WORK GOD'S WAY, GOD'S GLORY

The workers constructed each individual part and item for the Tabernacle according to all that the LORD commanded Moses (Exod 39:42). And Moses also did according to all that the LORD commanded him when he put the individual parts together. So Moses finished the work. A cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the LORD Himself filled the Tabernacle. At this point, even Moses could not enter into the tent of the congregation. The glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. When the cloud was lifted, it was the signal for the children of Israel to journey onward. As long as the cloud remained, they were to stay put. During the night, a fire was upon the Tabernacle instead of the cloud. This scene was in full sight of the house of Israel throughout their entire journey.

Moses had pleaded for God's own presence to be with them instead of an angel's. And now that they had also constructed the Tabernacle exactly according to God's instructions, the LORD showed that He accepted it by filling the Tabernacle with His glory. The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night upon it also signified His protection. What a sight to behold! And His signal to move or make camp showed His leading and guiding. Only when we do God's work God's way can we witness His glory. The chief end of man is to glorify God. Absolute obedience to Him in how we do things in church, at home, at work, in school today has the same promises of His abiding glorious presence and leading. The outcomes will glorify Him. The world only considers it glorious if outcomes are positive, if there is success, wealth or promotion for example. But a glorious outcome is when we have the LORD's presence because He is pleased with us for doing exactly as He commanded. When our church stands firmly on His Word, when we live godly lives at work, at home and in school, no matter how we look to the world, the glory of God rests among us. That is all we should seek. The key is to do all things as God commands.

THOUGHT: The glorious presence and pleasure of God can be ours.

PRAYER: LORD, help me to do all things and live by Thy Word.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 31

PSALM 11

EXODUS 20:2

"I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee ... out of the house of bondage."

SUMMARY OF LESSONS

The children of Israel were in Egypt not by chance. God used Egypt as a womb to grow His people to form a nation. He led them out at His appointed time. He allowed the slavery to be bitter else the people would not be interested to leave. But He protected His people through exceptional means, exhibiting His glory in the miracles. They left with much possession which was for the construction of the Tabernacle. The freeing of His people was not merely deliverance from slavery but to form Israel from which the promised Saviour would come. God has a plan for all that happens in your life. And trials serve a purpose. He will protect. His provision is also for His purpose and use eventually. We are saved to fulfil His purpose. All that we have comes from Him and we are stewards, giving is but returning to Him. His people murmured and complained. They even longed to go back to Egypt and their old life, eating the familiar food. When you forget that God saved you for His purpose, you will murmur and complain when things do not suit you. You will still not leave the world behind. You begin to expect God to be your servant, doing whatever you expect. The golden calf incident saw more deaths than Pharaoh and all their enemies tried to inflict. When you sin against God, you inflict calamity upon yourself and lose out on God's protection. The church must learn to exercise discipline and members must understand its purpose, even if it involves loved ones, for the greatest danger is sin from within. Sin and disobedience are infectious. The Ten Commandments are the moral laws which we love and keep till today. They are part of our covenantal duties to please God and be a holy people to Him. Finally, God's glorious presence was with the people because they all obeyed Him strictly in building the Tabernacle. His presence to lead us must be all that matters in church, family, and individual lives. The criterion is simple: absolute obedience. The exodus was just the beginning of Israel's spiritual journey. So also for us, our salvation is only the beginning of a life of great purpose and usefulness to God.

THOUGHT: The Exodus was just the start of a spiritual journey.

PRAYER: "Take my life and let it be, consecrated LORD to Thee."

Notes

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To: *The RPG Ministry*

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