



BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Exodus



Exodus 1–2

Introduction

Exodus is a book of *theological history*: it is written to teach us what God is like (*'revelation'*) and how we are to relate to Him (*'relationship'*). We should never read it merely to learn the events of history – even though they are recorded accurately and excellently on its pages; rather we should read it so that we may know the Lord our God a little better, and because we want to know what it means to live as his redeemed people in his world.

Exodus stands as the second book of a collection that has become known as *the Pentateuch* (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy together form the early history of God's dealings with his people). As such, it is to be read not in isolation but as part of a larger whole. In Genesis God promised that he would make the descendants of Abram into a great nation, that he would give to them a great land, that he would bless them and that through them he would bless all of the peoples of the world (Genesis 12.1–3). Those 4 promises are foundational for the whole Bible, and especially for the books of the Pentateuch. In Genesis 12–50, God is at work in the world, sometimes in the most miraculous of ways, to begin to fulfil his promises. Here is a 'status update' of where God has got to at the start of Exodus, 400 years after the original promises were given to Abraham:

The promise of a people: Exodus begins by reminding us that the descendants of Jacob were just 70 in number when they arrived in Egypt – certainly not as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen 15.5; 22.17; 26.4). Ever since, they have been multiplying greatly (1.7).

The promise of a land: The people are far from the promised land (Gen 12.7; 15.18-21), and are living in deteriorating conditions in Egypt (1.1; 1.10-11).

The promise of blessing: The Hebrews are living under the rule of a pagan king rather than of God (1.8-11) and don't seem to know much of the blessing of living in a relationship with Him (Genesis 12.2-3).

The promise of blessing to the nations: Despite the global success of Joseph's policies during the famine years (Genesis 37-50), the descendants of Abraham are not much of a blessing to the other nations of the world as Exodus opens – they have enough worries of their own!

Despite the current state of affairs, the reader is not to think that God's plans are being thwarted; rather he predicted back in Genesis 15.13 that Abraham's descendants '*will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.*' Thus the careful Bible reader turns to the text of Exodus keen to read on in the story (the first word in the Hebrew text of Exodus is 'and' because this book carries on where Genesis left off) and wondering how God will now work to fulfil the promises made years earlier to Abram. The answer is more spectacular and dramatic than any first time reader might have imagined.

By the end of the book, things have progressed as follows:

The promise of a people: the Israelites grow rapidly in number in the first two chapters, but their population remains relatively static thereafter because, surprisingly perhaps, events from chapters 3-40 fill the space of only a few months).

The promise of a land: Israel has been rescued from Egypt but has yet to reach the promised land – they are living in the wilderness.

The promise of blessing: Israel is a nation with an identity and purpose as God's people – they are living in relationship with Him and he dwells among them in the tabernacle.

The promise of blessing to the nations: three developments are of note: some of the servants of Pharaoh fear the word of the Lord and act in the light of it (9.20); a crowd of mixed races left Egypt along with the people of Israel (12.38); Jethro, a Midianite priest, seems to have been converted (18.10-11). Nevertheless, we are still a long way short of *all* the peoples of the world being blessed through Abraham's descendants.

The greatest development in the book therefore is in the Israelites' relationship with God – clearly therefore, we should look out for that as we work our way through the book.

As we probe a little deeper, we discover that Exodus 6.6-8 can be considered 'the principal statement' (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p34) of the theology of the whole book. In the verses, God reminds his people of his promises to their forefathers, and reveals to them both what he is doing for them and how they are to think of themselves in response to Him:

^{6:6} Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgement.' ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD."

The verses suggest that we will need to look out for several key themes as we read the book:

Redemption – from slavery to the service of God

Revelation – God wants the Israelites to know that he is the LORD their God

Relationship – what are the out-workings of the Israelites' status as God's own people?

Residing – God will dwell in the midst of his people and they will be given a great land

Structure of the book

Over the years, the book of Exodus has been divided and sub-divided in many ways – and as usual each 'structure' has its own strengths and weaknesses. For our purposes it will help to divide the book into 3 main sections:

Chapters 1-18
Chapters 19-24
Chapters 25-40

The LORD who delivers
The LORD who demands
The LORD who dwells

Structure of passage

Much of the book of Exodus (and the dominant focus of chapters 1-18) will be the story of how God gets his people *out of* Egypt and *to* Sinai. Our opening chapters tell us *why* God's people need to be rescued and then give us glimpse as to *how* God will achieve that rescue – they act as an overture to the whole.

1.1-22	The expansion and oppression of Israel
2.1-10	The birth and deliverance of Moses
2.11-22	The 'exodus' of Moses
2.23-25	The hidden heart and hand of God

Text notes

1. Conflict: The purposes of God versus the purposes of man, 1.1–22

Chapter 1 is much more than a historical account of population growth, racial tension and oppression. It is the account of a pagan king who sets himself in express opposition to the purposes of God.

God's purpose to make the descendants of Abraham as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore (Genesis 15.5; 22.17; 26.4) is deliberately evoked both by the references to Jacob which bracket these introductory 2 chapters (1.1; 2.24) and by the account of rapid population growth in 1.7 (which itself echoes the creation mandate of Genesis 1.28).

In contrast stands Pharaoh – the new king in Egypt who is either ignorant of the debt that his people owe to Joseph or chooses to ignore it (1.7). While he may be wise in his own eyes (1.10), it is never a shrewd decision to stand in opposition to the purpose of the living God. Pharaoh's 'politics of terror' consist of three progressively harsh strategies designed to control the population growth of the Israelites. When *forced labour* (1.11–14) and slavery does not have the desired effect (1.12!), Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives to *kill all Israelite male children at birth* (1.16–21). (It is interesting that Shiphrah and Puah are named while Pharaoh remains anonymous – God's perspective on history is very different to the world's!). Thanks to the midwives' courage, Pharaoh's command is once again ineffective (1.20). [We should not lose much sleep over the midwives' apparent 'deceit' – God rightly commends them for the courage that they showed in refusing to carry out the murderous wishes of a pagan king – would that more people in history had refused to carry out similar instructions.] Pharaoh's final solution is to bypass the midwives and order all his own people *to murder every infant Hebrew boy* (v22). The policy will later come back to haunt his nation with a grim irony: as the Israelite children are killed in water now, so the Egyptian army will die in water later.

Peter Enns highlights the significance of Pharaoh's policies, 'This is not a battle of Israel versus Pharaoh, or even of Moses versus Pharaoh, but of *God* versus Pharaoh' – Pharaoh stands opposed to both the creation and the redemptive purposes of God. The final outcome of the conflict between God and Pharaoh is still some chapters away, but already in chapter 1 Pharaoh's efforts seem futile (cf. Psalm 2.3-4).

2. Redemption: Moses as a picture of God's salvation, 2.1–22

Pharaoh's edict to murder the Hebrews is still ringing in the air when we learn of the birth of one particular Hebrew boy – his 'priestly' heritage as a Levite will become more important as the Pentateuch progresses. Discerning readers may be surprised that the birth of a son of Levi is highlighted – since Genesis 49 we have been waiting for a son of Judah to fulfil the Lord's promises; perhaps an early indication that Moses is not the final answer. The reader does not yet know the relevance that this child has to the oppression detailed in chapter 1 – all we are told is that he was born (the word translated *fine* in 2.2 is the word translated *good* repeatedly in Genesis 1 to describe God's creation – Moses will be on the side of God's creation purposes over and against the de-creator Pharaoh), hidden, abandoned, found, adopted by an Egyptian princess, and then raised, ironically, by his own mother! Once again, Pharaoh's plans are being thwarted by the God who controls every detail of every event in the world.

But Moses' rescue as a child is more than an illustration of Pharaoh's frustration, he functions explicitly in the text as a twofold picture of God's salvation: first, as he echoes the salvation of Noah, and second as he prefigures the salvation of Israel from Egypt.

i) Moses and Noah, 2.1-10

There is a triple connection between the rescue of Moses as an infant, and Noah's famous rescue in Genesis 6–8: i) both are spared by God from dying in water; ii) both are placed in an 'ark' (the word translated *basket* in 2.3 is the word translated *ark* in the Genesis account – the word only occurs twice in the whole of the Hebrew OT, thereby joining these two stories together; further, in both cases, the *ark* is daubed with *bitumen* and carries its passenger to safety while others are destroyed; iii) both Moses and Noah are vehicles through whom God 'creates' for Himself a new people. Moses is not just avoiding death in 2.1–10, powerless as he is, he is being saved by God.

ii) Moses and the Exodus, 2.11-22

In 2.11 the narrative rushes forward about 36 years (cf. Acts 7.23-30). Whatever else has happened in the intervening time, it is clear that Moses now identifies strongly with 'his own people' (2.11). So much so that when Moses sees an Egyptian *beating* (the same word is used in 5.14) a Hebrew, he attempts to deliver one of his oppressed people – acting alone, furtively and in his own strength, and with disastrous results. While 21st Century readers may wonder what Moses was up to, the writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews explains his motivation: Moses might easily have been seduced by the power and wealth he enjoyed in the royal household, but he chose to identify with, and therefore 'to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time' (Hebrews 11.24). That the Israelites should question Moses' leadership of them (Exodus 2.14) is one piece of evidence among many that Stephen utilises to demonstrate their fundamental rejection of God's word (Acts 7.23-30; cf. Exodus 5.19-21; 14.11-12; 17.3; Numbers 14.2; Deuteronomy 1.27).

Even so, some have puzzled over the inclusion of this incident in the Exodus narrative – is it evidence of an 'anti-Moses source' within the text? And if not, why does the writer give space to the stories of Moses slaying the Egyptian and defending Reuel's daughters? The best answer is that Moses' actions are a sneak preview of the rescue that God is about to accomplish. The following table from *Dig Even Deeper* highlights the verbal clues (this is not mere 'word-spotting' - the words in *italics* are the same in the original):

Actions of Moses	Actions of God
One day, when Moses had grown up ... he <i>saw</i> an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people (2:11).	Then the LORD said, 'I have surely <i>seen</i> the affliction of my people who are in Egypt' (3:7). 'I have also <i>seen</i> the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them' (3:9).
He <i>struck down</i> the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (2:12).	'I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will <i>strike</i> all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast' (12:12). At midnight the LORD <i>struck down</i> all the firstborn in the land of Egypt (12:29).

The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and <i>saved</i> them (2:17).	Thus the LORD <i>saved</i> Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians (14:30).
Moses provides <i>water</i> for the Midianite women (2:17)	The LORD provides <i>water</i> for Israel (17:6)
They said, 'An Egyptian <i>delivered</i> us out of the hand of the shepherds' (2:19).	<p>'I have come down to <i>deliver</i> them out of the hand of the Egyptians' (3:8).</p> <p>Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has <i>delivered</i> you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has <i>delivered</i> the people from under the hand of the Egyptians' (18:10).</p>

Further, just as the Israelites will soon journey out of Egypt into the Sinai desert, so too here does Moses as he flees to Midian. In all these ways Moses intends his readers to see in his own story a little prototype of the rescue that God is soon to accomplish for his people. Many hundred years later, another Hebrew had a childhood not dissimilar to Moses' own – he too was the object of a king's hatred; he too fled to a foreign country in fear of his life; he too would be saved from Egypt (read Matthew 2); he too would rescue God's people.

3. Providence: The hidden heart and hand of God, 2.23–25

The chapters close by returning the readers' attention to Egypt where God's people remain trapped in crushing slavery. But this time a new detail is added. The people have begun to pray (cf. Deuteronomy 26.7) and in response to their prayers, God *remembers* his covenant with their forefathers. We are not to imagine that the all-knowing God had temporarily forgotten his promises, rather he began to act in the light of his promises – we might say that 'God decided to honour the terms of his covenant.'

Application:

1. 'We know that for those who love God all things work together for good' (Rom 8.28)

The whole of Exodus is written *so that God's people may know the LORD*. In particular, these two introductory chapters are written to teach us that God is always faithful and always at work in accordance with his eternal purposes – even when it looks like he has lost all control.

In Exodus 1–2 God's people are the object of hateful genocide – they are persecuted and oppressed at every turn. It is almost impossible to see God's hand at work, but the LORD never forgets his promises; he never forgets his people. With the benefit of hindsight, the reader of Exodus can see that God was at work throughout, protecting his people, blessing those who trust in Him, over-ruling the decisions of a princess, hearing his people's prayer and working to deliver them – even if it was not until Moses was 80 years old that his rescue plan went public.

Modern believers are to trust in the '*behind-the-scenes faithfulness*' of God – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ give us even greater reason to do so. Corporately, believers in Eritrea today no doubt struggle to trust in God as they watch their fellow Christians kidnapped, tortured, raped and murdered on a daily basis. Believers in China no doubt struggle to trust in God as the

government enforce a new wave of persecution against the house church movement. Personally, we will all have had occasion to doubt that God is in control and that he is for us – unemployment, marriage troubles, health concerns and family strife can all erode our trust in God. We can however take our stand on the promise of Romans 8.28, illustrated so wonderfully in Exodus 1–2.

Try to be very practical with your groups. What difference would a Romans 8.28 mind-set make to a suffering Christian? How would the prayer life of someone who believes Romans 8.28 differ from someone who does not? How could they help a fellow Christian to cling to Romans 8.28 without sounding glib?

2. God will achieve his purposes for his people through his redeemer

The Romans 8.28 application is relatively general – it could fit usefully as the application to many Old Testament passages. The explicit comparison between Moses and God in 2.11-22, however, allows us to tighten the application a little further. The way that God will work to fulfil the promises that he first made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier will be by raising up one who will *strike down* his enemies and *deliver* them. As the book develops, we will learn a great deal more about the redemption that God will provide for his people, but at this stage we can say that insofar as Moses is a picture of the rescue that God will accomplish, he is also a sneak preview of the ultimate deliverer of God's people, Jesus Himself.

Even at this early stage of the book, this enables us to look 'in the right place' for the work that God will do on behalf of his people – his purposes centre on the destruction of his enemies and the deliverance of his chosen people through his redeemer. We will find ourselves more than once in Exodus praising God for Jesus!

Aim Trust that God is at work to fulfil his purposes through his redeemer, even when you can't quite see how.

Exodus 3.1–7.7

Introduction

The book of Exodus is designed to *reveal* God to us and to teach us how to *relate* to Him. In Chapters 1–2, God is revealed as the faithful God who controls all things and can be trusted to work out his purposes in the world even when he seems to have forgotten his people. Now in chapters 3–7 we learn both the name of this incomparable God ‘*I am who I am*’ and also his unshakeable commitment to save his people (this latter point is the major theme of chapters 1–18). To put it differently, in 2.23-35 God heard his people’s prayer for rescue, now we learn exactly *how* his presence will be manifest to them and something of the rescue that he will accomplish. The chapters also establish (the rather inadequate) Moses, together with his brother Aaron as the means by which God will deliver his people. This is a long passage, so it is really worth stressing to your groups the importance of reading the passage in advance, reading the relevant *Dig Even Deeper* chapter, and having a go at the prep questions in advance.

Structure

The reason to tackle such a long passage in a single study is that it consists of two cycles of a repeating structural pattern:

Cycle 1:	3.1-22	God’s name is revealed
	4.1-31	Moses is weak and cowardly
	5.1-23	Moses’ mission fails
Cycle 2:	6.1-11	God’s name is re-revealed
	6.12-30	Moses is weak and cowardly
	7.1-7	God promises success

Thus even the structure of the section highlights its main point: although Moses is the means by which God will save his people, Moses himself is not the hero – he is weak, cowardly and inadequate. Salvation is entirely the work of God to the glory of God and the praise of his grace.

Text notes

‘This block of narrative moves the exodus story from the obscurity of one man’s quiet, isolated life in Midian to the decisive challenges of a nation demanding its freedom – in the name of Yahweh – from the vastly superior Egyptians’ (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p105).

1. What do we learn about who God is in these chapters?

From the incident of the non-burning bush in 3.2 onwards, God’s self-revelation dominates these chapters. Moses asks God his name (3.13); Pharaoh declares his own ignorance of the LORD (5.2) and God makes his name known twice (3.14; 6.2). This is new news – the Patriarchs did not know God in this way (6.3). [The name itself is not entirely new: men like Noah (Gen 9.26), Abraham (Gen 12.8), Isaac (Gen 26.25), Jacob (Gen 28.16) and Laban (Gen 30.26) had known God as ‘the LORD’, but 6.3 reminds us that they did not experience God acting on his promises to them to the same extent that he now acts here.] Our key question in this section must be: *what do we learn about God?*

The chapters begin with Moses, who will soon be shepherding God's people, tending his flock in the wilderness. He comes to *Horeb, the mountain of God*, also known as Sinai – where God will later reveal Himself to his redeemed people. At Horeb, one appears to Moses who is described both as *the angel of the Lord* in verse 2 and as *the Lord* in verse 4. This angel is not, as some claim, a pre-incarnation of Christ, but his role as revealer of God is later fulfilled by Christ. (see Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p96). God appears to Moses in fire, as he often does – see, for example Exodus 13.21; 19.18; 24.17; cf. Gen 15.17; Ezek 1.27; 8.2. Moses did not realise it at the time (see 3.3), but later readers would no doubt reflect that the One who is able to set a bush on fire without making it burn (and indeed if he can turn the Nile into blood, order a plague of gnats etc.), **can only be the Creator and Ruler of the world.**

God sets the tone for the encounter by revealing to Moses both his holiness (v5) and his history (v6). Notice that God again refers to Himself as *the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* (3.6; cf. 3.15, 16; 4.5; 6.3) – this God is **the promise-making and promise keeping God.**

Verses 7-10 have their own little repeated structure:

- 3.7 God *sees* his people's affliction and *hears* their cry
- 3.8 God promises to bring his people out of Egypt and into the land
- 3.9 God *hears* his people's cry and *sees* their affliction
- 3.10 God will use *Moses* to bring his people out of Egypt

In this way 3.8 sets the narrative agenda for the whole of Exodus – Joshua and 3.10 highlights the central role that Moses will play in the next few chapters. **God is the rescuing God.**

God finally reveals his name to Moses in verse 14: *I am who I am*. The response is not an evasion of the question, but a statement of transcendence. **God is self-defining and incomparable.** Incredibly, it is this transcendent God who promises to be present with his people to save them (3.8; cf. 3.12) as expanded in the parallel passage in 6.1-11 – **God is present with his people and is for them.** [For complicated reasons, the name of God is variously written as I AM, the LORD (in small capitals), Yahweh and Jehovah in our English Bibles – all these titles translate the name of 3.14.]

This is not to say that the rescue of his people will be plain sailing – there will be setbacks along the way (3.19; 4.21; 7.3). Indeed, in 5.1-23 the situation seems to get worse rather than better, but **God remains sovereign despite setbacks in the experience of his people.** The passage ends with a confident statement of the Lord's victory over the Egyptians (7.4).

We have already learnt a great deal about who God is and what he is doing. The re-statement of the divine name in chapter 6 reiterates all these points, but also adds an important further detail. The way that God will work to redeem his people is *with great acts of judgement* (6.6) against the Egyptians; indeed, he will act with such a strong hand against Pharaoh that the king will himself *drive* [the Israelites] *out of his land*. 6.6-8 is so foundational to the argument of the whole book that it is worth repeating the comments made on the verses in the introduction to the previous set of notes: In the verses, God reminds his people of his promises to their forefathers, and reveals to them both what he is doing for them and how they are to think of themselves in response to Him... The verses suggest that several key themes will dominate the book:

Redemption – from slavery to the service of God

Revelation – God wants the Israelites to know that he is the Lord their God

Relationship – what are the out-workings of the Israelites' status as God's own people?

Residing – God will dwell in the midst of his people and they will be given a great land

In these chapters, God is revealing Himself in order that his people might know Him. In some sense of course, they already have a relationship with Him – God calls them his people (3.7) and also his firstborn son (4.22). But while God knows them, they do not yet really know Him. God's purpose now is to change that. He will rescue them for relationship with Him (6.7) – this necessitates not just a change of ruler over them (not Pharaoh but God) but also his self-disclosure to them and that is what is happening here.

2. What do we learn about Moses in these chapters?

Moses does not come out of these chapters well – he is not meant to. No sooner has God announced his plan to deliver his people from Egypt through Moses than Moses begins to question his wisdom... the first one or two questions may have been valid, but 5??

Objection 1:	Who am I to deliver this people?	
Answer 1:	I will be with you.	(3.11-12)
Objection 2:	But who are you?	
Answer 2:	I AM.	(3.13-22)
Objection 3:	The people won't believe me	
Answer 3:	I will validate your authority with 3 signs	(4.1-9)
Objection 4:	I am not a good speaker	
Answer 4:	I will teach you what to say	(4.10-12)
Objection 5:	Please send someone else	
Answer 5:	Take your brother Aaron with you	(4.13-17)

There are two further objections a little later, which again follow directly from God's self-revelation and statement of intent in 6.1-11:

Objections 6:	Pharaoh will not listen to me	
Answer 6:	Just do as you are told	(6.12-13)
Objection 7:	Pharaoh will not listen to me	(6.30)
Left unanswered to highlight the weakness and cowardice of Moses.		

The cumulative effect of all this is that we doubt not just Moses' confidence and ability, but also his willingness to do what his Lord has asked of him. Indeed, that is why the Lord's anger is kindled against Moses (4.14). What hope do Israel have if God's anger is kindled against their deliverer? Moses' cowardice is all the greater when we remember all that he has just had revealed to him. Few men in history have had such a prolonged question and answer session with the Living God Himself, the Creator and Sustainer of all. Few have received such a clear and personal promise of divine assistance (3.12) and such tangible evidence of divine commissioning. But despite all that, Moses, (at this time the only man in the world who knows the Lord's personal name), is at best reluctant, and at worst disobedient to his God (notice that the reason he gives to Jethro in 4.18 is at best a half-truth).

Further evidence of Moses' personal inability to deliver God's people is found in the curious incident in 4.24-26. God is once again angry with Moses (probably because he has not circumcised

his son despite Genesis 17.12-14) – this time he is angry enough to want to kill him. What follows is another anticipation of the Exodus account later in the book: God has just announced in advance what he will do disobedient Egypt on the night of the plague of the firstborn son in 4.18-23 and now the life of an Israelite is spared by the shedding of blood (4.25-26). The point is that even Israel's deliverer needs to be saved from the just anger of God.

Therefore, while these chapters build our confidence in Moses as the divinely-appointed leader of God's people – he has not only met with God, spoken with God, and been commissioned by God but he also comes from true priestly heritage (part of the point of 6.14-27) – they ensure that we read on in Exodus sure in the knowledge that the real hero of the account is not Moses, but God (notice that the section is book-ended in 6.12 and 6.30 with reference to Moses' 'uncircumcised lips'). Indeed, the fact that the genealogy runs past Moses and Aaron and into future generations of Levites may strengthen the point. It is not only Moses but the whole priestly line who are unable to effect the rescue that God's people need. This is a work, as 6.6-8 promised, that can be undertaken only by the Lord Himself: *his* rescue will succeed despite Moses' weakness (7.4-5).

Application

Confident faith

Exodus is written to reveal God to us so that we might relate rightly to Him. These chapters give us great reason to be confident in God, and a great reminder not to place our confidence in man. God is the mighty creator and sustainer of all, the one who holds nature in the palm of his hand and can bend it to his purposes at will; he is the great I AM who listens to the cries of his people and who will act, however bad things seem (note the detail in chapter 5), to give his people the salvation that he has promised them. The principle application of this passage therefore is that we grow in our knowledge of God and confidence in his salvation.

At the same time, we are reminded not to put our confidence in human beings. Moses went on to be an effective means of God's deliverance, but even before his first conversation with Pharaoh we are told repeatedly of his weakness, doubts and even disobedience – this 'deliverer' has already himself needed to be 'delivered' twice in the first few chapters, this time from the anger of God Himself. The point is that the salvation that will be effected for the Israelites will be entirely and only the work of God. However impressive Moses may seem to us in later chapters, we will know that he is no more than God has made him, and that he too is a needy recipient of divine grace. Salvation is all of God.

There is a relationship between the two ideas of divine power and human weakness that we have noticed recurring throughout these chapters. The God of great power is in the habit of working through weak and unimpressive human beings. Indeed, as we discovered in 2 Corinthians, he is in the habit of making even the most impressive human leaders weak in order that his power can be demonstrated through them to his own praise and glory. This is the God who saves through the weakness and foolishness of the cross, and who can say to his Apostle, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12.9).

Aim Be confident that our God is the great I AM, mighty and determined to save.

Exodus 7.8–10.29

Introduction

The Lord is a faithful God who has chosen this moment to act upon the covenant that he made with Abraham 400 years earlier (2.23-25). To that end, he is revealing Himself to the Israelites and has told them that he will rescue them from the oppressive Egyptians with great acts of judgement in order that he might enjoy relationship with them (6.6-7). He has appointed Moses, together with his brother Aaron, as the means by which he will accomplish this great deliverance.

Structure

The passage consists of an introductory sign and the first nine of the ten plagues that God will unleash on the Egyptians.

7.8-13	Prelude to the plagues: God will win
7.14-25	Plague 1: Blood
8.1-15	Plague 2: Frogs
8.16-19	Plague 3: Gnats
8.20-32	Plague 4: Flies
9.1-7	Plague 5: Livestock
9.8-12	Plague 6: Boils
9.13-35	Plague 7: Hail
10.1-20	Plague 8: Locusts
10.21-29	Plague 9: Darkness

Text notes

1. The prelude to the plagues: God will win, 7.8–13

After the initial unsuccessful audience before Pharaoh in 5.1-223, it may well have been with some trepidation that Moses and Aaron approached the king for a second time. They need not have feared. This incident is an advanced summary of the battle that is to follow between God and Pharaoh. Several features are worthy of note: i. In summoning *the wise men and the sorcerers... the magicians of Egypt*, Pharaoh intends to make a show of strength to Moses and Aaron. ii. Pharaoh's magicians are not without power – they too were able to turn a staff into a serpent; the difference is that they did so by means of *secret arts*, whereas Moses and Aaron did so in exact obedience to the Lord. iii. Most significant of all, however, is the ultimate outcome – Aaron's staff *swallowed up* the magicians' staffs; the same word is used in 15.12 as Moses celebrates the way that the Red Sea *swallowed up* the Egyptian armies. This episode functions then as a sneak preview of the victory that God will enjoy over Pharaoh. Peter Enns comments, 'Counterfeit power, although real power, is not lasting power, and neither the Israelites nor the Egyptians should be fooled by appearances' (Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p198).

2. The plagues themselves: God's enemies will lose, 7.14–10.29

Although there are 10 plagues in all, we will treat the first 9 together because the text itself suggests that they are carefully arranged in 3 sets of 3 plagues. The following table highlights some of the recurring themes and patterns in the plague narrative:

Plague	Type	Instruction formula	Initiator	Response	Purpose
1	Blood	'Go to Pharaoh <i>in the morning...</i> ' (7.15)	Aaron		'By this shall you <i>know...</i> ' (7.17)
2	Frogs	'Go in to Pharaoh...' (8.1)	Aaron		'So that you may <i>know...</i> ' (8.10)
3	Gnats	No announcement	Aaron		
4	Flies	'Rise up early <i>in the morning</i> and present yourself to Pharaoh...' (8.16)	The Lord	You may sacrifice to God, but don't go far (8.28)	'that you may <i>know...</i> ' (8.22)
5	Livestock	'Go in to Pharaoh...' (9.10)	The Lord		
6	Boils	No announcement	The Lord		
7	Hail	'Rise up early <i>in the morning</i> and present yourselves before Pharaoh...' (9.13)	Moses	'I have sinned' (9.27)	'so that you may <i>know...</i> ' (9.14) 'for this purpose I have raised you up... so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.' (9.16) 'so that you may <i>know...</i> ' (9.29)
8	Locusts	'Go in to Pharaoh...' (10.1)	Moses	'Go, the men among you' (10.11)	'that you may <i>know...</i> ' (10.2)

9	Darkness	No announcement	Moses	'Go serve the Lord... only let your flocks and your herds remain behind.' (10.24)	
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Instruction formula: 1, 4 and 7 match, as do 2, 5 and 8, and 3, 6 and 9
Initiator: 3 x Aaron; 3 x The Lord; 3 x Moses
Response: Pharoah's sustained refusal to heed God is highlighted throughout (see 7.16)
Purpose: God wants Pharoah and indeed the whole world to *know* that there is none like Yahweh in all the earth

A few other features of the plague narratives are worthy of comment:

- 1. Order:** although there does not seem to be a particular reason for the order of the plagues, the first plague is appropriately placed because Pharaoh tried to kill the Israelite baby boys in the Nile in chapter 1, and because the Egyptian army will die in water in chapter 14.
- 2. Sovereignty:** many of the plagues emphasise God's sovereign control – he is in complete control of natural phenomena like water and darkness, and also over the animal kingdom.
- 3. Magicians:** although Pharaoh's magicians manage to replicate the first two plagues (although quite why they *add* to the number of frogs in Egypt is a mystery!), by the time of the third plague they are beginning to recognise the unique power of God (8.19), thereby demonstrating that they are beginning to learn a little lesson that Pharaoh himself has been slow to comprehend (5.2). Thereafter, Pharaoh's magicians fall from the account and by 9.11 cannot even stand before Moses.
- 4. Distinction:** from the time of the fourth plague onwards (8.23), and with the exception of the locusts, the Lord draws a clear distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians. This will be seen most clearly in the final plague (12.12-13), but it also evident in 9.4, 9.12, 9.25-26 and 10.23.
- 5. Arrangement:** it is hard to know what to make of the arrangement of the plagues in groups of 3. Indeed, why 9 plagues rather than 3? Most likely, the repeating pattern emphasises the significance of the lesson being learnt (much as the repetition 'Holy, holy, holy' is used for emphasis in Isaiah 6): the Lord is deeply committed to making Himself known as the God who judges his enemies and rescues his people.
- 6. Hardening:** Pharaoh's heart remains hardened to God and his word throughout the plague narratives; sometimes, Pharaoh hardens his own heart (8.15, 32; 9.15); sometimes God hardens Pharaoh's heart (9.12; 10.1, 20, 27, cf. also 11.10; 14.4, 8) just as he had said that he would (4.21; 7.3); sometimes we are not told *who* hardened Pharaoh's heart, merely that it was so (7.13-14, 22; 8.19; 9.7, 35). All of these statements are equally true, and none negate the others. The one paragraph summary of 'divine sovereignty and human responsibility in *Dig Even Deeper* is very helpful:

'The Bible is clear: we are responsible for our actions *and* God is in control of them. We find this all over the place in Scripture. Out of jealousy, Joseph's brothers freely decided to sell him into slavery, yet God intended their action to save many lives (Genesis 50:20). Out of pride, the king of Assyria boasts in his plundering of Israel (Isaiah 10:7-11, 13-14), yet unbeknownst to him he was acting as an instrument of God's judgement, an axe in God's hand (Isaiah 10:5-6, 15). Out of greed, Judas freely decided to betray Jesus for money (Matthew 26:14-16), yet God planned that Jesus should be betrayed to save many lives (Acts 2:23; 4:28).'

Why does it happen like this? Unsurprisingly, the answer matches the major emphasis of Exodus. It is the *supreme* concern of the Lord to make Himself known. He deliberately protracted events so that he could work through the plagues and through Pharaoh (with justice) to maximise the opportunity to make Himself known. It is worth thinking of this in terms of application as well, for it magnifies our understanding of God's sovereignty. his chief concern is not human happiness or prosperity but the revelation and glory of his own name. 'He has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills' to that end (cf. Rom 9.14-18).

Application

The text itself has taught us the purpose of the plagues, and thereby given us the application of our studies. God, the Sovereign ruler over all his creation is making Himself known. He is the winner. Sometimes, God does not look powerful; indeed, sometimes we may be intimidated or dazzled by the counterfeit power of the enemies of God, but nothing changes reality: God's enemies will face his judgement and be destroyed. But God's people will not suffer when his judgement comes for he will make a distinction between us and his enemies and protect us. Supreme evidence of this, of course, is seen at the cross.

What difference does it make to you when you remember that God will triumph?

Aim Know God as the sovereign God who judges his enemies and saves his people.

Exodus 11.1–13.16

Introduction

The faithful Lord of all has already revealed to us what will happen in this passage, and how we are to interpret the events: he is working through great acts of judgement to deliver his people *from* slavery to the Egyptians *for* relationship with Him – he is the Lord (6.6-8). Nine times already Pharaoh has refused to do as the Lord has told him; as a result his people will now face the last and greatest of plagues. Previously their ‘life-source’ the Nile has been affected, as has been their land and their livestock. People have experienced boils, and some who did not heed God’s warning have been killed (9.25), but now the judgement of God will leave a lasting impression on every household in the land (12.30).

Structure

The pattern of narrative illustrates that this plague is different to the others. Previous accounts have had three main elements: announcement, execution and result. This time, there is a delay of 28 verses between the announcement and the execution – these differences are never random in the Bible: we are meant to sit up and pay attention to the material that breaks the pattern.

11.1-10	Plague 10: announcement
12.1-28	Regulations for Passover and feast of unleavened bread
12.29-42	Plague 10: execution and result
12.43-13.16	Regulations for Passover and consecration of firstborn

The structure highlights that there are two distinct *rescues* in play in these chapters. The plague narrative tells us of **Israel’s rescue through God’s judgement on Pharaoh**; the regulations tell us of **Israel’s rescue from God’s judgement through the blood of a substitute**.

Text notes

1. Rescue through God’s judgement on Pharaoh, 11.1-10 and 12.29-42

As anticipated in 4.21-23, we reach the last and most severe of the plagues – the only plague from which there is no hope of reversal: every firstborn in Egypt will die. The plague is clear retribution for Pharaoh’s own policy of trying to kill every Israelite baby boy in chapter 1 – that the plague should be announced by a baby who escaped that edict carries with it a particular irony. Further, as Pharaoh oppressed God’s ‘firstborn son’ Israel, now his own firstborn will suffer (4.22). This will be a night like no other (11.6), and will be decisive in the on-going argument with Pharaoh – this time he will drive God’s people away *completely* (11.1). [Properly understood, the conversation in 11.4-8 does not break the word of 10.29 – this is something that Moses said on his way out of Pharaoh’s presence.]

After the extended hiatus for the Passover regulations in 12.1-28, the narrative of the final plague resumes. As previously, God’s threat is made good (12.29-30). Loud wailing is heard throughout Egypt for death has visited every house, finally prompting Pharaoh to release Moses and all his people (this time together with their livestock) – thereby fulfilling God’s promise in 11.1.

The point is that Israel is enslaved in Egypt – the only way that they can be rescued is if God overcomes and defeats his enemies. Judgement on God's enemies is always a vital part of his rescue plan: here his judgement falls on Egypt's gods (12.12), on the firstborn (e.g. 12.29) and on all Egypt as they are plundered of their riches (12.35-36).

2. Rescue from God's judgement through the blood of a substitute, 12.1-28 and 12.43-13.16

a. The Passover

Throughout the plague narrative, God has been 'making a distinction' between his enemies and his people (8.22-23; 9.4-7, 25-26; 10.22-23; 11.6-7). He does so again this time, but there is a difference: this is the first time that the Israelites have to *do* anything in order to benefit from God's protection. They are not of course *earning* their protection – it is initiated by God and made effective by God; what they are doing is *appropriating personally the rescue that God is offering them*. If they do nothing, their firstborn too will die; they need a faith (trusting God's word – cf. Hebrews 11.28) that works itself out in action.

12.3-11 sets out the detail of the instructions. A lamb without blemish (12.5) will shed its blood as a substitute for the people (note that the lamb has to be in proportion to the size of the family in 12.3-4). When the Lord saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the Israelites, he would *pass over* them. The blood of the lamb functions in two distinct ways: first, it is a 'sign' (12.13) that marks a household out as belonging to God – a bit like a name-tape on an item of school clothing; this house belongs to God, not Pharaoh. But even more significantly, the spotless lamb died in the place of the Israelite firstborn – if the lamb had not been killed in any particular Israelite household, God's judgement would have fallen on that house as well, killing the firstborn. Thus the lamb took God's judgement in the place of the Israelites. It is hard to over-state the biblical significance of the lesson that God rescues people from his judgement through the substitutionary death of a spotless lamb.

[Some may well ask, 'How can a whole family / nation be rescued because a firstborn son is redeemed?' The question reveals the extent of our Western individualistic approach to life and forgets the crucial role of the firstborn within an Israelite family. God does not just deal with us as individuals but through rightly appointed representatives – think of Adam (or for that matter Jesus); think of heads of state; think of the head of a family. The firstborn son was in a real way the future of a family and therefore his redemption can truly be said to secure the redemption for the whole household or family. This is not a massive point, and I would not necessarily try to teach it proactively from this passage, but it may help to have it ready as an answer if someone in your group asks you about it.]

b. Remembering

Even before the plague has fallen, God has begun to instruct Israel about how to remember his rescue in the future:

The feast of the unleavened bread (12.14-20) will enable Israel to remember the rescue from Egypt, and especially the haste with which they eventually departed (12.31-39).

The Passover (12.24-27, 42-49) will enable Israel to remember their rescue from God's judgement; they remembered by observing the feast and by keeping vigil (12.42).

The consecration of the firstborn (13.1-16) will enable Israel to remember that God killed the firstborn of Egypt but redeemed the firstborn of Israel with a lamb. As a result, the firstborn were not their own – they were the possession of God Himself.

These rituals were not empty – they were designed to teach future generations of Israelites (13.8, 14) of all that God had done *for them* (notice that the *us* in 13.14 includes even the generations of Israelites that were not alive at the time of the Passover – this was a rescue of ‘Israel’ and not just one generation of firstborn) in delivering them from his judgement and from Egypt.

[How many people actually left Egypt? The question has been debated for centuries because the figure of 600 000 fighting men stated in 12.37 seems unreasonably large to some. We can be helped by realising that the word translated ‘*thousand*’ in 12.37 can variously also be translated *cattle, clans, divisions, families, oxen, tribes* and even *platoons* or *squads* (a military unit of 12-15 soldiers). To plump for *thousand* as the translation simply because it yields the biggest number may not in fact be the best reading. The suggestion of *platoon* is interesting (and argued for by Douglas Stuart in his commentary – it would yield a number of around 28 000-36 000 who left Egypt rather than 2 million. In the light of the uncertain meaning of the Hebrew word, it is hard to be too dogmatic about the exact number one way or the other. Certainly, it was a large number – much, much larger than the population in Exodus 1 – cf. 1.7. Many others, presumably Egyptians made a faith decision to leave along with Abraham’s descendants as well (12.38).]

Application

The application flows directly out of the two rescues that Israel experienced.

1. We too have been rescued from slavery through the judgement of God’s enemies

By nature, human beings are slaves to sin (John 8.34) and to the ways of the devil himself (Ephesians 2.2). But on the cross, God acted decisively in victorious judgement over the twin enemies of sin and the devil (see, for example, John 12.31; Colossians 2.14-15). The result is that those who trust in Jesus have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Colossians 1.13). We are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6.6 – even though we often sin, sin is no longer our ‘master’) and need never fear the evil one again – we now belong to Jesus.

The New Testament applies this truth in two different directions:

i. Personally: We are not to return to the old ways of sin, but instead to live by the Spirit, putting to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8.13), pursuing godliness and cultivating the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.16-26).

ii. Corporately: Rather surprisingly, when Paul is teaching the Corinthians that ‘Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed’ (1 Corinthians 5.6), he uses it as a motivation for church discipline. In particular, churches are not to tolerate the sexually immoral, the greedy, the idolatrous, the revilers, the drunkards, or the swindlers in their midst (1 Cor 5.11) but are to ‘cleanse out the old leaven’ by purging the evil person from among them (1 Cor 5.13). We celebrate the festival today by being a people of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5.8).

2. We too have been rescued from judgement through the death of a substitute

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1.29). There are a further 10 explicit mentions of the Passover in John's gospel (2.13, 23; 6.4; 11.55 x2; 12.1; 13.1; 18.28, 39; 19.14), many in the context of Jesus' death to emphasise that the Passover is fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Jesus shed his blood as a lamb without blemish in order to redeem his people from both judgement and futile living (1 Peter 1.18-19). As a result, he will be forever praised by his people as the Lamb who was slain (Rev 5.12).

We too are to remember the rescue accomplished by the death of the Passover lamb. We do so, says Jesus, every time we take the bread and the wine at the Lord's supper (Luke 22.7-23). How does a fresh look at the original Passover refine and underline your understanding of the significance of the Lord's supper?

Aim Remembering that you have been rescued from slavery to sin and from God's judgement, pursue godliness and treasure the cross.

Exodus 13.17–15.21

Introduction and context

We should not be surprised that Exodus 1–18 teaches us the same lesson more than once. The unit reveals God to us as the Lord who remembers his covenant and so *delivers* his people by destroying his enemies. Pharaoh has repeatedly attempted to hinder the purposes of God, and from time to time has appeared to hold the upper hand (e.g. chapters 1-2; 15), but there was only ever going to be one winner. The plagues, culminating in the plague of the firstborn, left Pharaoh on his knees – the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea is the knockout blow for, ‘The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name’ (Exodus 15.3) and none can stand against Him.

Structure

No sooner are the Israelites on the move with God in their midst than Pharaoh has again changed his mind and dispatched his army after them – the Lord has not yet finished revealing his glory as the triumphant man of war. his victory is told in narrative form in chapter 14 and celebrated poetically in chapter 15, for this is a day to which Israel will look back for many generations.

13.17-14.31	The crossing of the Red Sea
13.17-14.4	God’s determination to reveal his glory
14.5-14	Egyptian attack and Israelite panic
14.15-31	Israelite escape and Egyptian destruction
15.1-21	Moses and Miriam’s song of celebration

The result of the crossing of the Red Sea was that Israel not only ‘feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord’ (14.31) but also sang his praises (15.1-21). A right reading of these chapters will leave us doing the same.

Text notes

1. The crossing of the Red Sea: fear the Lord, 13.17-14.31

a. God’s determination to reveal his glory, 13.17-14.4

We know that God’s ultimate plan was to take the people of Israel to the land that he had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is because Moses believed this promise that he took the bones of Joseph along with him on the journey (13.19; cf. Gen 49.29-50.14; 50.24-25). God now set about leading his people (via Sinai, as promised – cf. 3.12) to the land – a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to symbolise the Lord’s steadfast presence with his people. The surprise is that he did not lead them by the most direct available route (the coastal route known as the *Via Maris* would have lead them straight to Canaan). A couple of reasons are given for the detour: first, the Philistine army stood in the way and God did not want to subject the fledgling and untested Israelite army to war against the mighty Philistines lest they lose heart and head back to Egypt (13.17; the Philistines were later subdued permanently under David – cf. 2 Samuel 8.1; 21.15-22); second, and even more significantly, the Lord chose deliberately to reverse the journey of the Israelites in order that he might gain a further victory over Pharaoh (and this time over his army as well) and thereby reveal Himself (yet) again to the Egyptians (14.1-4). How

Pharaoh could possibly have concluded that the God who had just demonstrated his superiority so overwhelmingly and repeatedly had now had his plans thwarted by the wilderness (14.3) is anyone's guess – but in the Lord's good purposes, he would use the opportunity to demonstrate to his people his ability to aid them in conflict (they have much conflict to come in Joshua as they take the land), and to reveal afresh to the Egyptians that he alone is the Lord of all.

b. Egyptian attack and Israelite panic, 14.5-14

As the Lord had predicted (14.3), so Pharaoh acted (14.5-9) and the sight of hundreds of Egyptian chariots in hot pursuit 'apparently drove all memory of God's assurances through Moses to the Israelites in 14.1-4 out of their minds' (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p335). Verses 11-12 are the first (but sadly not the last – cf. Numbers 14.1-4; Joshua 7.6-9) declaration by the Israelites that they should have stayed where they were in servitude to Pharaoh. The verses reveal that although the Israelites cried out to the Lord (cf. 2.23), this was not a cry of faith – they did not trust that he would deliver them from Pharaoh's clutches.

Moses' reply to the people demonstrates his growth as a leader of God's people (cf. 3.11-4.17) as he urges calm, patient, faith-filled waiting for the Lord's promised salvation – in fact, the only thing that the Israelites need contribute to their upcoming deliverance is *silence*!

c. Israelite escape and Egyptian destruction, 14.15-31

We reach at last one of the grandest moments in scripture – the last direct encounter between the Israelites and the Egyptians in the book, and a final, decisive opportunity for God not only to 'get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen' (14.17) but also to reveal Himself to the Egyptians as the Lord (14.18). The account of the actual events is relatively brief, but the detail leaves us in no doubt that both the parting of the sea for the Israelites and the closing of the sea on the Egyptians were entirely the work of God. The Egyptians are right that 'The Lord fights for [the Israelites] against the Egyptians' (14.25).

It is a moment that will be remembered by many later OT writers as the supreme demonstration of the power of God displayed for the good of those who love Him as they are saved through the judgement of God's enemies. When Israel saw God's power at work so magnificently they could only fear the Lord, and believe in Him and in his servant Moses (14.31): 'if God could do this sort of thing to the Egyptians, he could certainly be trusted to bring to completion his whole plan to allow Israel to conquer and settle into the promised land and to reign over his people forever and ever' (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p337).

2. Moses and Miriam's song of celebration: sing to the Lord, 15.1-21

Poetry is different to prose not only in form and arrangement of material, but also in effect. Moses records this song of praise because he wants future generations of Israelites (the song will be sung in the new creation as well – Rev 15.3) not only to understand that God rescued them, but also to join him in celebrating their deliverance. This was a song that was sung not only by Moses and Miriam, but by 'the people of Israel' (15.1) and 'all the women' of Israel too (15.20). Strikingly, they sing in the first instance not because they were themselves delivered but because God has 'triumphed gloriously' and 'thrown into the sea' his enemies (15.1 and 21 bracket the song).

The song itself comes in 5 parts:

i. Praise the Lord for he is a warrior, the God of salvation (15.1-3)

The Israelites would fight soon (e.g. 17.8-16) and often (e.g. Joshua and Judges). It was vital therefore for them to know that their Lord God is a warrior, a 'man of war' (15.3) who would fight *for* them and be their 'strength' (v2). That is why they 'sing', 'praise' and 'exalt'

their Lord for throwing their enemies, the Egyptians, into the sea – if he can triumph over the Egyptians and their gods, he can triumph over anyone.

It may seem strange to us that Moses should praise God for destroying people – but when those people are enemies intent on enslaving (14.5), plundering (15.9) and even killing you (15-9c), it is understandable! It is in the same vein that Christians praise Jesus for destroying the powers of death, hell and Satan himself at the cross.

ii. Praise the Lord for he has humbled and destroyed his enemies (15.4-10)

Verses 4-10 expand upon the praise of v1 – praise the Lord for he has single-handedly proven his ability to protect his people by humbling an arrogant enemy (v9) with a simple breath (v10). Pharaoh had sent his best men (v4b) against God (notice in v7 that Pharaoh's army are described as opponents of God rather than of the Israelites), but even they were no match for the 'burning anger' (v7) of the God who is 'majestic in power' (v6). (We have already come across the idiom of the Lord's 'hand' as a metaphor for his power in 3.19-20; 6.1; 7.4-5; 9.15; 13.3, 9, 14, and especially 14.30-31.)

Notice the important theological point that God's anger and destruction of his enemies are not in opposition to his majesty as some would have us believe, but expressions of it (v7).

iii. Praise the Lord for he is incomparable in glory and unfailing in love (15.11-13)

The heart of the song emphasises the Lord's uniqueness – there is none like Him. He is 'majestic in holiness' (he reigns high over all, morally perfect, in regal splendour), 'awesome in glorious deeds' (his works are always good and right and impressive at the same time), and 'doing wonders' (one who does the miraculous as easily as the routine). Specifically, this incomparable Lord destroyed the Egyptians (v12).

This mighty God is supremely on the side of his people – in *love*, he has 'redeemed' them (cf. 6.6), 'led' them (14.17-22), and will certainly take them to his holy abode (Sinai and Canaan are most in view, but the New Testament reader will naturally think ahead to Jesus' promise in John 14.1-4 and the hope of the new creation). The final verb of v13 is in the past to express the certainty of Israel's hope. Wonderfully, the Lord who redeemed Israel is a God of both 'strength' and 'steadfast love' (v13) – if he lacked either quality, their hope would be worthless.

iv. Praise the Lord for his future enemies will tremble before Him (15.14-16a)

Moses continues to praise the Lord in the past tense – it is a forgone conclusion that Israel's future enemies will hear of the Lord's dramatic victory and melt in fear and trembling. Moses words were proven true by history: Edom, Moab and Canaan are mentioned in the order that they would later be encountered; Edom was easily cowed (Numbers 22.2-3), Moab took a little more convincing (Numbers 24.17-18; Deuteronomy 2.4; 1 Samuel 14.47 and finally 2 Samuel 8.1, 11-12), but Rahab was in no doubt about the mood of the Canaanites (Joshua 2.8-11).

v. Praise the Lord for he will reign forever and bring his people to his rest (15.16b-18)

God has purchased a people for Himself (v16b), he will bring them to his eternal dwelling place (v17a – alluding first to Canaan, especially to Mount Zion (2 Samuel 24), but ultimately to the new creation), and he reigns supreme over all other gods and forces (v18). Douglas Stuart comments on verse 18, 'The unstoppable, uninteruptable, eternal reign of God is a widely represented topic within the Bible (e.g. Psalm 10.16; 45.6; 48.14;

Hebrews 1.8; Revelation 1.18; 11.15) and an assurance to all who place their faith in Him' (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p361) – it is therefore a fitting conclusion to the song.

Verses 19-21 conclude the unit with a summary description of the contrasting fortunes that met the Israelites and the Egyptian charioteers who entered the sea. Miriam, the older sister of Moses, is mentioned only here in the book, but we know from Micah 6.4 that (as a prophetess – v20), she assisted Moses and Aaron in the leadership of the Exodus. Her song again emphasises that it was through the judgement of Israel's enemies that he delivered his people (v21).

Application

Once again, we are not left to invent our own application, or to hunt around for particular 'evangelical applications' to bolt onto the text – the characters in the text model the correct application to us. In 14.31 Israel feared the Lord and believed in Him, and then in 15.21 Miriam echoed the song of praise to the Lord sung earlier by Moses and the people (15.1). The application flows directly out of the two rescues that Israel experienced.

1. Fear the Lord and believe in Him

God is the great Redeemer – he has acted in and through the Lord Jesus Christ to redeem his people from slavery, not to political oppression, but to sin, death and the devil. We too have seen a mighty demonstration of his power in his resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1.19-21) – it is right therefore that we should fear Him (1 Peter 1.17; 2.17). Ours is not the fear of those who think that God might destroy them (15.15-16), but the fear of those who know that their lives are watched over by the living God Himself, and who dare not presume on his grace. In previous generations and in certain types of churches, it is possible that the Lord's exaltedness and otherness were so emphasised that believers failed to appreciate the freedom with which we can approach Him and the intimacy we share with Him, but 'over-reverence' is hardly our danger today. How does this passage's reminder of the Lord's naked power and might help you to fear Him appropriately?

2. Sing to the LORD

It is easy to see why Moses, Miriam and the Israelites would have praised their Lord on the actual day of their deliverance, but Moses included chapter 15 in the book of Exodus because praising the Lord for his redemption was to be the theme tune of their life. Thanksgiving is to be a hallmark of the New Testament believer's life as well – e.g. Colossians 2.7. It is worth asking whether my own life is marked by the virtuous circle of 'praise leading to greater appreciation of Christ leading to more praise of Him...', or the vicious circle of 'feeling spiritually cool and therefore not praising Christ much and therefore feeling spiritually cooler...'. The reminder of Exodus 15 is that it is not enough to be able to explain the doctrine of redemption with precision and clarity; a true 'participation' in that redemption will necessarily cause me to overflow in praise. When did you last give a few minutes (apart from in church) to praising God for delivering you from slavery to sin and the dominion of darkness and bringing you into the kingdom of light? What do you tend to sing about? If it is not the cross, why isn't it?

Aim Fear and praise the Lord for saving his people by destroying his enemies.

Exodus 15.22–17.16

Introduction and context

Our studies in Exodus so far have taught us primarily about God and his redemption. He has revealed Himself as the faithful Lord who is working through his appointed redeemer to save his people from judgement by judging his enemies. Now for the first time, the Israelites themselves take centre stage. As readers, we have high hopes for them – this is a people who had their prayers for deliverance so dramatically answered (2.23-25); this is a people who have witnessed simply incredible feats of power in the plagues and an unforgettable demonstration of the majestic holiness of their warrior Lord in the destruction of the Egyptian charioteers in the Red Sea; this is a people who have begun to fear the Lord and believe in Him, and also in his servant Moses (14.31); this is a people who are full of praise for their Lord, the one who is their strength and salvation (15.1-2); this is a people to whom the Lord has promised not just a wonderful land (6.8) but also a relationship with himself (6.7). What could possibly go wrong in the spiritual life of such a privileged people? Or for that matter in the spiritual life of a yet more privileged Central Focus leader at St Helen's?

Structure

The majority of the passage highlights a contrast between the faithful provision of a patient Lord and the faithless grumbling of a distrusting people (the '*grumbling*' word group occurs 10x in Exodus, all of them in this passage – 15.24; 16.2, 7 (x2), 8 (x3), 9, 12; 17.3).

15.22-27	Grumbling at Marah and the Lord's miraculous provision
16.1-36	Grumbling at Sin and the Lord's miraculous provision
17.1-7	Grumbling at Rephidim and the Lord's miraculous provision
17.8-16	The faithful Lord is among his people to defend them

Text notes

1. Grumbling at Marah and the Lord's miraculous provision, 15.22-27

a. Grumbling, 15.22-24

With the song of their deliverance still echoing in their ears, Israel travelled three days into the wilderness but found no water. Thus, hot on the heels of Israel's first great victory came her first great test. She failed – rapidly forgetting the significance of the deliverance she had just experienced. We might think that she would know that the God who parted the Red Sea is unlikely to be hindered by the bitter waters of Marah, but Israel's response to an unfavourable circumstance was not to pray but to grumble – her own heart every bit as bitter as the waters.

b. Provision, test and promise, 15-25-26

The Lord responds to his complaining people not with condemnation, but with grace. Moses prays (at least he remembers the lesson of 2.23) and does exactly as the Lord commands, and the Lord works to make the waters sweet.

The test has already happened – the last few words of v25 can be translated 'there he had tested them'. Israel has failed, but in his grace, the Lord pre-empts the giving of the law and tells his

people what he wants from them. They are to 'listen diligently' to Him and 'do' what he says, and if they do, they will know his 'perfect divine protection' (Douglas Stuart's phrase, p367) – not a promise that they would never get sick, but a promise that they would never experience his judgement in the way that Egypt had done so during the plagues. For the Lord is their 'healer' – the one who can cure their sin disease.

c. Further provision, 15.27

The suggestion is that it was on the very same day that the Israelites reached Elim and experienced the Lord's abundant provision of water – they very thing that had caused them to doubt Him hours earlier. Doubt always looks silly in the light of God's lavish goodness.

2. Grumbling at Sin and the Lord's miraculous provision, 16.1-36

a. Grumbling, 16.1-9

The paragraph feels like an action replay of events at Marah: this time about a month had elapsed (they left on the 15th day of the first month) when along came another unannounced, unexplained *test* (v4b) of Israel's willingness to trust God. The Israelites not only fail (this time 'the whole congregation' joins in the grumbling, v2 – even though the Lord continues to guide them by fire and cloud), but also demonstrate an appallingly bad memory – chapters 1 and 2 gave us no indication that the Israelites were enjoying a life of indulgence and ease in Egypt! (The Israelites repeat their argument that it would have been better to die in Egypt again at Numbers 11.4, 18; 14.2; cf. 20.3; Joshua 7.7).

In response, God tells Moses that he will again be good to his people. He promises enough manna for their daily needs and double provision on the sixth day in order that they may imitate the Lord's creation pattern and rest on the Sabbath. Two reasons are given: first, in this way God will test (cf. 15.26) Israel to see if she will obey his law (the use of the torah word suggests that he is not only testing whether they will obey his instructions about the manna, but whether they will obey the law that he will reveal to Moses on Sinai); second, each morning's provision will be a further demonstration of the Lord's glory – God remains committed to revealing Himself to his people so that they might know Him as their rescuing Lord (v6, cf. 6.7; 7.5,17; 10.2; 11.7; 14.4, 18).

b. God provides Manna, 16.10-15a

The Lord responds to the grumbling of his people by graciously revealing his glory to them, and supplying them with both a one-off feast of quail, and daily provision of manna, once again with the aim that the people 'will know that I am the Lord your God' (v12). Surely they will get the message of the Lord's faithfulness to his promises and goodness to his people this time?

c. Manna and its gathering: some disobey the voice of the Lord, 16.15b-20

The Lord provided, and initially at least the Israelites obeyed the Lord's instructions: no-one took more than their allotted amount, but neither did anyone go without. Manna was never to be stored overnight – partly perhaps to prevent disease, but especially to teach a daily dependence on the Lord – 'give us this day our *daily* bread'. Some did not 'diligently listen to the voice of the Lord their God' (15.26), and thereby failed again the test of the Lord and angered his servant.

d. Manna and the Sabbath: some disobey the voice of the Lord, 16.21-30

As hinted in 16.5, the sixth day (immediately before the Sabbath, 16.23) brought with it double provision from the Lord – each gathered two omers but ate only one, and this time, the remainder did not go off. The Israelites were not to go out and collect on the Sabbath, but were to dedicate the day to the Lord their God instead. Needless to say, however, some chose yet again to ignore the voice of the Lord. This time it is not Moses but the Lord Himself who is exasperated by their errant behaviour, prompting Him to ask Moses how long his people would continue to refuse to keep his commandments (16.28).

Given that the purpose of the Lord's provision of manna was to test the Israelites to see if they would obey his law (16.4), their repeated failure to do so is designed to leave us as readers as exasperated as the Lord Himself. But as we point the finger at the Israelites' faithless disobedience, we should be very aware of three fingers pointing back at us.

e. Manna and the future: evidence of God's faithfulness preserved, 16.31-36

Douglas Stuart writes, 'That a sample of manna should be kept with the ark, in the holy of holies of the tabernacle, was a major step of commemoration indeed. The holy of holies contained only one item of furniture: the ark, also called the ark of the testimony... a box symbolising the very presence of God Himself. For a jar of manna to be kept there gave the manna a prominence above many other objects... which were excluded from the holy of holies by the tabernacle's inner curtain' (*Exodus*, p384). Stuart's observation gives some indication of the necessity for the Israelites to remember the Lord's gracious and faithful provision for them in the wilderness years.

3. Grumbling at Rephidim and the Lord's miraculous provision, 17.1-7

God continued to lead his people by the pillar of cloud / fire and in time brought them to Rephidim, where once again there was a shortage of water. Fortunately, by this stage in her growth Israel has learned that the Lord can be trusted in such circumstances, and therefore the people hold a prayer meeting... or not! In 'quarrelling' with Moses (v2), the people are in fact 'testing the Lord.' Testing the Lord always involves some degree of doubt about the faithfulness and goodness of God.

What Moses should have done was remind the people again of the goodness of God (as at 16.6-8); what he in fact did was to demonstrate that he did not trust God to be good to him either (he was more concerned with his own safety than faithfulness to God – an exact parallel with the rest of the Israelites). As a result, Scripture remembers this episode as a rebellion not only of Israel (Numbers 20.13, 24; 27.14; Deuteronomy 6.16; 9.22; 33.8; Psalm 81.7; 95.8; 106.32; Hebrews 3.8), but also of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 27.14; 20.24; Deuteronomy 32.51; Psalm 106.32).

Once again, the Lord responded to the faithlessness of his people with a miraculous demonstration of his faithfulness to them. Moses had used his staff to unleash some of the plagues against Egypt (e.g. 9.23; 10.13), and also to divide the Red Sea (14.16) – now, at the Lord's command, he uses it to strike a rock that will flow with all the water that the people need.

Thus the Lord's faithfulness is again set in contrast to the faithlessness of his people. Massah ('testing') and Meribah ('quarrelling') are appropriate names for the place of the rock – for here the Israelites had the gall to question whether the Lord was actually among them! his presence was obvious at all times (and even as they asked the question!) through the pillar of fire / smoke; they had seen boundless evidence of his help for them both in the Exodus and in the wilderness ever since – and yet, they doubted his presence. Surely, even when times are tough, no-one who

has ever experienced the rescuing and providing power of God could ever even come close to doubting his love and goodness in this way?

4. The faithful Lord is among his people to defend them, 17.8-16

The final episode in this unit answers the question of 17.7 and confirms the truth that has been taught throughout: even despite the faithlessness of his people, the Lord remains a faithful God who will act for his people to deliver upon his promises to them.

The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Gen 36.12) and initiated battle with the Israelites in 17.8. In response, Moses instructed Joshua to find some men who could go to battle for Israel, while he stood (presumably at the Lord's command) on the hill with his staff in hand as a symbol of God's presence with his people during battle. [There has been a close identification between the staff / hand of Moses and the Lord Himself throughout Exodus – in 7.17 God even said that Moses staff was in his own (God's) hand.]

During the battle itself, the fortunes of Israel were tied to the position of Moses' hands – when his hands were lowered, Amalek seized the advantage, but when they were raised (even with the help of Aaron and Hur) the Lord gave to Israel the advantage (v12). 'This verse does not teach the efficacy of 'prayer without ceasing' but rather the fact that Israelite holy war was God's war' (Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, p398). As Andrew Sach and Richard Alldritt write, 'The point is clear, and it ought to be sinking in by now. Yahweh is with his people; he never leaves them. He is utterly faithful.' The altar built by Moses would confirm the truth to future generations: the Lord is the banner of his people – and will destroy all who dare oppose his purposes.

[The new atheists like to mock the 'genocidal tendencies' of God and cite verses like these as proof of their case. There is no time here for a full treatment of the subject here but note a few things: i. This particular battle was initiated by the Amalekites themselves (17.8) – presumably Messrs Dawkins and Hitchens would defend their family if they were attacked; ii. The Amalekites are not themselves sinless but a vicious and blood-thirsty group of idolaters who deserve the Lord's judgement. It has been kind of God to delay the day of 17.13, but the day of his judgement will always come; iii. The destruction of God's enemies in time in the OT is meant to warn us of the greater destruction that will come on His enemies at the end of time.]

Application

'These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction...' (1 Corinthians 10.11)

1. The folly of faithlessness

The Israelites present a classic example of how not to relate to God within this text. They enjoyed astonishing spiritual privilege; they witnessed copious evidence of the Lord's goodness to them personally, and yet still they doubted Him. Worse, they tested Him and failed repeatedly to listen diligently to His voice (15.26). Their failure shows us the great folly of our own faithlessness. We enjoy enormous privileges – far greater than Israel's, for in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. But when circumstances look unfavourable, we can be every bit as quick to doubt God's goodness to us. Jesus only once rebukes His disciples for a lack of faith in Luke's gospel – it is when they doubt their Father in heaven's goodness (Luke 12.28).

What does 'grumbling' look like at St Helen's? It must be more than complaining about the music; what does it look like for us to test the Lord? What is the relationship between grumbling and obedience? How does a grumbling spirit manifest itself when our food and drink come from the supermarket rather than the sky? In what ways are we tempted to be dissatisfied with the provision that the Lord has made for us in His Son, the bread of life?

2. The faithfulness of the Lord

Repetition is a good way to teach those who are slow to learn. This unit repeats the lesson in at least 6 different ways that the Lord is a God who is faithful to His people. In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and by His Spirit, he really is 'among us' (17.7). The death and resurrection of Christ are the supreme examples of the Lord's faithfulness to His people, but what further evidences of the Lord's faithfulness can you point to from your own life? How practically can we learn to be better at trusting the Lord and turning to Him in prayer when unfavourable circumstances come our way?

Aim Learn from the faithlessness of the Israelites and trust that the Lord is good to His people.

Exodus 18.1–27

Introduction and context

Chapter 18 summarises and draws to a close the first major section of Exodus in which God has revealed Himself as **the Lord who delivers**. The section opened with Moses' own Exodus from Egypt in 2.11-22 – a rescue which prefigured the rescue that all God's people have now experienced. Intriguingly, as the section closes, Jethro, Zipporah and Gershom (who featured in the account of Moses' exodus) now reappear – thus bracketing the section and reminding us of its major theme. In 2.23-25, the Lord heard the groaning of His people and remembered the covenant that he had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he has been working ever since to *deliver* His people from slavery in Egypt. Now Jethro reappears on the scene and praises God for the *deliverance* he has wrought – Jethro (a Midianite!) thus functions as a model of how readers should respond to the first section of the book. As he does so, he stands in stark contrast to the threefold grumbling unbelief of the Israelites themselves that we observed in the last study: we are already being encouraged to wonder who exactly is a member of *true Israel*.

In addition, we will see that Jethro also anticipates the theme of the second major section of the book in which God is revealed as **the Lord who demands** (chapters 19–24).

Finally (as Peter Enns points out on p367 of his commentary), Jethro's encounter with Moses in 18.1-11 stands in deliberate contrast to Moses' encounter with the Amalekites in 17.8-16:

- In 17.8, the Amalekites *came* and *fought*; in 18.5-7, Jethro *came* and *greeted*.
- In 17.9 and in 18.25, both encounters result in men being *chosen* for a specific task – warfare against God's enemies and the governance of His people.
- In 17.12 Moses *sits* on a stone; in 18.13 he *sits* to judge.
- Both activities start on the *next day* (17.9; 18.13) and last *all day* (17.12; 18.13-14).
- In 17.12 and 18.18 Moses is *tired* and provided with assistance.

The point is that although the people of the nations will respond differently to the Lord and His people, the sovereign Lord rules over them all. He will work either to destroy the nations or to bless them, according to their response to Him.

Structure

Chapter 18 serves as a bridge between the first 2 sections of Exodus – with verses 1-12 summarising what has happened in chapters 1-18, and verses 13-27 anticipating what will happen in chapters 19-24.

18.1-12	Jethro praises God as the Lord who delivers
18.13-27	Jethro anticipates the need for the law of the Lord

This point is strengthened when we realise that chapter 18 is placed by the author out of chronological sequence. The events of chapter 18 take place 'at the mountain of God' (18.5), but Moses and the Israelites do not actually reach the mountain until 19.2. It is most likely that Jethro's meeting with Moses happens some time after chapter 24 (how else does Jethro know which offerings to bring?), but it is recorded here because the chapter both rounds off the first major section of the book (chapters 1-18) and introduces the need for the second major section of the book (chapters 19-24).

Text notes

1. Jethro praises God as the Lord who delivers, 18.1–11

a. Jethro's conversion

Verse 1 announces the reason that Jethro is reintroduced into the story – he has heard ‘how the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt.’ The Lord's deliverance of His people has clearly made a big impression on Jethro, for it leads the Midianite priest into a personal confession of faith in Yahweh. He highlights two distinct aspects of the Lord's work as the reason for his conversion:

i. The deliverance of God's people

The encounter between Moses and Jethro is the occasion for a happy family reunion, but it is much more than that. It is the account of the way that the Lord's work of rescue of His own people led to the conversion of a Midianite priest. One feature of the narrative is the way that the word ‘*delivered*’ is emphasised by repetition in verse 8, verse 9 and twice in verse 10; we are also told for the first time in verses 4 about Moses’ second son Gershom whose name means ‘The God of my father was my help and *delivered* me from the sword of Pharaoh.’

As Jethro heard about the Lord's goodness (v9) in preserving Moses’ own life from the hand of Pharaoh, and especially in delivering all His people from servitude to the Egyptians, he was not just happy that his son-in-law was safe; rather, he found himself caught up in the same song of praise to the Lord that Moses himself had modelled in chapter 15.

ii. The destruction of the Egyptian gods

The wording of verse 11 is interesting: ‘Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, *because* in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.’ Jethro is saying that he was persuaded to put his own trust in Yahweh not only because of His goodness to His people, but also *because* of the fate of the Egyptian gods who dared to oppose Him. We have already been told that the plague of the firstborn was an act of judgement on the gods of Egypt (12.12), and heard Moses praising God for His great superiority over all other ‘gods’ (15.11). Now we learn that the Lord's demonstration of His incomparable power was of evangelistic benefit as well. [See *Dig Even Deeper* for helpful comments on the translation of verse 11.]

We should not miss the significance of the moment – the Lord had promised that His purpose for Israel would prove a blessing to all the nations of the world (Genesis 12.1-3). We have already met some ‘word-of-the-Lord-fearing’ servants of Pharaoh (9.20), and observed a ‘mixed multitude’ leaving Egypt in the Exodus (12.38), and noted provision for ‘strangers’ to share in future Passovers (12.48), but now a Midianite priest, possibly the high priest, has come to *know* the Lord personally (as the Lord anticipated in 9.16).

b. Jethro's response

Three aspects of Jethro's response are highlighted: first, he rejoiced that God had been kind to the Israelites (v9); second, he actively praised God for His kindness to them (v10); third, he brought sacrifices of praise to God (v12). This last point is especially significant, for it was for the express purpose of making a sacrifice to the Lord that the Exodus happened (5.3) – yet here we are, several chapters after the Exodus and the first person to make a sacrifice to the Lord is a former Midianite priest – a baby believer... so much for the ‘belief’ of the Israelites in 14.31! Specifically, Jethro offers ‘a burnt offering and sacrifices’ (18.12): Leviticus 1 suggests that these offerings

could well have included an atonement offering – has the Midianite priest learned not only of the Israelites' past need for redemption from Egypt but of all humanity's on-going need to be rescued from God's wrath?

Either way, Jethro stands as a model for the way that readers of Exodus are supposed to be responding to the Lord at this stage of the narrative.

2. Jethro anticipates the need for the law of the Lord, 18.13-27

On one level, the remainder of the chapter is relatively straightforward. Moses finds the burden of adjudicating in every Israelite civil dispute overwhelming; Jethro recommends a hierarchical judicial system with Moses at the top of the pyramid and other less-qualified judges below him; Jethro's system is adopted, and works well.

The question then is, why did the author of Exodus feel the need to record 15 verses of basic management consultancy at this stage in the narrative? The answer is that the episode is a microcosm of Israel's need for the next phase of her growth. She has been redeemed from slavery so that she might know the Lord – but if the only person who has access to the Lord's will is Moses, then how will Israel ever be able to function effectively as a nation state? Apart from anything else, the burden on Moses would be far too great (18.18). What is needed therefore is for the Lord to give a comprehensive and public revelation of His will in order that His redeemed people might know how to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Chapters 19-24 meet that need.

Application

1. Be like Jethro

Jethro stands as a model of how the Lord wants people from every nation to respond to His work of deliverance. Persuaded of the power and superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrated in His death and resurrection, we are to *rejoice* in all that the Lord has done (see, for example, Romans 5.2; Philippians 3.1; 4.4; 1 Thessalonians 5.16; 1 Peter 1.8). Further, we are to *praise* God for all that he has done for His people (see for example the paeon of praise that is found in Ephesians 1.3-14). Finally, and in view of God's mercy, we are to '*offer our bodies as a living sacrifice*' to God – every part of our life and person dedicated to pleasing Him.

Give some time to meditating on each of these three responses to the Lord's work of salvation:

- **How is your joy?** David prayed, 'Restore to me the *joy* of your salvation' (Psalm 51.12). The work of Jesus is more than a series of coherent concepts that stimulate the mind – it is a work of rescue that overflows in joy. Different believers at different times from different places will demonstrate this joy differently, but joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit – evidence of the Lord's work in someone's life. If the gospel is not causing you to rejoice at the moment, ask yourself why not. Are you seeking joy somewhere else?
- **How is your praise?** We commented in chapter 15 that praise is a hallmark of the Christian faith. Make a list of 10 different aspects of the Lord's work of deliverance, wrought in pain on the cross, and spend some time deliberately praising Him for each one. David sang,

‘Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...’ (Psalm 103.1-2).

- **How is your sacrifice?** I know that it would be hard to *give* my life as a sacrifice for the LORD; but I find it every bit as hard to *live* my life as a sacrifice for the Lord. The more clearly I understand the mercy of God, demonstrated in the cross-work of Christ, the more I will offer my body as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable to Him (Romans 12.1). Are there parts of my body that are not currently being offered to Jesus? Are there parts of my life that I cling to as my own? Are there sins that I am refusing to confront?

2. Be like God – but not yet!

This is not a major line of application just yet, but the hint is there. The Lord has already given certain commands to Israel (e.g. 15.26 and the regulations about Manna in chapter 16) – soon He will make a comprehensive disclosure of His will to them. God’s redeemed people are to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord (cf. Ephesians 4.1).

3. Be like Moses – but not always!

Moses is a prophet of God and the means of God’s deliverance – he is not therefore a model for us in everything. However, it has already been made clear to us that God’s mighty deeds are to be declared to future generations (10.2), to Joshua (17.14), and to ‘all the earth’ (9.16). And in chapter 18, Moses exemplifies the role that will later be given to all believers (e.g. Matthew 28.18-20; Luke 9.60; Acts 2.17-18) by telling Jethro, at the time a Midianite priest, of all that the Lord had done. Praise God that we have a part to play in the same great work today.

Aim Respond to God’s work of deliverance in joy, praise and self-sacrifice.

Exodus 19.1-20.21

Introduction and context

The second major section of the book begins, approximately seven weeks after the Exodus (see 19.1 “The third new moon” after the Exodus) with the fulfilment of the promise made in 3.12 that Moses would return to the mountain where God himself dwells. This “sign” serves to demonstrate to Moses that God is truly with them, something which has been in evidence for much of the previous section. This second section – **The Lord who demands** (chapters 19-24) - and indeed the third section – **the Lord who dwells** (chapters 25-40) - are both built on the foundations of the narrative of the first section – **The Lord who delivers** (chapters 1-18). Both in the opening preamble to the covenant (19.1-6) and in the words which immediately precede the Ten Commandments at the heart of the covenant (20.2), the Lord reminds the people of exactly what he has done for them in redeeming and rescuing them from Egypt. These events should leave the people in no doubt as to their special status as God’s people and what will follow by way of law code only serves to emphasise that fact.

The immediately preceding context to this section is the meeting with Jethro (though it appears as if chronologically speaking this meeting took place after the arrival at the mountain – see 18.5), where an appropriate system of adjudication was put in place. Everything is set now for the redeemed people of God to begin to live out their identity as God’s chosen people. All they need now is instruction on how to do that.

Structure:

19.1-2: Date and location

19.3-6: The rescuing God of the covenant outlines the terms of the covenant

19.7-8a: The people promise to obey

19.8b-25: The terrifying presence of the Lord descends

20.1-17: The ten commandments

20.18-21: The terrifying presence of the Lord creates obedience

Text notes:

1. The covenant God outlines the terms of the covenant, 19:1-8a

As the people gather at Mt Sinai, Moses ascends the mountain for the first time and the Lord addresses him there. He will continue to act as a mediator between God and the people. The message that God gives to Moses serves as something of a distillation of the book as a whole.

First he looks back and reminds Moses of everything he has done for his people in bringing them to this point (see Deuteronomy 32.10-11 for a fuller use of the “eagle’s wings” metaphor). He has judged their enemies and saved them in the process. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has truly remembered his covenant with them (2.24; 3.6; 3.15, 16; 4.5; 6.3,8).

With this relationship between God and his people clearly established the Lord goes on to outline what life in this covenant relationship will look like. Simply put, if the people obey the covenant terms that God is about to lay out, they will enjoy all the blessings of being God’s people and will in turn then bless the nations. There is no suggestion here that the people will in some way earn the Lord’s favour by their obedience – they are already clearly enjoying the Lord’s favour before this covenant has even been ratified – rather, their obedience to this covenant will mark them out and enable them to enjoy all the implications of their relationship with the Lord. The Lord then gives some hints as to exactly what those blessing might be:

- “...*my treasured possession*”: The Lord’s election of the sons of Israel is already manifest, but this title gives the people a deeper understanding of that state of affairs. Whilst every nation of the earth belongs to the Lord, Israel will enjoy being the nation that the Lord will love above all. The statement evokes a sense of a King who owns everything (“...all the earth is mine.”) but has set his affections on a particular item. As Alec Motyer states, they will be the Lord’s “personal treasure.”
- “...*a kingdom of priests*”: This image speaks firstly of a special access to God that Israel will enjoy collectively, something that they enjoy now to an extent but which will be particularly worked through in the third major section of the book. Secondly it speaks of a ministry that Israel will ideally fulfil to the nations around them. Exactly what this priestly function is, is not clear at this point, but it is in continuity with God’s covenant with Abraham through which “*all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” (Gen 12:3)
- “...*a Holy nation*”: This third title bestowed on the people of Israel communicates their distinctive identity when compared with the nations around them. They will be “set apart” for God’s purposes as they live out the terms of the covenant that the Lord is about to lay out. At the same time however it speaks of the fact that, as these people live out this covenant, so they will become like their God who is himself Holy. The Law which is to be followed teaches the people what God is like and as his people they are to become like him.

Moses heads down the mountain and calls together the representatives of the people and reports to them what God has said. Although the formal ratification of the covenant is still to come, the people respond whole-heartedly that they will obey the Lord. Whilst we know that this obedience will prove short lived, tragically culminating in a total loss of all the blessing outlined above centuries later (see e.g. Hosea 1:9 – “you are not my people and I am not your God) we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the people at this point.

2. The frightening God produces fearless fear, 19.8b-25 and 20.18-21

Having laid the ground for the establishment of this covenant the Lord then promises to draw near to the people such that they can hear him speaking with Moses. This will vindicate Moses as the mediator between the Lord and the people, something which will prove necessary after the people encounter the living God for themselves (see 20:19)!

The unapproachable God... (19.9b-15 and 19.21-25)

Both before (19.9b-15) and after (19.21-25) the Lord descends on the mountain he is at pains to stress the need for the people to be purified. Before he comes down he demands that the people be consecrated, washed and that they abstain from sexual relations (see 1 Corinthians 7:5 to make sense of this). Even after he comes down he tells Moses to make sure that the priests who might draw near consecrate themselves. A pure God cannot be near impure people without consuming them. Not only must they purify themselves, but even in their purified state they must keep their distance. Before he descends, the Lord demands that limits be set around his mountain and that the people be warned not to touch it. Should they touch it they “shall not live” whoever they are. Again, even after he descends, the Lord reiterates the warning to both the people and subsequently the priests that they must not “break through” the limits, lest the Lord “break out” against them.

This bracketing of the descent of the Lord on both sides with extensive requirements of distance and purity serves to highlight the fact that this God is not to be trifled with. The people of Israel in their natural state cannot come near without dire consequences. He is truly unapproachable.

...approaches (19.16-20 and 20.18-21).

All of this makes it all the more remarkable therefore that the Lord does draw near, by descending onto the mountain. Despite his transcendent unapproachability the Lord does want to be with his people. Even then however this nearness is a terrifying experience for the people. Either side of the giving of the Ten Commandments we are told about the thunder, lightning, smoke and trumpet sound (not to mention the cloud and mountain trembling that are also mentioned in 19:17-18) that mark the arrival of the Lord. It is a truly terrifying experience and in both sections we are told that the people themselves “trembled” and then in the second section they ask that they be spared the experience of listening to the voice of God themselves again.

Whilst this reaction of the people is understandable and correct to a certain extent, none-the-less Moses commands the people, “Do not fear..” (20:20). What are we to make of this? The people need to understand that whilst the Lord is a consuming fire his intention is not to consume them. Quite the opposite, his intention is to draw near and be with them. He will be their God and they will be his people. So, whilst the Lord cannot be approached without his gracious initiative, he is still a God of grace. Having said that, Moses goes on to state that there is a healthy fear (*Dig Even Deeper* describes this helpfully as a “think-twice-before-you-sin fear,” p108) of the Lord and the aim of these events and their retelling has been to produce that fear in the people. Before he gives the Ten Commandments the Lord's intention has been to produce the right attitude in his people – a right fear of him that issues in obedience. By this stage in the narrative the people should be clear on exactly who this God is that they have relationship with and what that relationship is beginning to look like.

3. The rescuing God delivers the content of the covenant, 20.1-17.

By now the people are ready to receive the Ten Commandments. Even then however, before he gives the “ten words”, the Lord reminds the people of the gracious rescue that has brought them to this point. Knowing the propensity of the human heart towards self-justification, the Lord underpins these Ten Commandments with his gracious initiative, “I brought you out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” This gracious initiative is in turn the fruit of who God is – “I am the Lord...” as he has been revealing himself thus far.

The Ten Commandments

This is not the place for a lengthy exposition of the Ten Commandments, but it is worth making some observations.

The commandments constitute a comprehensive ethical system. Whilst some seem narrow in their application (no adultery – at first glance a commandment limited to marriage) and others more broad (no theft – at first glance a commandment that can be widely applied) the rest of the Bible, not least the case law which is to follow, seems to expound them all both broadly and narrowly. What God is giving the people here is therefore a comprehensive ethical system. This makes sense when we consider that these commandments are an expression of the character of the Lord who has revealed them. He is the God who made everything and rules over everything and so the Law which reveals him and how to live life in his world will always be comprehensive in scope. For Israel, this revelation of the Lord constitutes a huge step forward in their knowledge of him.

The order of the commandments is noteworthy in as much as the first four have behaviour towards the Lord as their reference point, whilst the last six are more to do with behaviour towards ones neighbour – Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbour as yourself. Whilst this distinction is a helpful one it would be wrong to drive a wedge between the two sections. After all, wrong behaviour towards God always issues in wrong behaviour towards others, and wrong behaviour towards others never occurs without an abandonment of right behaviour towards God first. None the less it is useful to note this ordering to help us understand the priority of relating rightly towards God if people are to relate rightly towards one another.

Lastly we should note that within some of the commandments are contained promises of blessing or curse dependent on obedience or disobedience. Whilst God had bound himself to the children of Abraham through his covenant in Genesis 12-17, none the less the obedience of his people matters profoundly. They cannot expect to ignore the God of the covenant and enjoy his continued blessing but if they obey then blessing will follow. The implication of all of this for the future is profound. The New Creation is a place where all of the blessings promised in the covenant with Moses will be fully enjoyed and so we must conclude that we will all live perfectly in accord with these commandments by God’s transforming work in us. Whilst there will be differences (The New Creation constitutes the perfect fulfilment of the Sabbath day for example – Hebrews 4:1-9), we get a glimpse through these commandments of how we will live in God’s perfect future world.

Application

The grounds of the Christian life:

The ordering of this section is essential for understanding the Christian life. Just as God moves towards Israel out of grace first, before he demands anything of them, so too God moves towards people today, in Jesus Christ before he demands obedience of us. Like Israel we have nothing to

offer God and require his rescuing redemption in order to enjoy being his people. Now we truly are his people however. The New Testament wants to apply the tag of “holy nation,” “royal priesthood” and “a people for his own possession” to the church (1 Peter 2:9), and so we have that wonderful privilege today. In light of this, the Lord expects us to live out the life of faith, a response of love for Jesus (Romans 12:1; Eph 5:1; Titus 2:11-12). If we get this ordering wrong we will always end up in a dangerous place. The Ten Commandments help us to see our sin in all its depth, but they also point us to the perfectly righteous life that Jesus Christ lived and that is given to us when we put our trust in him. Once we have that status, then we are empowered to live out the life that the commandments outline for us. It’s crucial then that we remember that we have been redeemed, like Israel was, in order to know AND serve the Lord. Many today are happy to speak about their relationship with Jesus, but are slow to obey His commands. But true love of Jesus will show itself in obedience to Him (e.g. John 14.15). We do not obey in order that we might know Him but our relationship with Him works itself out in obedience to Him. Christians will disagree on some of the details for how the commandments are to be applied for the New Testament believer, but given that the New Testament reaffirms explicitly nine of the ten commandments (the 4th commandment concerning Sabbath is not explicitly restated), they constitute an excellent place to start.

The God of the Christian life:

Much of this section is given over to demonstrating how frightening God is, whilst also wanting to assure us that we need not fear him. God has not changed and so our approach to him should be informed by what we see here (see also Luke 12.5). Christ has achieved for us perfect access to God that means that we can approach him with deep confidence and no fear of recrimination or reprisal. Whenever we sin we can come back to him. Whenever we have need we can come to him in prayer. Whenever we doubt we can come to him with our questions. But the manner in which we come will be determined by the portrait of God we see here. We should always come reverently and in awe. If the church in previous generations was guilty of presenting a God who was distant and unapproachable, it might be the case that today we have domesticated God somewhat. This in turn can sometimes work itself out in a relaxed attitude to sin and many would be surprised to hear talk of fearing God as a motivation to avoid sin. These verses encourage us though to pause and consider the fearful God when we are tempted to reject his rules and to remember just how terrified the people of Israel were. Would we do some of the things we do if had that image of God at the forefront of our minds? The Lord is not a benevolent, docile old uncle who cares little about our misdemeanours and so we should cultivate a healthy fear of God that issues in obedience. As the writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and fear.” (Heb 12:28)

Aim: “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” Exodus 20.20

Exodus 20.22-23.33

Introduction and context

Much of the theological groundwork for understanding the current section has been laid in our previous section. The people of God have been reminded that their status as his people is on the basis of his gracious promise and rescue (19.1-6). Their promised obedience to his commands is the outworking of his promise to them that they will be a “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and that obedience has been further stimulated by the terrifying presence of the Lord, on top of the mountain (20.20). So terrifying has been the presence of the Lord, that Moses now acts again as mediator between the Lord and his people, at the request of the people (20.19), and our last section ended with Moses drawing near to “the thick darkness where God was.” The upshot of all of this is that the people are ready to receive “the book of the covenant” (24:7), a document that must contain at least the contents of our section, but probably the Ten Commandments as well. And so our section begins with the Lord speaking directly to Moses with a message for the people.

Structure

Commentators largely disagree on the details of the structure of this section, but agree on why that should be the case! The reason for this is that once we get into the details of “the rules” (21:1), it becomes quite hard to draw neat lines between sections. For example, whilst there are clear sections at the beginning and end of “the rules” which speak to the religious life of Israel (20.22-26 and 23.10-19), there are also relevant commandments scattered throughout (see e.g. 22.18, 20, 29-30). Also, any attempt to categorise sections with reference to the Ten Commandments shows that, whilst there might be some broad patterns, there is no simple delineation and all of the commandments are brought to bear at different points. This irregularity, in and of itself, points us to something of the nature of this collection of laws, that being that it is not a neat and tidy, comprehensive legal statute book, but we will say more on this in due course. There are, however, certain major sections that seem to stand out, even if some of the precise details within the sections don’t always fit neatly.

20.22-23.19 The Law will prescribe the way for life in the land

20.22-26 Right worship: No idolatry and right sacrifice

21.1-11 Responsibility towards slaves

21.12-22.20 Criminal justice:

21.12-27: Humans injuring humans

21.28-36: Animals injuring humans or each other

22.1-17: Concerning matters of property

22.18-20: Concerning religious behaviour

22.21-23.9 Responsibility towards the vulnerable

23.10-19 Right worship: Sabbath observance and Festival celebration

23.20-33 The Lord will prepare the way for life in the land

Text notes

1. The Law will prescribe for life in the land: 20.22-23.19

Before diving into some of the details of “the rules” that the Lord gives to his people it is worth making some preliminary points to help us understand them rightly:

- These rules are given post-redemptively. We’ve said it before, but given that the LORD wants to re-iterate it at the beginning of our section (20.22 – at least by implication!) it’s probably worth saying again. These are not the means to entering into relationship with God. They are the means to enjoying that relationship.
- These rules are given in a specific context:
 - For life in a specific place at a specific moment in history. This means that most of the laws will have an historical flavour to them in keeping with the fact that the people are about to move into a specific piece of land around the year 1450 B.C. They are not therefore timeless instructions, but a law code for a particular moment. We should also bear in mind that the land would still be inhabited upon entry, and would not be free of the nations for a while after the people enter (see the Lord’s plan for a delayed removal in 23.29-30). This means that the people will be exposed to many of the erroneous religious practices of the nations around them and certain parts of the legislation is there to keep them from going that way (see 23.33). This certainly seems to explain why boiling a young goat in its mother’s milk (23.19b) – a fertility practice of the nations already in the land – might be forbidden.
 - For people with sinful hearts. Jesus recognises this state of affairs when commenting on the divorce legislation from Deuteronomy in Mark 10:1-12. His point there is that the Lord often legislates to deal with situations that are not ideal. This does not legitimise, prescribe or in any way condone those situations, but demonstrates that the Lord speaks into our sin scarred world. Understanding this gives us insight into some of this legislation, e.g. laws on slavery and compensation for pre-marital sex with someone’s daughter.
- These rules are not exhaustive. A moment’s thought will reveal that this collection does not cover every conceivable situation. This fact gives us a hint as to the nature of the Law itself though, showing us various ways that the Ten Commandments can be applied into various areas of life – a task that will fall to Moses and the other elders.
- These rules reveal the character of the Lord. Just as the Ten Commandments show us what the Lord is really like, so too these out-workings of those Commandments will help Israel and us better know the Lord.
- These rules are given before the life and death of Christ. This fact will make all the difference to how we view these rules, but we will save that discussion for application.

Right worship: 20.22-26 and 23.11-19

The Lord begins this section (which strictly speaking falls before he starts to give the rules) reminding the people of the events of chapters 19-20, and particularly the fact that they have heard him speak from heaven. This makes sense when we consider the importance of those events for generating a right response to the covenant stipulations that he is about to outline. In v.23 he gives a “reiteration of the first two commandments” (Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p441), which

serves to reinforce the point that the people have experienced first-hand at the foot of the mountain: The Lord is the only God worthy of worship and he is therefore to be obeyed.

It is striking that he then moves on to legislate in the area of sacrifice and altars (vv.24-26). Whilst the full details of the sacrificial code will be worked out in Leviticus, this serves as a powerful reminder that the life of Israel is dependent upon sacrifice for sin and worked out in sacrificial thanksgiving. Redemption that leads to obedience. It is difficult to work out the significance of the precise details of how the altar should be constructed, but Douglas Stuart is helpful in suggesting that they are constructed in such a way that all the glory goes to God (rather than the artisan who hews the stones v.25), and without risk of unbecoming exposure of the priest at the altar. This may well represent another move away from the more sexual priestly activities of the pagan nations of the land.

This section (20.22-26) is then mirrored with a final section that also legislates for the religious life of Israel (23.10-19). The focus here is on Sabbath (vv.10-12) and then the festivals (vv.13-19) Israel are to celebrate. Given that Sabbath represents something of the goal of creation – a remembrance of the “rest” that God enjoyed at the end of his creation (see the 4th commandment, Exodus 20.8-11) – this seems a fitting penultimate note to this collection of rules. The final note, however, is reserved for legislation concerning the festivals. In their different ways each of these festivals serves to remind the people of their dependence upon God and the right response of whole-hearted worship, the note on which this collection started. This topping and tailing of the section with a focus on the “religious” life of Israel reiterates the functional priority of the first four commandments for shaping the whole life of Israel. To deduce some kind of sacred secular distinction on the back of this would be false however, not least because of the interspersing of this kind of legislation throughout the section, but also because of the evident relationship between one’s relationship with the Lord and one’s relationship with his people.

Social responsibility: 21.1-11 and 22.21-23.9

Both of these sections are characterised by an absence of recommended punishment for disobedience, something which characterises all of the legislation between these two sections. They also both draw on Israel’s previous experience in Egypt, either explicitly or by implication. Peter Enns makes the point that the Lord starts his social legislation with rules about slavery (21.1-11) because Israel’s “first thought should be to take great care not to do what Egypt had done to them.” (Enns, *Exodus*, p443) This motivation is made explicit, twice in the second of our sections (22.21-23.9) in 22.21 and 23.9, verses which top and tail this particular mini-section. Whilst slavery is the topic of the first section (see previous comments on the presence of slavery legislation and comments in *Dig Even Deeper*, pp.116-118) both sections are pervaded with a strong sense of the love and concern that Israel is to have for the weak among them, especially in contrast with the practices of the nations around them. Justice is paramount and the Lord is especially concerned that the weak receive justice and compassion. This legislation appears to be a very natural outworking of the character of a God who has already redeemed a helpless enslaved people.

Criminal justice: 21.12-22.20

This section is held together by the fact that all the legislation outlines a consequence for failure to observe. As the suggested structure (above) suggests there are broad divisions, but the question is what do we learn about the God behind the legislation and his concern for how his people live. Firstly, that he is a God of justice. There is an equity to this legislation that shows that not only will

God not let wickedness pass, but that he will punish it justly. It is in this collection, for example, that we find the *lex talionis* (21.24). Secondly we see that the Lord has a concern for people over animals and property. Not only does the legislation concerning people come first suggesting priority, but the punishments for injuring people are much more severe than for injuring animals or damaging property. Lastly, note that this legislation shows us a God who knows. There is within this legislation a recognition of the complexities of life. We see differing levels of responsibility and guilt, differing outcomes to the same action, even differing intentions behind the same action represented here. The Lord is not aloof and distant from all of this. He knows everything about the mess of life and is able to deal with it.

2. The Lord will prepare the way for life in the land: 23.20-33

Having preceded this larger section of law with a reminder to the people of his faithfulness to them in bringing them to this point (19.4), the Lord closes off this collection with a promise that he will continue to go with them. The promise is that the Lord will go before his people through his angel (and his terror and his hornets!) and prepare the way for them. Not only that, but he will also provide for them in the land. Throughout the section the Lord demands covenant obedience from his people if they are to enjoy this blessing, both in obeying him (v.22) and in not making covenant with the nations and their Gods (v.32), but there is little doubt that the blessing is the consequence of his gracious faithfulness not theirs. The knowing reader cannot help but feel a twinge of sadness that the people never managed this kind of obedience, nor ever really enjoyed the kind of blessing promised (“None shall miscarry or be barren in your land”).

Application

1. The Christ of the Law

The prominence of the sacrificial system within this law code (beginning and end) and our knowledge of the failure of Israel to keep their part of the covenant both force us to look beyond this collection of rules. We know that, whilst it represents the perfect character of the Lord, it also stands as an historical testimony to the failure of the people of Israel. As Paul says, “The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.” (Romans 7.25). And so, knowing the perfect standards of the Lord, we are left as readers wondering whether anyone could meet these standards. Praise God for Jesus who not only perfectly observed all the festivals, gave release to the oppressed and never wronged anyone, but who also fulfilled the sacrificial system that propitiated God’s wrath for Israel. As we read through this collection we should be all the more amazed at the life and death of Jesus who came to fulfil this law (Matthew 5.17). Through him we are perfectly obedient to all the standards that God sets.

2. The Law of Christ

Jesus also states that “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18), and proceeds to outline standards of behaviour that draw on and resonate with the law code of Exodus. We must remember the contextual nature of this law code and work hard to see how Christ fulfils it (using his work and the New Testament as our filter), but the God who stands behind it is the same yesterday, today and forever and the Law as a category continues on into the New Testament (see e.g. Romans 13.8-10; 1 Corinthians 9.21, 14.34; 1 Timothy 1:8). It should come as no surprise to see that post our redemption this same God outlines standards of obedience that will, energised by the cross, issue from our loving relationship with him. As we catch this glimpse of what the Lord is like from his law, so we understand better how we should live.

Case studies: *Dig Even Deeper* provides several excellent worked examples of some of this material and its application for today but it's worth having a think about another case study or two.

What place a single mother at St Helen's? For the people of Israel, the widow or single mother (the parallels between a widow and single mother are not always exact but the principle seems to extend naturally enough) in their midst was someone vulnerable and in need of care and the same is true for the church today (see James 1.27). If we are to take seriously the Law, then we should be careful not to be those who wrong or mistreat a widow or her children. This might seem straightforward on the surface, but are we those who make an effort to talk to the mother who is in church on her own with a cluster of children, even though she's distracted and tired? Are we those who offer to babysit, or entertain her kids at church so that she can talk to others? Are we concerned for her and her family's well-being such that we are able to help her, or help her to access help if she is in need? If we take the Law seriously then we'll take care to take care of the vulnerable among us at St Helen's.

Are the poor as much a part of church as the rich? There was to be no hint of partiality among the people of Israel, especially not on the basis of wealth and the same is also true for the church (see James 2.1-13). On a Sunday we might sit side by side with someone of "lower standing" to us in society, but are we as inclined to invite them back for Sunday lunch as we are the people who are more like us? Are we as likely to introduce them to our friends or colleagues as we are to others? Would we consider helping to subsidise their attendance at a small group weekend away? Praise God that he shows us a community in which this kind of love and care is possible and that he forgives our previous failings.

Aim That we might know the standards of the LORD such that we look beyond ourselves for help in fulfilling their requirements.

Exodus 24

Introduction and context

Chapter 24 serves as the climax to the section we've been referring to as **The Lord who demands** (chapters 19-24). The terms of the covenant with Moses have been clearly outlined and the Lord has drawn near to the people (if you can call residing at the top of a mountain whilst the people stand at the bottom, near!) to deliver those terms. Now all that remains is for the covenant to be ratified, something that the people are keen to do. Their enthusiastic double-declaration of obedience, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do ... and we will be obedient" (24.3 and 7) is an almost exact repetition of their initial declaration back in 19.7, serving as a bookend to the larger section. However, whilst this section points backwards to all that has been laid out in the previous five chapters, the author's mind is clearly turning towards the next section, **The Lord who dwells** (25-40), as the section draws to a close with Moses heading up into the mountain and the presence of the Lord to receive not only the tablets of stone, but also the instructions for the tabernacle. The chapter as a whole serves therefore as something of a buffer zone between the two sections as the covenant is sealed and the presence of the Lord on the mountain shows the first signs of becoming the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle.

Structure:

The section seems best divided into two by the two calls of the Lord to Moses for him to join him on the mountain (v.1 and v.12). Whilst the first section (vv.1-11) draws heavily on what has gone before, serving as something of a climax to the larger section, the second section (vv.12-18) begins to point ahead as Moses is called to come and receive the tablets of stone, something which then takes place in 31.18.

24.1-11: The covenant is sealed by blood – the Elders approach God

- 1-2 Moses and Co called to approach
- 3 Declaration and response: obedience pledged
- 4-6 Formalization of the covenant
- 7-8 Reading and response: obedience pledged
- 9-11 Moses and Co approach¹

24.12-18: The Covenant will be mediated by Moses – he alone may approach God

Text notes:

1. The covenant is sealed by blood – the Elders approach God: 24.1-11

Moses is now in a position to approach the people with a completed covenant document. "All the words of the Lord and all the rules," (24.3) refers to the Ten Commandments (20.1) and the rest of the legislation (21.1) laid out in the previous chapters and is summed up with the title "the Book

¹ With thanks to Alec Motyer for this mini-structure (Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, p.248).

of the Covenant” (24.7). Whilst the legislation of the covenant is essential to understanding the covenant as a whole (see previous notes), and the obedience of the people essential to its ratification, the structure of this sub-section appears to put the emphasis somewhere else.

a. Consecration by blood

The middle part of the chiasm outlined above focuses in on the consecration of the people of Israel by the sacrifice of burnt and peace offerings and the sprinkling of blood. The people of Israel themselves are gathered, and represented by the twelve pillars that Moses constructs near to the altar and then sacrifices are offered on behalf of them all. These sacrifices are, in embryonic form, those which will be fleshed out more fully in the book of Leviticus and we know from Leviticus that burnt offerings represent both atonement being made between those offering the sacrifice and the Lord and whole-hearted devotion to God (See Leviticus 1.1-17) whilst peace offerings represent peace (see Leviticus 3.1-17). The blood is sprinkled on the altar first of all, representing the fact that “the primary need is that God should be satisfied” (Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, p.249) and after the people have declared their desire to obey the covenant they too have the blood thrown over them. Whilst this covering represents an application of the mercy of God to the people it also in turn represents their consecration for service of him. This distinctive process of marking out shows that the people are now set apart for service of the Lord (See 1 Peter 1:2). As the authors of *Dig Even Deeper* observe there is a “similar ritual associated with consecration to the priesthood” (Sach and Alldritt, *Dig Even Deeper*, 131), suggesting that the people of God are being corporately consecrated for service of the Lord – “a kingdom of priests” (19.6).

The centrality of this scene in the ratification of the covenant vividly demonstrates the need that the people have of a substitutionary sacrifice if they are to be acceptable to the Lord. No matter how sincere the intent of the people at this point, they need the gracious initiative of the Lord if they are to be his people.

b. Coming up to the Lord

The section starts with the call to Moses to approach the Lord with Aaron, Aaron’s sons and 70 elders of the people. The section then ends with exactly that taking place as they all head up the mountain to see God. This movement from the beginning to the end demonstrates the effectiveness (and lack of effectiveness? Read on!) of the sacrifices that have taken place in between. The events of vv.9-11 are truly remarkable when we consider the contrast with the events of 19.9b-25. Here is a group of Israelites standing on the mountain of the Lord, seeing him (for helpful comments on whether or not the people *actually* saw the Lord see *Dig Even Deeper*, p132. A distillation of their argument is that whilst the people did not actually set their eyes on God himself – see John 1:18 and Exodus 33:20 – what they saw of his surroundings and presence generally spoke of the Lord so powerfully that it was enough for them to say that they saw him), eating and drinking in celebration of the peace they have with the Lord. When we consider the warnings of the consequences for those who trod on the mountain before (19.12 and 19.21) the words, “he did not lay a hand on them” (24.11) are all the more amazing.

c. Close but no intimacy

All of that said, the narrative has a latent frustration attached to it, that being the fact that there is still a distance between the Lord and his people. Yes the elders are able to approach the Lord, but the people are still at the bottom seeing the Lord “like a devouring fire” (v.17). Yes the elders are able to approach the Lord, but they can only go half way and only Moses can fully enter the presence of the Lord. We know that the obedience of the people works out to be short-lived and

the tidy-minded will be wondering about the efficacy of an animal sacrifice in place of people (Hebrews 10.4), all of which suggests that there is something not quite there about this covenant. This is not to undermine the massive step that it represents in Israel's relationship with the Lord, but even now there appears room for improvement.

2. The Covenant will be mediated by Moses – he alone may approach God: 24.12-18

Moses is then called further up the mountain to receive the “tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment” and, as it transpires, the instructions for the tabernacle. The Lord who has delivered, will pass on instructions for his demands and his dwelling. The expectation is that Moses will be up the mountain for some time, as he not only takes his assistant Joshua with him (probably wise for a man in his eighties to take some help on a mountain climbing expedition!), but also establishes a judiciary to cover his absence. Once again Aaron and Hur will be his right and left hand man (see 17.12)! Certain features of this scene point forward to the tabernacle that Israel will construct in due course. The cloud and fire of the Lord dwell (the verbal form of the noun for tabernacle is used to describe the cloud taking up residence) atop the mountain in the same way as it will reside above the tabernacle at the grand finale of the book (40:38) and the tripartite division of the mountain (see vv.1-2 Moses near, the elders not near but on the mountain, and the people not on the mountain) corresponds with the tripartite division of the tabernacle. This helps us to see that the tabernacle is patterned after the mountain such that God's glory can travel with the people.

What then takes place is even more remarkable than the earlier scene with the elders. Moses, the Lord's chosen mediator, walks straight into the middle of the cloud, at the Lord's invitation and remains there for 40 days and 40 nights. Despite the appearance of the glory of the Lord as “like a devouring fire” (v.17) he remains unharmed.

Whilst we know Moses' failings well by now, we see here that the Lord intends to enjoy close communion with his chosen mediator. It has always been the Lord's way to draw in one that his presence might be mediated to the many, but this moment is only a pointer towards the moment when God's perfect mediator encountered the Lord on top of a mountain. When Jesus walked into the cloud of the Lord he came away, not with tablets of stone, but with the words “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (Mark 9:7) ringing in his ears.

Application

Perfect access

Whilst this story of the inauguration of the Old Covenant gives us a wonderful picture of the beginnings of a close relationship between the Lord and his people, we have already noted the inadequacy of that covenant and our eyes should be thrown forward to the New Covenant. It is a covenant with sacrifice at its heart, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ whose blood truly can “purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:14). Where the sacrifices at the heart of the old covenant only pictured this cleansing work, the sacrifice of Christ actually achieves it and brings us perfectly into the presence of God. As the writer to the Hebrews says, “...since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean...” (Heb 10:19-22. It would be worth reading all of Hebrews 9-10 to see Christ's fulfilment of these events). Through the New Covenant sacrifice of Jesus Christ we are not left standing at the bottom of the mountain looking on, rather

we are invited in to dwell with God in perfect intimacy. Paul even goes so far as to say that our new covenant experience exceeds that of Moses. Where the glory that made his face shine eventually faded, we are being “transformed... from one degree of glory into another” as we behold the glory of the Lord in Christ (see 2 Cor 3:12-18). We have a wonderful privilege and it is one that we should be careful not to neglect. Rather we should make the most of it, gazing on the perfect glory of the Lord in Christ, coming to the Lord in prayer and walking closely with him each day knowing that he dwells in our hearts by his Spirit. Even then however, the ultimate fulfilment of this passage will come when we physically walk into the perfect presence of God and see his glory with our own eyes (Revelation 22:21-27). As wonderful as it is to enjoy his new covenant presence now, how much more wonderful will it be on that day?

Perfect mediation

Whilst we should enjoy the presence that Christ has won for us, we should ultimately let our eyes turn to the perfect mediator Jesus Christ. Not only did he enjoy perfect intimacy with the Father eternally, something of which we get a brief picture as Moses enters the cloud, but he also gave it up on our behalf. He did it, that he might come to earth and die, only then to re-enter the Holy Place to offer the blood of sacrifice, “not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood...” (Heb 9.12). He is the only one who could mediate on our behalf to the Lord, and without him we would not even be able to enjoy the partial presence that the elders of Israel enjoyed that day. Praise God for Jesus Christ who brings us to him!

Aim That we might put our trust in Christ and enjoy the perfect access to God that he makes possible.

Exodus 25-31

Introduction and context

Having encountered **God who delivers** (chapters 1-18) and the **God who demands** (chapters 19-24), Israel now well and truly encounter **the God who dwells** (chapters 25-40). The last few verses of the previous chapter (24:12-18) provide something of a link between the two sections as we witness Moses ascend the mountain and enter the cloud of God's presence. Whilst in God's presence he will receive the tablets of the law which have been the subject of much of the previous section – they are promised in 24:12 and given in 31:18 thereby forming an inclusio for the whole section. He will also receive the plans for the Tabernacle, a structure which mirrors the mountain (see previous notes for the parallels) and that will enable God's presence into which Moses has just walked, to go with the people. It is these plans that dominate our current section and as we study them we will understand exactly what it takes for the Lord to dwell with his people and what the significance of that dwelling is.

Structure:

24: 12-18: Moses is promised the tablets of the Law

25:1 - 27:19: The Tabernacle construction: God's dwelling from inside to out

27:20 - 30:10: The Priestly consecration: God's dwelling mediated

30:11 – 31:17: The Tabernacles completion: God's dwelling perfected

31:18: Moses is given the tablets of the Law

Text notes:

The giving of the Law bookends, 24.12-18 and 31.18

It is worth noting that our section is topped and tailed by the promise of and subsequent giving of the tablets of the Law. This places the Tabernacle and the Law inexorably together in the mind of the author. As Alec Motyer says, "we will not understand the tabernacle correctly unless we see it in the context of the law; and we will not understand the law correctly unless we see the tabernacle at its centre" (Motyer, *Exodus*, p260). Whilst the Law contains the standards of obedience that the Lord expects and requires from his redeemed people, the tabernacle represents the LORD's willingness to draw near to them and to provide for their inevitable failure to meet those standards in the sacrificial system. This ordering further underlines the point that whilst obedience to the Law is an essential part of covenant life, the Lord draws near on the basis of his grace to the people, not on the basis of their performance to him first of all.

The Tabernacle construction: God's dwelling from inside to out, 25.1 – 27.19

This section opens with the Lord instructing Moses to appeal to each man to give for the construction of the tabernacle as his "heart moves him" (25:2). At this point in the narrative the vision is of a people who are delighted at the prospect of the Lord coming to dwell with them such that they give generously to make it happen. This serves to heighten the disappointment we should feel when we see their enthusiasm to give in support of an altogether different building project (32.2-3).

The priority of presence

The plans for the tabernacle are then clearly laid out for Moses and they must be strictly adhered to (25.9; 25.40; 27.8). The movement of the plans are from inside to out, starting in the "Most Holy Place" (The Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat), moving out to the "Holy place" (the table for the bread and the lamp stand and the instructions for the tabernacle's structure) and finishing in the court of the tabernacle (the bronze altar and the instructions for the proportions and walls of the Outer Court). This movement is significant and the fronting of the Ark, "the supreme post-Sinai symbol of the Presence of Yahweh" (See Enns, *Exodus*, 511), in the most Holy place serves to emphasise the importance of God's presence. The point of all of this is that the Lord might dwell with his people (see 25.8) and the presence of the Ark in the Most Holy place will represent exactly that.

The enabling of presence

Various of the details of the tabernacle highlight for us exactly what is required to enable God to dwell with his people in the first place. One cannot help but notice the extraordinary care that must be taken in construction and handling of the various implements of the tabernacle. Inappropriate contact with a Holy God results in death (Remember the mountain restrictions and look ahead to 2 Samuel 6:6-7 for a vivid demonstration of the danger of inappropriate handling of the Ark). The exact significance of the table of the bread of presence (25.23-30) is not clear, but its presence in the Holy Place and at the entrance to the Most Holy Place and the fact that the priests are to eat of the bread (Leviticus 24:8-9) seems to echo the location and occasion on which the elders enjoyed their meal with the Lord on the mountain (24.9-11). It serves therefore as a reminder of that covenant meal and therefore of the covenant that makes this arrangement possible. Also, the bronze altar in the Outer Court represents the necessity of sacrifice if a Holy God is to dwell with an unholy people. Lots of animals will need to die if the people are to live. Lastly and perhaps most significantly of all, the lid of the Ark is referred to as the "mercy seat" (25.17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22!). It is here that the blood of sacrifice will be sprinkled in due course (Leviticus 16.14) and it is here that the presence of the Lord will specifically dwell as he speaks to Moses. The connection between these two events is unmissable as the Lord resides at exactly the point at which the atoning blood of sacrifice resides.

The significance of presence

The constituent parts of the tabernacle have a symbolism that points in two directions at once – backwards and upwards. The authors of *Dig Even Deeper* helpfully draw out the parallels between the tabernacle and the garden of Eden (see table on pages 140-141) such that we can see in the tabernacle a symbolic return to how things should be with the Lord present and ruling and the people coming to him in right worship and enjoying the light of life. As the Lord dwells with his people so things are returned to the right order. As well as looking backwards however, these

details also point upwards to the heavenly tabernacle. There are hints in the passage itself such as the presence of the cherubim above the Ark and embroidered into the material but the full flourishing of this truth comes in Hebrews 8-9 where we learn that this earthly tabernacle is in fact an exact copy of the heavenly one. This construction provides a hope for the future therefore of a day when heaven and earth will come together and the dwelling place of God will be fully with man. Standing this side of the incarnation we can look back and enjoy something of the fulfilment of this image in the person of Christ who “became flesh and *tabernacled* among us” (John 1:14), but there is a further fulfilment to come in the New Creation when the whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

The Priestly consecration: God’s dwelling mediated, 27.20 – 30.10

At first glance two apparently miscellaneous details mark the beginning and end of this section – the oil for the lamp (27.20-21) which comes after the outermost point of the tabernacle instructions and the Altar of Incense (30.1-10) which appears after the priests consecration but does not begin with the refrain “The Lord said to Moses” as do each of the sections which follow. Motyer helpfully suggests that these two sections top and tail the priests' consecration giving definition to their role. He says they are “responsible for the Lord's light reaching out to his people and their solemn and acceptable worship reaching up to him” (Motyer, *Exodus*, p279).

The priest as representative, 28.1-43

The elaborate garments that the priest is to wear are outlined in detail in chapter 28. Whilst the significance of every single item is difficult to pin down, suffice it to say that these are garments that fit the job of the priest. Like the tabernacle itself his outfit is beautifully ornate and arrayed in the same colours and he himself is to wear an engraved gold plate declaring that he is “holy to the Lord” (28.36). He is almost part of the furniture, set apart from everything and everyone else for this role. And yet he represents the people as a whole as he carries out his ministry. He carries the names of the twelve tribes on his shoulders (28.6-14) and in so doing he enters, not on his own behalf, but on theirs, carrying their concerns. He also carries their names on the “breastpiece of judgement” that they might be brought to “regular remembrance before the Lord” (28.29). Exactly what it means for Aaron to “bear the judgement of the people of Israel” (28.30) is unclear except that it further emphasises the representative function as he brings them and their concerns to the Lord.

The priest as rebel, 29.1-46

However wonderful the garments of the priest might be, they cannot cover over the fact that he and his progeny will always be sinful and so in the process of their consecration sacrifice must be made on their behalf. Three offerings are made on their behalf as in each case they lay their hands on the head of the animal. One bull and two rams constitute a sin offering, a burnt offering and a wave offering respectively. Exactly what the significance of each sacrifice is is not precisely clear at this moment in the text, but from wider examination of the Pentateuch it seems that the sin offering cleanses from sin, the burnt offering represents an expression of devotion and the wave offering is a type of fellowship offering establishing communion with God (see Enns, *Exodus*, p535.). Either way, the message is loud and clear: No human being can come before the Lord to mediate without first having their sin dealt with. Once that has happened however, they can then mediate, offering sacrifice on behalf of the people (29. 38-42), such that the Lord comes and dwells. All of the work required to prepare and consecrate the priests is suddenly worth it as we read the words “I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God” (29.45-46). This climactic statement is something of a centre point for this section and highlights the importance of the role of the priest.

The Tabernacles completion: God's dwelling perfected, 30:11 – 31:17

This last collection of instructions seems much more eclectic than the other collections of material and the plausible explanation of their assembly is that they constitute all of the different parts and practices of the tabernacle that aren't required in the consecration of the priests. The author, out of a desire to focus on the priest and their role, seeks to "bring the instructions regarding priestly consecration into the picture as quickly as possible" (Enns, *Exodus*, p537). Whilst this serves to land the emphasis on the consecration of the priest in the process of the Lord coming to dwell, the author takes the opportunity that laying out further plans creates to make one further point. Each of the six new sections starts with the phrase "The Lord said to Moses," which together with the use of this phrase at the beginning of our section constitutes seven occurrences, climaxing with a reiteration of the Sabbath legislation. The pattern of a sequence of seven climaxing with the Sabbath should be ringing some bells (31:17 might help if you're struggling!), and further underlines the point that this construction embodies a (perhaps partial given the necessity of sacrifice, the sin of the people and the restricted nature of the access) return to the ideal state when God first dwelt with his people.

Application

A Perfected dwelling

There is in this passage a sense of awe and wonder at what the dwelling place of the Lord is like and just what is required to make it ready. At the same time there is a latent sense of frustration at the somewhat limited nature of the access, especially when compared with the garden of Eden to which the whole scene so vividly points. Both of these truths should cause us to rejoice as New Covenant people, in the fact that God chooses to dwell in us as his new tabernacle. Not only is our access to him unlimited, but it speaks volumes for how he must view us in Christ Jesus. We are both individually (1 Cor 6.19) and corporately (Eph 2.21 and 1 Pet 2.5) now the dwelling place of God and that is a wonderful thing, not to be taken lightly. Both our individual battle with sin and our corporate battle with sin should be considered of upmost importance as we seek to live out our status as the dwelling place of God. It is easy to lose the sense of wonder and reverence that these truths should produce, but a few minutes spent dwelling on the wonder of the tabernacle and its fulfilment in us should correct that error.

We cannot read these chapters, however, without letting our minds turn to the day when the heavenly tabernacle of which these chapters are a picture will meet with the earth and the dwelling place of God will fully be with man (Revelation 21.3). A perfectly proportioned, lavishly jewelled, structure with a tree of life at the centre, into which no unclean thing will come, inhabited by a sacrificed lamb who lights up the whole with the light of life – that is the future to which we look forward and these chapters give us a tantalising glimpse of that wonderful future.

A Perfect Priest

As well as being awed at the tabernacle itself, we should pause to give thanks for the mediating work of Christ. The text makes much of the fact that the dwelling of the Lord depends on the work of the priests and so to have that work fulfilled perfectly in Christ is a wonderful relief. Because of his perfection and the sufficiency of his sacrifice we do not need priests to be consecrated and then repeat sacrifices day after day (see Hebrews 8-9). All of that work is done once and for all and we should praise God that it is. We need not seek any other mediator

between us and God. We do not need to achieve our own perfection that we might mediate. Indeed because of the work of Christ, in one sense, we do not even need a mediator any more. Too often we act as though our access to God is restricted in some sense, perhaps because of our sin, perhaps because we create a culture in which we depend upon certain individuals to give us a sense of the presence of God. As we remember again the perfect priestly work of Christ we should praise God for unrestricted access, draw near to him in faith and look forward to the wonderful future which is ours on the basis of his priestly work.

Aim That we might delight in the fact that the Lord dwells in us by his spirit through the mediating work of Christ, and look forward to the day when we will fully dwell with him.

Exodus 32.1-33.7

Introduction and context

Up until this point in Exodus the relationship between the Lord and his people has, by and large, strengthened and strengthened. The obvious exception to this is the grumbling of the people in the wilderness (a strong pre-law hint as to the sinful hearts of the people), but that didn't actually prove to be a set-back in the relationship as the Lord continued to bless and provide for them. Whatever differences there might have been were put aside in chapter 19 and again in chapter 24 where the people enthusiastically declared their obedience. Now in light of the covenant relationship, defined and established, the Lord has shown them the plans for his residence among them (Chapters 25-31) and the reader has glorious expectations for the construction and habitation of this tabernacle. The future for God's relationship with his people seems rosy. However, what happens next serves as the ultimate cold shower for the reader as the grumbling part of Israel's heart well and truly triumphs over the "we will be obedient" part. How the Lord responds to this will teach us a great deal about him.

This section sits together with the next section (33.8-34.35) as the sandwich filling between the two sections concerning the plans for the tabernacle (chapters 25-31) and the construction and habitation of the tabernacle (chapters 35-40). The close resemblance of the two tabernacle sections, and the progress that they describe (from plans to dwelling place) suggest that the 'filling' section constitutes a full exposition of how the Lord can dwell with his sinful people. Our section (31.1-33.7) serves largely to raise problems which the next section (33.8-34.35) will answer.

Structure

- 32.1-6 The sinful idolatry of Israel
- 32.7-14 The burning anger of the Lord and the intercession of Moses
- 32.15-29 The burning anger of Moses and the punishment of apostasy
- 32.30-33.7 The delay in judgement and the removal of presence

Text notes

The sinful idolatry of Israel, 32.1-6

The creation and worship of the golden calf constitutes an outright rejection of the covenant that the people have just made with Moses and the speed with which they turn their backs is devastating. Commentators disagree on which of the commandments the people break but there's a strong case to be made for each of the first three, and who knows which others as a consequence of their false worship. To quibble over which commandments were broken is to miss the point however. The people have revolted against the covenant Lord and established for themselves an alternative cultic system. As they turn their backs on the Lord so, inevitably they turn to worship something else (Romans 1.23).

It is striking just how much resonance there is between the covenant system and structures that the Lord had put in place and the new cultic system that the people introduce. The new system consists of a priest (Aaron), an altar (v.5 and see 27.1-8), early rising to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings (v.6 and see 24.4-5), plenty of gold (v.2 and see 25.3ff) as offered by the people (v.2 and see 25.1-8) a feast to the Lord (v.5 and 10.9; 12.14 and 13.6), eating and drinking (v.6 and 24.11), and even singing (v.18 and see 15.1-21). Like any false religion the Israelites chosen system is parasitic on true worship of the true God.

The differences are marked however. Where the Lord has provided the Ark of the covenant as the heart of the covenant system – a construction that contains the revealed word of the Lord and speaks vividly of the atonement required for the Lord to dwell with his people – the people replace it with a golden calf, a common representation of god in Egypt and the Ancient Near East. It seems that Aaron thinks he is representing the Lord from what he says in v.4, but a refusal to listen to the Lord and wait for his chosen mediator has resulted in a distorted, polytheistic (v.4), syncretistic version of the true God. We have seen throughout Exodus that a right understanding of the Lord and correct worship of him results in a wonderful ethical system that reflects that God. So now we see that the false worship of the Lord works out in deeply flawed ethics, slightly prudishly summed up by the ESV's "...they rose up to play" (v.6 see also Gen 26:8 for use of the verb with sexual overtones).

The sin of Israel is horrific and represents a new depth in their inability to obey the Lord, but in many ways their sin is the same as we have seen before in Exodus. They refuse to trust in the Lord as he has revealed himself, or his chosen mediator ("As for this Moses ... we do not know what has become of him" v.1) and they look back wistfully to Egypt rather than trust the purposes of the Lord who has brought them this far (see Acts 7.39-41). It is a sin that has been repeated *ad infinitum* over the years.

The burning anger of the Lord and the intercession of Moses, 32.7-14

From the bottom of the mountain we now head up the mountain where Moses' meeting with the Lord is drawing to a close. The Lord informs Moses of what has taken place at the foot of the mountain, providing his own commentary. His emphasis is on the speedy turning aside from his way and the "stiff-necked" nature of the people (like the God they now worship! See *Dig Even Deeper*, p159-160). Where previously we have seen the Lord respond with gracious abundance to the sinful grumbling of Israel, now, under the terms of the Mosaic covenant his anger burns hot against them and he threatens to consume them. He is well within his rights to do this and this section gives us a vivid picture of the way the Lord feels about sin, but even then he leaves the door open for a mediator to intercede on their behalf. By informing Moses of his anger at their sin and asking him to "let me alone..." (v.10) it appears almost as if the Lord is prompting Moses to pray, and pray he does.

The intercession of Moses is instructive and entirely in keeping with the bases upon which the Lord has acted so far in Exodus. Firstly he appeals to the Lord's concern for his own reputation (vv.11-12) the reason for which he carried out the events of the exodus in the first place ("that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth" 10.9). Secondly he appeals to the Lord's covenant promises (v.13) the grounds upon which he acted to rescue Israel in the first place (2.23-25). Rather than appealing to the Lord to change his mind, as some might suggest, Moses is in fact urging the Lord to stay faithful to the direction he has already set. Moses may only have a glimmer of understanding as to how the Lord might reconcile his anger at sin and his concern for

his reputation and covenant promises, but he is confident that he can. True to himself, the Lord relents from acting on his anger at this moment and holds firm to his covenant course. Did the Lord 'change his mind' therefore? The answer appears to be no. Rather, he has demonstrated to Moses something of how his covenant purposes relate to his anger at sin and in the process has involved Moses' prayers in his sovereign plan. His anger is genuine as is his concern for his reputation and covenant but the Lord's supreme concern at this point is to demonstrate that to Moses – that he might know him better! No doubt there is something mysterious about this course of events, but there is nothing changeable or fickle about the God of this portrait.

The burning anger of the Lord's mediator and the punishment of apostasy, 32.15-29

Whilst Moses appeals to the Lord to relent from his anger in the previous section it should come as no surprise that the Lord's mediator shares the same burning anger (v.19) as the Lord at Israel's sin. Just as he mediated the covenant between the Lord and his people so now as the Lord's representative he mediates the (temporary) dissolution of that covenant as he breaks the tablets at the foot of the mountain. He even exacts destruction on the false, Egyptian version (see previous comments on the calf as a common Egyptian representation of god) of the Lord just as the Lord demonstrated his superiority over their gods in the events of the exodus (12.12). On the other hand the dialogue with Aaron serves to emphasise his failure as a mediator between the Lord and his people. Rather than lead the people in the ways of the covenant he has let them lead him into disastrous false worship. His failure only serves to highlight the faithful mediation that Moses exercises. The judgement that he is about to orchestrate is truly the judgement of the Lord therefore.

The differentiation that takes place in v.26 is between those who are "on the Lord's side" (presumably repentant of whatever part they played in the rebellion) and those who resolutely stick to the false cult worship recently established (presumably there is a group of people who fall somewhere in the middle such that they don't suffer the fate of the "three thousand men of the people" (v.28)). The Levites who will oversee the life of the tabernacle in the future prove themselves up to that task as they successfully purge the people of this rank idolatry, even though the personal cost has been high. No doubt the fate of the resolute apostates is shocking and gruesome. However given that it is the instruction of the Lord exercised through his true mediator (v.27) it gives us insight into just how seriously the Lord takes outright rebellion against him.

The delay in judgement and the removal of presence, 32.30-33.7

This final section, set on "the next day," is written through with tension and unanswered questions. Moses begins by declaring to the people what a great sin they have committed and immediately we are left wondering who these people are such that they haven't had to undergo the judgement of the 3000. Next he states that he will try to "make atonement for your sin" (v.30). Whether this atonement is achieved through interceding on their behalf (followed by a desire to be blotted out if the Lord won't forgive), or through offering himself as a substitute, is unclear. Regardless, it appears that he is unsuccessful, but the Lord's reply does not make clear exactly what his intention is. He states that he will blot sinners out of his book, and that he will judge on the day that he visits, but what this will mean in practice is far from obvious at this point, especially as he will continue to send his angel before the people as a protective presence. A plague of some sort descends temporarily, but it appears that his full judgement is being delayed but how it will be resolved is unclear at this point.

Similarly, the Lord removes his presence from among the people, something which understandably devastates them, and yet it appears to be a merciful act on his part. Such is the “stiff-necked” nature of the people that the Lord would destroy them if he dwelt with them. One act of judgement prevents another. Even then however the Lord states that he will send an angel to protect them and drive out the nations from the land, a good land that they will still inhabit. Even though he withdraws from them it appears that his covenant purposes are still being enacted.

What should we make of these unresolved tensions? On one level we need to wait and see exactly how the Lord will resolve them, something he will duly do in the next section and ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ. But on another level we should note the patience and kindness of the Lord in allowing the tension to exist at all. The Lord would have been within his rights to destroy the whole nation moments after they sinned but he does not. Inevitably their sin has created a relational distance between them and the Lord, but is not something that the Lord will allow to thwart his covenant purposes.

Application

A case study in sin

As we observe the rebellion of the people of Israel, so we see a paradigm established for all human sin. Whenever we sin it is because we ignore the revelation that the Lord has given about himself and the best way to live and decide to give our worship and allegiance to something else. Indeed as others have observed, we become what we worship, our lives being shaped by the object or person to whom we give our allegiance. Whether it is money or career or Allah or a relationship, those who worship these things have lives and ethics that reflect exactly that. It is helpful to stop and ask the question, “What does the shape of my life tell me about which god I worship?” Indeed, whenever I sin I can ask myself the question, “to what or whom was I giving my allegiance in that moment, and why?” This in turn enables us to ask the question “why is worship of the true God and Jesus Christ his son so much better in practice?” such that you can root out sin in your life

A case study in judgement

Lest we get caught up in the dynamics of sin, we must pause to note its horror. Israel rejects the Lord's purposes with alarming speed and disturbing nonchalance and the Lord is right to threaten the judgement that he does. Indeed the exacting of that judgement upon the 3000 shows us just how he feels about sin. So much of the sin in our lives is comparable with Israel's and we are often just as quick to forget the goodness of God in redeeming us and revealing himself to us. There is little reason apart from the character of the Lord why we should not meet the same fate as the 3000. It does us good then to pause and reflect on this such that we are fully aware of the horror of our sin and the consequent mercy of God in not treating us as our sins deserve. This is true both in the sense that the Lord does not blot us out at any moment, but also in the sense that he keeps us from hardening our hearts once and for all like the 3000. The warnings against apostasy in the New Testament are real and sobering (see e.g. Hebrews 2:1-3) and this account should cause us to pray that the Lord would keep us trusting in him and to examine some of the tendencies of our hearts.

A case study in mercy

What is it about the Lord that means he doesn't just blot us out? How can he carry on letting a "stiff-necked" (see Acts 7:51) people exist, even holding out forgiveness and reconciliation to them? The answer to those questions is rooted in our next study but for now we can enjoy the patience of the Lord which was extended to us. That the world carries on today despite its sin is only due to the patience of the Lord (1 Peter 3:9) and we should praise him for it. We should also note that our God is a God who responds to the prayers of his people in line with his character and covenant purposes. Indeed we could do worse than model our prayers for the lost on the prayer of Moses. We long to see the mercy of God extended to our generation and so we should pray as Moses did, that concern for his name the goal of his covenant purposes, would see him bring many into his kingdom.

Aim That we might be convicted of the awfulness and danger of idolatry and see our desperate need of a gracious God.

Exodus 33.8-34.35

Introduction and context

We pick up the narrative at a point of huge tension. The golden calf episode has demonstrated both the rotten heart of the people of Israel, and the burning anger of the Lord at sin. However, by the end of the previous section the people have demonstrated some genuine remorse and the Lord has demonstrated that he is not entirely against them by continuing to go with them in a restricted fashion. Questions need resolving though: Is this the form that Israel's relationship will take with the Lord now? Will he ever be fully present among them as he promised he would? What about his covenant promises?

Fortunately, with the benefit of a wide-angle lens we can see that the Lord will resolve these questions and fulfil his promises to dwell with the people in the tabernacle because he does exactly that in chapter 40. The purpose of our current section must therefore be to resolve the question 'how?' Specifically how can the Lord dwell with a sinful people? If the previous section (32.1-33.7) raised the problem that Israel's sinfulness provides for the Lord, our current section must resolve those problems.

Structure

33.8-11: The Lord speaks to Moses face to face

33.12-23: Moses requests the Lord's 'presence' for all the people and the Lord agrees

34.1-34.28: The Lord renews his covenant on the basis of his character

34.29-35: The Lord speaks to his people face to face through Moses

Text notes

The Lord speaks to Moses face to face, 33.8-11

This section speaks of both a wonderful relational intimacy and a frustrating relational distance. The intimacy is enjoyed by Moses and the frustration is endured by the people. The tent that Moses pitches outside the camp is by no means a fulfilment of the tabernacle, but there are definite resonances, in as much as the Lord meets with his appointed intermediary there as his cloud descends (see 33.9 and 40.34). A significant difference is the fact that this construction stands "outside the camp" (v.7) rather than in the midst of them (25.8) and the people can only really worship from a distance. There is no sacrificial system, altar of incense or bread of presence all of which represented relationship with the Lord. No Israelite with any understanding of the Lord's covenant promises could truly have been happy with this.

For Moses however it is a very different state of affairs. He can come and go as he pleases and whenever he arrives so too does the Lord. There is no need for sacrifice or ritual washing (at least the author sees no reason to mention them if there were) and the relationship is a close one. Not only does the Lord speak to Moses, but he does so "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (v.11). This is a truly remarkable description and one wonders what more the man who enjoys this could want?

Moses requests the Lord's 'presence' for all the people and the Lord agrees, 33.12-23

Moses appears well aware of his special status before the Lord. A five-fold repetition of the description of Moses as having “found favour” in the Lord's sight makes that abundantly clear. The question that is still hanging in the air is where do the people stand with God? Moses is clearly concerned, presumably on the basis of the Lord's distance from his people, that the Lord might part company with them. Whether Moses is concerned that he will abandon them in the wilderness leaving Moses as the sole inhabitant of the promised-land, or rather that he will get the people to the land but without sending his presence, is unclear. The overall point is the same either way: Moses cannot bear the thought that the Lord might not be present with his people, especially because of the impact that it will have on the Lord's international reputation. It is on the basis of his favour in the Lord's sight that Moses appeals to the Lord on behalf of his people. The request that he puts forward is a remarkable one however. The word translated “presence” (vv.14 and 15) in the ESV is actually the Hebrew word for “face” and so, in effect, Moses requests that the “face to face” relationship that he enjoys with the Lord might go with him *and* the people into the promised land. That the Lord responds positively speaks volumes for the power of a mediator with whom the Lord is pleased.

The Lord responds on the basis of his relationship with Moses and promises that he will do what he asks but Moses is looking for more. He wants to see the glory of the Lord (v.18). The Lord's glory is his majesty, worthiness, beauty and power all in one concept. It is his awesome ‘weightiness’ and the very essence of who he is and Moses knows that a glimpse of it is all he needs to be confident in the Lord's promise. Again the Lord agrees saying that he will make his “goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord.” His glory, goodness, name and presence/face are almost synonymous with one another representing different perspectives on the same thing – the Lord's essential character. It seems only right then that just as the Lord knows Moses' name (vv.12 and 17) so too he will reveal his name to Moses. They will be on first name terms.

Moses' desire for something that he can see is not fulfilled however on the basis that “man shall not see me and live.” (v.20) The Lord gives him something equally revelatory however in a brief description of what he is like. This should come as no surprise given that the Lord has already expressed his preference for verbal revelation over visual representation. What he says will get filled out shortly (in the next section), but in simple terms the Lord reminds Moses that he will be merciful and gracious to whom he has decided to show mercy and grace. He is consistent, faithful and at heart merciful and gracious and that is wonderful news for the leader of a people who most of all need mercy and grace. Moses can be confident that the blessing that he enjoys will indeed get passed on to the people.

The Lord renews his covenant on the basis of his character, 34.1-34.28

Having watched Israel's unfaithfulness and the devastating moment when Moses smashed the tablets of the covenant on the floor, what comes next is a tonic to the reader. The Lord in his mercy initiates a covenant renewal by instructing Moses to appear before him with two new tablets. The repetition of the instructions to clear the mountain of people and livestock (v.3 and 19.10-25) remind us that that this is still the holy, unapproachable God who is drawing near but what comes next gets to the heart of *how* that holy unapproachable God can draw near.

Verses 6-7 get us right to the heart of who the Lord is and what he is like and what we discover is almost (though not quite!) too good for words. He is, in essence, merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and he is that to generation after generation. This explains so much of what we have seen during the book of Exodus and so now we are hearing in word exactly what we have been seeing in deed. We truly know the Lord. The wonderful fruit of these characteristics is that the Lord is a God who has forgiveness at the very heart of his being. That is not to say that he is a pushover and the second half of v.7 makes the point that his justice will prevail and that those who spurn him will discover this, but his vengeance is meagre when compared to his love: It is visited on four generations in contrast to thousands. It is in this revelation of who the Lord is that we discover the solution to the problem of how he can dwell with a sinful people – forgiveness. Whilst the mechanics of that forgiveness are yet to be worked out, its existence is not in doubt now and Moses responds in the only way appropriate. Firstly he bows his head in worship and then he petitions the Lord on behalf of the people and in accord with who the Lord is. Forgiveness is what he asks for as, above all (note again the adjective “Stiff-necked” as a reminder of the ingrained sinfulness of the people), this is what the people need and he knows that if they can have this then they can enjoy the status of being the Lord's “inheritance” (v.9).

This revelation from the Lord sheds light on so much of what he has done and indeed what he will do, and verses 6-7 will form something of a mantra for the people of Israel way on into their future (see *Dig Even Deeper*, pp. 172-173 for a tour of the Biblical usage). The immediate outworking is however, the renewal of the covenant that takes place immediately. Whilst the author spares the reader a repetition of all of the covenant material that has been previously laid out he intends us to understand that it is all included. The replacement tablets top the account as do the Ten Commandments first time round and vv.21-26 are a distilled repetition of 23.10-19 which is the end of the book of the covenant in its first recounting. In between the author pointedly highlights legislation that will keep the people from making the same mistake again, especially when they enter the land. This all represents a wonderful return to how things were before the golden calf incident, but now the people have a wonderful revelation of who the Lord is to give them confidence in his covenant purposes.

The Lord speaks to his people face to face through Moses, 34.29-35

Moses then descends from the mountain with the new tablets unaware that his encounter with the glory of the Lord has left its mark on him – the ‘face’ of the Lord has truly gone with him (see 33.14 and remember that ‘presence’ = ‘face’). The people are terrified by what they see, just as they were by the unmediated voice of the Lord (19.19) but Moses encourages them to draw near. As he speaks to them and “command[s] them all that the Lord had spoken with him” so the people enjoy something of the ‘face to face’ experience that Moses himself enjoyed with the Lord. The transferral of blessing from Moses to the people has taken place and we know that it is all because of who the Lord is and what he is like. It is still the case that there is something inherent in the people, such that they cannot handle the sight of the glory of the Lord, even in the face of Moses, and he accommodates himself to that by using a veil. We should not let that cause us to miss the remarkable change that has taken place in the closeness of relationship, such that the Lord and Israel can now be called “friends” (see 33.11).

Application

The foundational character of the Lord

The character of the Lord as revealed in words in this section forms the underpinning of everything else that we see and hear from him in the rest of the Bible and experience of him day by day in our lives. He says and does everything he says and does because of what he is like and he does not change. Supremely this is seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, wherein the gracious, merciful, abundantly loving forgiveness of the Lord and his just vengeance against sin are embodied. Indeed, just as Israel's relationship with the Lord was transformed on the basis of God's character, so the closeness of relationship that we enjoy with the Lord today is the outworking of what God is like. To know that all of this, and every other blessing that we enjoy in the Christian life is rooted in what God is like by nature is wonderfully liberating. Whatever else may change in our world, the Lord will not and so we can always count on his abundant love towards us and his forgiveness of our sins. Whilst this should not produce complacency, it should produce a deep-seated confidence and an instinctive movement towards the Lord in all things. We can open his word knowing that he loves us and wants to address us. We can pray knowing that he listens and want to do us good. We can walk in his ways knowing that his grace is sufficient. We can confess our sin knowing that his very essence is forgiveness. To know the Lord as he is revealed here shapes our entire relationship with him and gives us a perspective on all of life that should be unshakeably confident.

The wonderful mediation of Christ

There is something mysterious about the mediation of Moses in this section. We know that he has found favour with the Lord such that he enjoys unlimited perfect access to him and yet we also know that he is still a sinner akin to the rest of Israel (33.20). It can only be the case that the Lord wants to show us, in Moses, the pre-figurement of another who will enjoy this kind of pure unmediated access to himself, but without unresolved questions of sin and guilt. The New Testament shows us that this is Christ who was "in the beginning with God" (John 1:2) and is now glorified in God's presence with the glory that he had before the world existed (John 17:5). He is the one who is supremely loved by the Father (John 5:20). Just as Moses wants to share that access, so too does Jesus, praying to the Father that it might be so (John 17:25-26) and going to the cross to win it for us (Hebrews 9:11-15).

The access that Christ wins for us is far superior to that which Moses made possible, as Paul draws out in 2 Corinthians 3. Where the people of Israel needed a veil to protect them from the glory of the Lord, God's new covenant people need no such protection. Indeed in Christ, by the Spirit the veil is removed and we are enabled to stare, unceasingly into the face of God, revealed in the person of Christ. More than that, we enjoy superior access to the glory of the Lord to Moses in that the glory that shone in his face faded whereas we are transformed increasingly from one degree of glory to another as we stare. When we think on this reality, the mediation of Moses and the access that the people enjoyed begins to seem pale in comparison. What joy then to have the full, unfettered mediation of the Lord that Christ makes possible. This is great motivation to gaze on the person of Christ as much as possible and enjoy his glory that we too might be transformed into his wonderful image. What greater privilege than to become like the one whom the Lord loves above all?

Aim That we might fearlessly draw near to the Lord because of what he is like and the perfect mediation of his Son.

Exodus 35-40

Introduction and context

Exodus 35-40 serves as the climax to the book of Exodus. As we conclude the section that we have entitled **The God who dwells** (chapter 25-40) we witness the conclusion of the movement of the Lord from heaven to the mountain to the tabernacle in the midst of the people of Israel. It is a truly wonderful moment for the people and the reader, though we know that it has not always been a straightforward journey. Chapter 35 begins exactly where chapter 31 left off and if we didn't know any better the two sections would fit together seamlessly, as Moses passes on the instructions for the tabernacle that he has been given at the top of the mountain. We do know better however, and this section has an added wonder to it because of that. In light of what has taken place in the intervening chapters (32-33) – the rebellion of the people and gracious revelation of God's forgiving character – it is a miracle that the people receive these instructions, let alone experience the glory of the Lord in their midst. Not only does it have an added wonder, but it also has an added security. We know that the people are fickle and sinful, but we also know that the Lord's unchanging character is gracious and merciful and so we can be all the more confident that his desire to dwell in their midst is not one that will be thwarted in the end.

Structure:

35.1-3: Sabbath regulations restated

35.4-36.7: Hearts, minds and spirits are moved to provide for the Tabernacle

36.8- 40.33: The Tabernacle is built

36.8-39.43: The Tabernacle is made

40.1-15: The Lord commands the assembly of the Tabernacle

40.16-33: Moses assembles the Tabernacle

40.34-38: The glory of the Lord fills the Tabernacle

Text notes:

Sabbath regulations restated, 35.1-3

Structurally speaking these Sabbath regulations serve to mirror the Sabbath regulations that Moses received at the climax of his time up the mountain (31.12-17). In that instance they functioned as a climax to the Lord's instructions for his Tabernacle and a seal on the covenant legislation embodied by the Tabernacle. In this instance they serve to reiterate that the covenant, which seemed so perilously close to destruction in the previous couple of chapters, is still very much in place. The people are still sanctified by the Lord (see 35.13), and as such are required to observe the sign of the covenant. Rather than this being a burden for them in any way, it is in fact a blessing, as they get to enjoy rest. Evidently this rest is a rest from the labours of the previous six

days of work, but it is a taste of a much deeper reality – the perfect rest that God and man enjoyed together at the end of the creation account (see Genesis 2:3). It should come as no surprise that as the Lord initiates a rescue and redemption that results in him residing among his people, so he should seal it with a sign that signifies all of the ensuing blessings of that state of affairs. Whilst it is still only a sign, once a week the people will stop and enjoy their restored relationship and the closeness with the Lord that is now possible. Wonderfully for the Christian, this is a sign that has been fulfilled by Christ as he truly brings us into the Sabbath rest for which we so long. Christians will disagree on what exactly the implications of this are for their Sundays, but should agree that it is only in Christ that we truly experience the rest of Genesis 2:3 again.

As with a certain amount of the legislation in this section, the Sabbath legislation is somewhat circumscribed. This is largely to avoid repetition where it is not necessary, given that much of the material in this section has been seen already in chapter 25-31. 35.3 constitutes an unusual additional feature in this section, however. It is difficult to know exactly what purpose it serves, but it achieves two ends. Firstly it helps to clarify that even though fires will be burning in the Tabernacle throughout the Sabbath, this does not legitimise domestic fire-lighting. Secondly it helps to emphasise the extent of the Sabbath legislation. It is possible that in a section so firmly cultic in its emphasis the reader might be tempted to think that the Sabbath legislation does not extend as far as the domestic realm. Here the Lord clarifies that even the most basic domestic task, such as lighting a fire, falls under the auspices of the Sabbath command.

Hearts, minds and spirits are moved to provide for the Tabernacle, 35.4-36.7:

By this stage in the narrative, the raw materials required to build the Tabernacle are familiar to us (see 25.1-9). What is new at this point is the overwhelming generosity of the people in providing those materials and the skills required to bring them together. The section begins with a command from the Lord (something we will see repeated throughout this larger section) that a contribution be taken from whoever is “of a generous heart” (35.5). It seems that having received forgiveness for their sins the people of Israel are inclined not only to obey the command of the Lord, but to do so with lavish generosity. The overwhelming response of the people in 36.3-7 serves as an amazing testimony to the work of grace in the life of the people, and as a striking contrast to the meagre provision that the people made for their false God (32.2-3). The post-manufacture inventory of all the precious metals used that appears in the next section (38.21-31) only serves to reinforce this point. Given the repeated emphasis that the text places on the movement of the people’s hearts and spirits (35.5, 21, 22, 29, 36.2, 3) it does seem that a genuine work of grace is taking place, as the people are moved to give whatever they can to the work of the Lord.

In many respects this obedience on the part of the people represents a fulfilment of the Lord's purposes in saving the people of Israel in the first place. Time and again he said that he was bringing his people out of Egypt in order that “they may serve me” (4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3) and now here they are doing exactly that. Previously in the book we have seen them do this in word (see 19.3 and 24.3, 7) but now we are seeing it in deed, and so truly it can be said of this people that they are a people who know the Lord.

Perhaps just as wonderful is the collaboration that will take place between the Lord and his people as this work is undertaken. Bezalel (“in the protection of God”) and Oholiab (“My Father is my tent”) are described as being filled with the Spirit of God as they undertake the creative side of

the project. There is not one detail that the Lord will not oversee whilst he entrusts this building project to his people.

The Tabernacle is built, 36.8- 40.33

This section breaks down into three smaller sections, each of which constitutes an order of proceedings. The first list describes the making of the constituent parts of the Tabernacle, the second describes order in which the Lord requires the Tabernacle to be assembled and the third describes that assembly. In each case the tent itself heads the list, followed by the contents of the tent from the innermost parts to the outermost. This contrasts with the order that is given as the Lord instructs Moses on the mountain. In the first case (25.10-27.21), the concern of the list is theological, giving us a sense of the priority of the holy of holies and the presence of the Lord. In the second case (36.8-40.33) the concern is more pragmatic demonstrating an order in which the construction must take place. You cannot place the Ark in a holy of holies that has not been erected yet.

Much of the material in this section is verbatim repetition of what has gone before but that emphasises a point that is made repeatedly throughout the section, that being that this work is being carried out “according to all that the Lord had commanded.” As Alec Motyer observes, “This refrain occurs seven times with regard to individual articles made (39.1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 32), seven times with regard to tabernacle articles in the course of completion (40.19, 21, 23, 24, 27, 29, 32) and three times with regard to the work as a whole (39.32, 42-43, 40.16)” (Motyer, *Exodus*, p318). Even one of the three lists in and of itself describes the Lord instructing the people how and when to construct the Tabernacle. The people are meticulous in their observance of the Lord's command, a stark change from their previous performance and a guarantee of a perfect Tabernacle. The people and the Lord are working harmoniously together.

The Tabernacle itself is to be constructed on “the first day of the first month” (40.1 and 40.17) demonstrating that this well and truly constitutes a new start for the people of Israel, indeed you might say, a new creation. When you combine that fact with the allusion to the creation story that we have in 39.42 (compare with Genesis 31.31-2.3) and the constant Edenic overtones present in the Tabernacle architecture, not to mention the importance of the Sabbath legislation, there is a real sense in which this construction constitutes the beginning of God's re-creative purposes as a little piece of heaven finds its way onto the earth. Only one thing is missing.

The glory of the Lord fills the Tabernacle, 40.34-38

Just as the cloud descended onto the mountain and the glory of the Lord dwelt there, so now the cloud covers the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle. Up until this point the glory of the Lord has been, at best, an “arms length” experience for the people of God, mediated by Moses. Now however, in this climactic moment, the glory of the Lord arrives in the midst of the people and so fills the tabernacle that not even Moses is able to enter in. This is the fulfilment of the Lord's stated intention of 25:8 and represents an amazing transition from the beginning of the book, where the Lord related to the people from heaven (2:23). Not only has the Lord now rescued his people in fulfilment of his promise of 6.6 but he has fulfilled his word of 6.7: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

The Lord well and truly resides with his people now, but there is no sense in which they are to sit still. As we know from the Abrahamic covenant promises the Lord still intends to bring the

people into the land and so they continue their journey onwards. The travel arrangements are similar to before (see 13:21-22), the difference now, however is that the pillar of cloud and fire find their home above the tabernacle in the midst of the people, rather than out in front of them. Just because the Lord has taken up residence with the people does not mean that he has been domesticated by them in any sense. It is still he who decides when they stay or go and it is he who will lead them to the promised-land. He will do so now however, as the Lord who has rescued, redeemed, revealed and now resides among his covenant people.

Application

Whole-hearted devotion to the Lord

The response of the people to the grace of the Lord demonstrated in this section is remarkable. They are both overwhelmingly generous and meticulously obedient and the author is at pains to remind us that this is the heart-felt response of the people rather than grudging duty in any sense. When we consider the revelation of the Lord that the people have had up to this point, it is easy to see why. How much more then should we, as people who have seen the fullest revelation of this God in the life and work of Jesus Christ, pour out our lives in generous, meticulous obedience?

If we fully grasp these realities, as the people of Israel did on this occasion, then our church will never be one that lacks the resources required to do the work that that Lord has for us to do. Indeed wouldn't it be amazing to have to turn people away from serving because all of our needs are abundantly taken care of! Too often we can become half-hearted in our service and giving, either because we have forgotten the grace of God, or the spectacular worthiness of the cause we serve. The people of Israel give us a fantastically concrete example to follow therefore.

Similarly, when we grasp the full revelation of our God, it should work out in a desire to live out *all* that he commands us to do. There are many areas of the Christian life that we find more straightforward to live out than others, but the real test of a heart that has been captivated by grace is a determination to be obedient to all that the Lord asks us to do. Sometimes this requires strenuous effort on our parts and often times we will fail, but the grace of God encourages us to get up and go again, full of zeal for godliness and determination to please our God.

Whole-hearted enjoyment of the Lord

We cannot read this account of the construction of the tabernacle, without letting our minds move forward firstly to the fact that the Lord has, by the spirit of Christ, taken up residence in our hearts and secondly to the fact that one day we will take up residence in his new creation. Our God is a God who delights to dwell with his people and it is a unique privilege that we get to enjoy and look forward to. It is even more remarkable, however, when we consider that not even Moses was able to get into the tabernacle on that "new year's day." Now however, we can say that the Glory of the Lord has taken up residence, not in our neighbourhoods or our homes but in our hearts (2 Cor 4:6). We have that day by day intimacy that Israel so longed for but could only enjoy in part and we have it wherever we might be. More than that, even we look forward to the day when it will be a tangible experience as we will see him face to face and gaze on his glory for eternity. It should cause us to give great thanks to God for his Son, Jesus Christ through whom this former impossibility has been made possible and it should cause us to take advantage of all that has been given to us by delighting in the God who dwells within.

Aim For us to respond in careful obedience to all that the Lord has commanded us and enjoy all of the blessings of his dwelling among us.