



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— April 2002 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
4 Apr	Enslavement of Israel in Egypt; Moses "drawn out"	Exodus 1–2
5 Apr	Burning bush and Moses' commission	Exodus 3–4
6 Apr	Moses confronts Pharaoh; God reiterates His promise	Exodus 5:1–6:27
7 Apr	Aaron's rod; Ten plagues on Egypt begin	Exodus 6:28–8:19
8 Apr	Still more plagues	Exodus 8:20–10:20
9 Apr	Darkness and warning of the final plague	Exodus 10:21–11:10
10 Apr	Passover, Unleavened Bread, the exodus and firstborn	Exodus 12:1–13:16
11 Apr	Crossing the Red Sea	Exodus 13:17–14:31
12 Apr	Song of Moses; Bitter water made sweet	Exodus 15
13 Apr	Manna and the test commandment	Exodus 16
14 Apr	Water from the Rock; Battle with the Amalekites	Exodus 17
15 Apr	Jethro's advice	Exodus 18
16 Apr	Israel arrives at Mount Sinai	Exodus 19
17 Apr	Ten Commandments spoken	Exodus 20
18 Apr	Judgments concerning servants, violence and animals	Exodus 21
19 Apr	Judgments concerning property and immorality	Exodus 22
20 Apr	Justice; Land Sabbaths; Feasts; the Promised Land	Exodus 23
21 Apr	Israel affirms covenant; Elders dine before God	Exodus 24
22 Apr	Plans for the tabernacle	Exodus 25
23-24 Apr	More plans for the tabernacle	Exodus 26–27
25 Apr	Garments for the priesthood	Exodus 28
26 Apr	Aaron and sons consecrated; Daily offerings	Exodus 29
27 Apr	Incense altar; Ransom money; Laver; Holy oil; Incense	Exodus 30
28 Apr	Artisans for the tabernacle; Sabbath a sign forever	Exodus 31
29 Apr	The golden calf	Exodus 32
30 Apr	Command to leave Sinai; Moses asks to see God's glory	Exodus 33

Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading

Introduction to Exodus (Exodus 1–2)

April 4

“Exodus is the record of Israel’s birth as a nation,” says *The New Open Bible* (introductory notes to Exodus). “The Hebrew title, *We’elleh Shemoth*, ‘Now These Are the Names,’ comes from the first phrase in 1:1. Exodus begins with ‘Now’ to show it as a continuation of Genesis. The Greek title is *Exodus*, a word meaning exit, departure or going out. The Septuagint [Greek translation of the Old Testament] uses this word to describe the book by its key event (see 19:1, ‘gone out’)” (1990). Though a nation of slaves, Israel will leave Egypt victorious to meet their God in the wilderness.

Exodus is the second of the five books written by Moses (see Exodus 17:14). Jesus Christ affirmed him as the author (compare Exodus 3:6; Mark 12:26). After calling Moses, God sends him to lead the people. But it is clear that the power to free the Israelites is not the power of Moses. Rather, it is the power of the divine King of the universe. All the while, the weakness of man is made quite clear—from Moses’ own initial resistance of God’s will to the stubborn hardheartedness of Pharaoh to the incessant complaining, murmuring and outright rebellion of the Israelites.

God, however, proves ultimately faithful. He will deliver His people. And this is all a mere type or forerunner of the future deliverance that He will accomplish through sending Jesus Christ—first to die as the true Passover lamb (represented in type here in Exodus) and then to come again as immortal Savior—to destroy His enemies and glorify all who choose to serve Him and live according to His law, a law first spelled out for us in the book of Exodus.

Archaeologists and biblical scholars have entered into lively discussions about whether Israel’s sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus really occurred. Biblical “minimalists” dispute the historicity of these events, because there is no evidence outside of the Bible for them. Yet many distinguished scholars uphold the veracity of the biblical account. “‘Absence of evidence,’ observes Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen, ‘is not evidence of absence.’ Nahum Sarna, professor emeritus of biblical studies at Brandeis University, argues that the exodus story—tracing, as it does a nation’s origins to slavery and oppression—‘cannot possibly be fictional. No nation would be likely to invent for itself, and faithfully transmit century after century and millennium after millennium, an inglorious and inconvenient tradition of this nature,’ unless it had an authentic core. ‘If you’re making up history,’ adds Richard Elliott Friedman, professor at the University of California at San Diego, ‘it’s that you were descended from gods or kings, not from slaves.’

“Indeed, the absence of direct material evidence of an Israelite sojourn in Egypt is not as surprising, or as damaging to the Bible’s credibility, as it first might seem. What type of material evidence, after all, would one expect to find that could corroborate the biblical story? ‘Slaves, serfs and nomads leave few traces in the archaeological record,’ notes [respected archaeologist] William Dever. And since official records and inscriptions in the ancient Near East often were written to impress gods and potential enemies, it would be quite surprising to find an account of the destruction of the pharaoh’s army immortalized on the walls of an Egyptian temple” (Jeffery L. Sheler, *Is The Bible True?*, 1999, p. 78).

Though Enslaved, Israel Becomes a Nation (Exodus 1–2)

April 4

Here we have a recount of the sons of Israel, interestingly not by order of age, but listed according to the sons’ mothers. First listed are the sons of Leah, then the sons of Leah’s handmaid (Zilpah), Rachel’s son Benjamin (Joseph was already in Egypt), then the sons of Rachel’s handmaid (Bilhah). It is stated that Jacob’s family of “seventy persons” had come into Egypt (verse 5), just as was stated in Genesis 46:27. Yet some people see here a conflict with Stephen’s statement in Acts 7: “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, *seventy-five* people” (verse 14). Yet, as Christ stated, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). And indeed, a simple explanation is given in John W. Haley’s *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*: “Jacob’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren amounted to sixty-six [Genesis 46:8-26]. Adding Jacob himself, and Joseph with his two sons, we have seventy. If to the sixty-six we add the nine wives of Jacob’s sons (Judah’s and Simeon’s wives were dead; Joseph could not be said to call himself, his own wife, or his two sons into Egypt; and Jacob is specified separately by Stephen), we have seventy-five persons, as in Acts” (p. 389).

But the Israelites were not to remain at these numbers for long. God had promised and covenanted with Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and as

the sand of the seashore (Genesis 22:17-18). He reiterated that promise with Isaac (26:4) and with Jacob (28:14), who was renamed Israel (32:28). Now we see in Exodus the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise, emphasized by the use of five different descriptions: “were fruitful”; “increased abundantly”; “multiplied”; “waxed exceeding mighty”; “the land was filled with them.” It seems as though God inspired Moses to drive home the point that He was starting to fulfill the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is very easy to forget God’s Word, especially when we fall upon difficult times, but this shows God’s faithfulness to His promises.

Now we read that a number of years have passed since Joseph and his family (including his brothers and their families) have all died. A new pharaoh has come into power who does not know, remember or acknowledge the deeds and position that Joseph once held. Ask any number of young adults today whether they remember men such as Dwight Eisenhower, Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. It doesn’t take long to forget men who once held highly visible positions. Yet in Egypt the tendency was far worse. There weren’t textbooks to read or TV news to watch. And a new pharaoh often erased evidence of the glory of the previous pharaoh to aggrandize himself in the eyes of the people.

This new pharaoh now regards the Israelites as a threat because of their vast and growing population. So the Egyptians devise a plan to bring the Israelites into total submission through slavery. This is all according to God’s plan that He had revealed to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-14). The attempt by the pharaoh to use the taskmasters to break the spirit of the Israelites, ruin their health through long, hard hours of work and discourage them from having children who would be born into slavery was not working. So an edict was proclaimed to *kill* the male children, thus restraining the population growth. It’s interesting to note God’s intervention here, as the midwives were not punished for disobeying Pharaoh’s command. In fact, God blessed the midwives due to their respect for Him! Pharaoh, in turn, commanded the Egyptians to engage in the murder of the male Hebrew children. Though many were killed, it is improbable that the edict lasted very long as we can see that by the time Moses returned to lead Israel out of Egypt as a grown man (in his 80s), the adult males of Israel numbered approximately 600,000.

Moses “Drawn Out” (Exodus 1–2)

April 4 Cont’d

Here we find an attempt by a Levite family to save their son during the time of Pharaoh’s edict. It’s interesting to note that Jesus—the ultimate Deliverer of whom Moses was a forerunner—also had to be hidden in Egypt when He was born, as a similar edict was issued during His infancy.

It is also wonderful to see here how God intervened during this very sobering time. Moses drifted right into the bathing area of the daughter of Pharaoh, who desired to save him and raise him as her own son. Though she recognized him as a Hebrew child, perhaps she viewed him as a gift of the gods, perhaps of the Nile god Khnum. Moreover, not only was Moses’ life spared, but his real mother was paid to nurse and rear him! The name the princess gave him, *Moses*, means “Drawn Out,” as in birth. Interestingly, this was a common suffix for the names of various pharaohs of the Middle and New Kingdoms of Egypt. For instance, Thutmose or Thutmosis is Thoth-mosis, meaning “Drawn (or born) from Thoth,” the god of wisdom. Another example is Rameses or Ra-meses, meaning “Drawn (or born) from Ra” or Re, the sun god. Thus, there is reason to believe that Moses’ name may have originally had a pagan prefix that he, quite understandably, did not record when he wrote the Pentateuch.

More amazing still, considering that the pharaoh’s daughter recognized that Moses was a Hebrew child, it would be rather surprising if the pharaoh himself did not. Yet the pharaoh did not demand the death of the child (perhaps out of a combination of love for his daughter and a belief that the child may have been a divine gift). In fact, he allowed the boy to become a prince of Egypt. In Acts 7:22 Stephen tells us that besides the trappings of royalty, “Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.” Indeed, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus informs us that he became a great Egyptian general. But all of this changed overnight when Moses became a fugitive fleeing for his life.

Acts 7:23-29 tells us that Moses was 40 years old at the time of his flight from Egypt. Verse 30 reveals that he sojourned in the land of Midian for another 40 years. And he would later wander with the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years (verse 36)—finally dying at the age of 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7). So Moses had three 40-year segments of leadership training: 1) training as a leader in Pharaoh’s court; 2) training as a shepherd in Midian; 3) training as a leader of the Israelites.

From this we can deduce that a period of approximately 80 years, or two thirds of Moses' life, transpires in Exodus 2 alone!

Moses was trained for 40 years under Reuel, the “priest” of Midian. This term makes sense when we realize that the Midianites were descended from Abraham (Genesis 25:1-4) and that, even in Israel, the head of each family was the one who would offer sacrifices prior to the institution of the Levitical system. Moses married Reuel's daughter Zipporah. It should be noted here that Reuel was also known as Jethro—as both names refer in Scripture to Moses' father-in-law (Exodus 2:18; 3:1; Numbers 10:29). Author John Haley says that, according to several scholars, “Jether, or Jethro, is not a proper name, but simply a title of honor, denoting ‘excellency,’ and about equivalent to the Arabic ‘Imam’” (*Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, pp. 354-344).



God Speaks to Moses From the Burning Bush (Exodus 3–4)

April 5

The time has come for God to deliver the Israelites in accordance with the prophecy given to Abraham in Genesis 15. The Almighty calls Moses from tending the flock, confronting him in a miraculous sight—a bush that, while burning with fire, was not consumed. God stated the fact that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom the covenant promises were given. And it was now time to fulfill part of that covenant by bringing the Israelites out of captivity and into the land He had promised to their descendants.

Sometimes we must be patient with the trials that beset us. God's promises are always certain. At times, however, it feels like an eternity when we are beset with trials. Yet when God does step in, His intervention is quick! “And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:7-8).

Just as God prepared Moses for what was going to be taking place, including the very outcome, He prepares His people today for events that will take place in the future.

Continuing in chapter 4, since God knows how the human mind reasons, He prepared for Moses to have authoritative credibility through certain miracles—not for Moses to be ultimately regarded but, rather, that God would be the One looked to, and Moses simply as His truly commissioned servant. You can be certain that God knows exactly how to get someone’s attention. The three miracles that God had Moses perform would be a great witness to the Egyptians—and to the Israelites, who were by now quite influenced by Egyptian religion. The snake was one of the gods of Egypt. Leprosy was an incurable disease that would have seemed to any physician of the time to be the work of a “god.” Last, but not least, the Nile was also worshiped, and defiling its waters with blood would draw the attention of everyone!

But we also can begin to see the meek, self-effacing character of Moses being revealed in this chapter. The deep humility of Moses (Numbers 12:3) was surely primarily the result of his closeness to God, but it is apparent that it was also rooted in his natural personality. Even though by this time Moses, as Stephen later preached, was “mighty in words and deeds,” it seems he lacked self-confidence. It’s not unusual for talented and successful people to lack confidence. In this case, this weakness was turned into a strength, because self-confidence was soon replaced by great confidence in and reliance on God. However, at this point, Moses was focusing on his own perceived lack of ability, and tried to wriggle out of this overwhelming assignment.

Perhaps he was simply so in awe of God that he thought himself incapable of representing Him. Yet in consideration of God’s power and who God was, Moses should not have been so presumptuous to think that God was making a mistake in choosing him—and that God couldn’t utilize him as required. Although God understood Moses’ personality, Moses was trying His patience by not focusing on all of the miracles and backing that God had given to Moses. And, as He was quick to point out, He was the Creator God—the very designer and maker of the human mouth. Yet, God is so merciful and understanding. Though angry with Moses for what appears to have been a lack of faith, God still gave him the assistance of his older brother Aaron. Of course, God had probably already intended some involvement by Aaron, who was to serve as Israel’s high priest. But it appears that before long, Moses was talking directly with Pharaoh, rather than through Aaron (see Exodus 8:9, 26, 29).

When we come to Exodus 4:24, it is shocking to read that God sought to kill Moses! Why? Notice the account in chapter 4 of the confrontation between Moses and his wife. Part of God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the acknowledgment of that covenant through the act of circumcision. Whoever was not circumcised among the males of God’s people would be “cut off,” or destroyed, from among them. When we review to whom the covenant promises were made, we can see that they did not extend through the lineage born to Abraham and Keturah. The Midianites were the descendants of Abraham and Keturah through Midian. And while Midian himself may have been circumcised, as Ishmael was, it is apparent that after the children of Keturah were sent away (Genesis 25:5-6), they did not continue the practice of circumcising their children. Rather, “the Midianites practiced circumcision on a groom right before his marriage instead of circumcising male infants.... Many of Israel’s neighboring peoples practiced circumcision, but none except Israel circumcised infants” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 24).

Now let’s put together verses 24 through 26. It is apparent that God was holding Moses responsible for circumcising his son, but Moses had delegated that to his wife, Zipporah, who was objecting to doing it. She finally did it, but with reluctance and resentment, calling Moses a “bloody man.” We might wonder why only one son was at issue when Moses had *two* sons (verse 20; 18:2-6). One suggestion is that, “most likely, Moses had kept one of his sons uncircumcised, despite what God had commanded” (same note). Perhaps Zipporah was so upset by the circumcision of one son that she demanded her next son not be circumcised. In any event, Moses was not following God’s instructions. And this involved the very sign of the covenant people—being violated by the one who was to be the national leader. Moses’ disobedience in light of these factors made it a capital offense. So we find this brief insert—the recording of an incident that, no doubt, had a great impact on Moses.

Supplementary Reading: “Moses: Leader of a Nation,” *The Good News*, March–April 1997, pp. 25-28.

Bricks Without Straw—But God Is Faithful (Exodus 5:1–6:27)**April 6**

Sometimes situations get worse before they get better. How do we react before God when we pray? Do we ever feel that we are not only not receiving an answer but also that things seem to be getting worse? Pharaoh's response to Moses was that the Israelites were getting too much "free time" and that it was allowing them the opportunity to get distracted from their work. When the Israelites received Pharaoh's harsh response to Moses' request that they be allowed to hold a celebration to worship God, it was certainly a test for Moses. For all of the details that God had told him, God did not reveal this as being part of the plan. Part of being a good leader is the ability to "turn the other cheek." God allowed Moses to be subject to the anger and bewilderment of the Israelites. But it was all with a purpose in mind.

God wants to make certain that His people understand clearly that He IS God. So we read references to Himself such as "I AM WHO I AM" (the literal Hebrew has no definite tense—"I Be Who I Be"—denoting past, present and future). God has always existed and will always exist. Here we read of God introducing a new name that He had not revealed earlier to Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. (It is used in the book of Genesis, but this is apparently because Moses, who wrote the book, was inspired by God to use it in relating the stories of the patriarchs). The newly revealed name is *Yahweh* (the exact pronunciation of which is unknown). It is essentially the name "I Be Who I Be" in the third person—that is, "He Be Who He Be"—and has been variously translated as "the Eternal," "the Ever-living" or even "the Self-Existent One." (Jesus later revealed that *He* was the one the Israelites worshiped as the great "I AM"—see John 8:58 and supplementary reading.)

God was preparing His people to understand that He was not some passing fad. The miracles that they were going to experience were a demonstration of His power and supremacy. Most biblical scholars today, if they accept that the events of the Exodus took place at all, approach it rather skeptically, claiming the plagues that came upon Egypt, for instance, were not miraculous in nature. They claim that these were merely natural phenomena exaggerated in the scriptural account. Biblical historian Eugene Merrill counters: "They [the plagues] must be understood for what they were—unique but genuinely historical outpourings of the wrath of a sovereign God who wished to show not only Egypt but his own people that he is the Lord of all of heaven and earth, one well able to redeem his people from the onerous slavery they knew under Pharaoh and to make them, by covenant, his own servant people" (*Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, p. 65). The Israelites were so encompassed with the "gods" of Egypt that they needed to understand that His ultimate intervention would exceed *anything* that man could do through sorcery, magic or false worship. Most of the plagues would be a direct attack on the "gods" of Egypt. Indeed, Jethro will afterward remark, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them" (Exodus 18:11).

If only mankind would simply believe God! The things of man are temporary. The things of God are eternal. So while mankind may let us down, God has been, is and will always be our loving God!

Supplementary Reading: "Who Was Jesus Christ?," *The Good News*, March–April 2002, pp. 30–31.

The Miracles Begin (Exodus 6:28–8:19)**April 7**

Moses was now in his 80th year. He was beginning the final 40 years of his life in leading the nation of Israel to the Promised Land. Moses and Aaron had been prepared by God to understand that Pharaoh would be very stubborn, regardless of the miracles that were to be performed. Pharaoh also had some "tricks" that could be performed through his magicians—perhaps even with demonic help. Pharaoh's magicians somehow imitated the first three miracles that Moses displayed (those with the snakes and the first two plagues—the water to blood and the frogs). After that, the magicians could no longer duplicate or simulate miraculous plagues. The ability to work magic with snakes was a skill in which the Egyptian magicians apparently prided themselves: "The power to control and direct the movements of such venomous reptiles was one of the things of which the Egyptian was most proud, and in which he was most skilfull, already in the time when the pyramids were being built" (E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic*, 1971, p. 5). This could have been akin to snake charming, a fleshly skill, or something supernatural—originating from Satan, the chief serpent. The New Testament tells us the names of the chief magicians were Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8). Their magic, though powerful, was not equal to the power by which God worked through Moses. Nevertheless, even after the power of God prevailed, Pharaoh did not listen.

In the future, the Bible reveals, an awesome geopolitical power known as “the beast” will arise on the world scene. Its leader will be a dictator like Pharaoh and, as Pharaoh was with the priests of Egypt, he will be in league with a false religious power that will perform many wonders and miracles. Will we be able to discern the power of God as opposed to the power of this false system? There are those who will be deceived (Revelation 13:13-14). Through His written Word, God promises that if we stay close to Him, we will not be deceived.

Returning now to the chapters of today’s reading, let us examine the first three plagues on Egypt--plagues that even the Israelites experienced.

1. Waters made blood: Each of the plagues of Egypt was an assault on multiple Egyptian gods. For instance, the plague on the waters was a slap at Khnum, the giver of the Nile; at Hapy, the spirit of the Nile; at Sodpet, the god of Nile floodwaters; at Osiris, whose bloodstream was the Nile; at Edjo, the goddess of the Delta; at Hatmehyt, guardian goddess of fish and fishermen; and at various other deities that should have been looking out for the Egyptians. Whether the waters were turned into actual blood is unclear. It is possible that the waters simply appeared this way. *The Nelson Study Bible* points out, “The Hebrew word translated *blood* can refer to a red color, as in Joel 2:31.... [It] might be that God caused torrential rains to flood and pollute the sources of the Nile to create this plague.... Red soil and algae would make the waters of the Nile red, unfit for drinking and deficient in oxygen for the fish” (1997). Indeed, volcanic or meteoric activity could cause a similar pollution of blood-red coloring, as appears to be the case in a prophesied future event in Revelation 8:8. And the Bible does seem to indicate that there was geologic upheaval at the time of the Exodus (compare Psalm 114:1-6). In any case, no matter what the actual change in Egypt’s waters was, and no matter how God brought it about, the important thing to realize is that *He* brought it about. It was clearly a divine miracle.

2. Frogs: One of the gods worshiped by the Egyptians was Heket, whose image was a frog or a woman with the *head* of a frog. Heket was the goddess of birth, midwives and safe deliveries (frogs, in moderate numbers, being seen as signs of life, renewal and happiness). After the overabundance of them, and then the stench of huge piles of dead frogs, it would seem that the goddess Heket would have lost credibility. Furthermore, the court of Hapy, mentioned above, included crocodile gods and frog goddesses. And the primordial gods Nun, Kek and Heh were each depicted as a man with a frog’s head. This plague, though imitated by the magicians, causes Pharaoh to yield. But his stubbornness then prevails and he changes his mind.

3. Lice: Though the Egyptians revered no specific god of lice, so far as we know, they did worship an insect God—Kheper, who was represented as a scarab beetle. Furthermore, we should see how this plague was a slap at the Egyptian gods in general—who were unable to protect their subjects from the infestation. Indeed, Har-pa-khered (Horus in child form) was invoked to ward off dangerous creatures, while Imhotep was besought as a god of medicinal healing. But beseech as they might, there was no relief. Even Pharaoh himself was considered a god—the divine incarnation of the sky and sun god Horus—yet he personally suffered from this plague. The lice infestation could not be imitated by the magicians. They, therefore, yield—but Pharaoh does not.

Still More Plagues (Exodus 8:20–10:20)

April 8

Before sending the fourth plague, God says that He will prevent it and the remainder of the plagues from afflicting the Israelites in Goshen. Thus, the first three plagues had been experienced by everyone, including the Israelites. But the seven last plagues (out of 10) afflict the Egyptians only. That the “seven last plagues” are distinct is quite interesting in light of the fact that we actually find this phrase in Revelation 15:1, in reference to the final plagues poured out on rebellious mankind—following a period of suffering that will come on God’s people (physical *and* spiritual) and on the rest of the world. And, just as in Egypt, God’s people of the end time will be spared the seven last plagues.

4. Flies: Concerning the word “flies,” the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* states that these were “not ‘flies,’ such as we are accustomed to [or perhaps not *only* such flies, as Egypt had and still has those too] but divers sorts of flies [i.e., flying, buzzing insects] (Ps. 78:45), the gad-fly, the cockroach, the Egyptian beetle, for all these are mentioned by different writers.... The worship of flies, particularly of the beetle [in the form of the scarab god Kheper], was a prominent part of the religion of the ancient Egyptians” (1961, note on Exodus 8:20-31). Furthermore, as the flies crawled all over them, flew into their eyes, covered their food and buzzed incessantly around them, adding to their misery, where was the supreme Amun, helper of the pious and god of the wind,

to blow away this plague? Where was the guardian goddess Mafdet and the protector god Sed? Finally, the “divine” pharaoh begins to bargain, agreeing to let the Israelites sacrifice to God in Goshen. But Moses points out that this would be an abomination to the Egyptians, since they considered it detestable to sacrifice sheep (see Genesis 43:32; 46:34), and that—now really hating the Israelites—they might stone them. So, with flies still buzzing around him, Pharaoh agrees to let the Israelites travel a short way into the wilderness to sacrifice. But once again, the stubborn ruler changes his mind.

5. Death of livestock: As in most pagan societies, oxen had strong attachments to various deities in Egypt. Apis, the bull god, was the living personification of the creation god Ptah. The creator sun gods Atum and Re, later syncretized into a single deity, were represented by the black bull Mnevis of Heliopolis. Nut and Neith were both depicted as the great celestial cow who gave birth to the cosmos and other deities. Mehet-Weret, another goddess associated with creation, was depicted as a cow. The mother goddesses Hathor and Nekbet were both pictured with the form of a cow. Hesat, the goddess of birth, was depicted as a cow. And the foster mother of Horus, the cow goddess Sekhet-Hor, was even invoked to safeguard cattle—a prayer that now availed nothing in the face of the true God’s power. It should also be noted here that the Egyptians did possess some sheep (see 9:3), though apparently not for food or sacrifice (compare 8:26). And ram gods figure prominently in the Egyptian pantheon—Ba, Banebdjedet, the primeval Heryshaf, and the Nile god Khnum. Even the supreme god Amun was symbolized by a ram with curved horns. The statement that “*all* the livestock of Egypt died” (9:6) must actually mean that the *vast majority* of their animals died, as livestock are still alive in verses 19-21 and horses in 14:7-9. Even so, we can imagine that this was a major blow to the economy and military strength of Egypt. Once again, God spares the Israelites, as Pharaoh discovers. But still he refuses to let God’s people go.

6. Boils: Once again, the false deities of Egypt are of no help, including Sakhmet, a guardian goddess against disease (besides her major role as war goddess), Imhotep, the god of medicine, and Isis, goddess of life and healing. Pharaoh’s magicians are now too afflicted to be present; yet Pharaoh’s heart is still hardened. Interestingly, the narrative for the first time states that *God* actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart (9:12)—an intent God had earlier stated (4:21; 7:3). Yet before this, Pharaoh is seen as hardening his *own* heart (8:15, 32). God, then, is now reinforcing Pharaoh’s stubborn inclination—for the purpose described in verse 16 (see Romans 9:14-24). To better understand this, please refer to the article “Twist of Fate” at www.ucg.org/brp/materials.

7. Hail: This plague killed servants, animals and cattle if they were not under shelter. Plants and trees were also destroyed, including crops in the field. That this was an extremely severe thunderstorm of icy hail and that the “fire” darting to the ground was lightning is apparent from Psalm 78: “He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost. He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning” (verses 47-48). These destructive elements, of course, had a devastating impact on the nation’s food supply. And still the gods of Egypt were shown to be powerless: the sky goddesses Nut and Hathor; the sky god Horus; Shu, the god of air and bearer of heaven; Seth, the god of storms and protector of crops; Neper, the god of grain crops; Osiris, the ruler of life and vegetation; Isis, the goddess of life; and all the cow and ram deities mentioned above proved impotent before the true God. Pharaoh now relents—for the time being. Of course, once the plague subsides, he again changes his mind.

8. Locusts: By this point, Pharaoh’s servants are attempting to impress on him that “Egypt is destroyed” (10:7). So he resorts to bargaining with Moses once again. But as he will not accede to God’s demands, a mighty wind brings an infestation of locusts on the land. The results are horrible to behold. Whatever vegetation had been left after the hail is now devoured by the locusts. The land is stripped bare. It must have been a wonder to look out over what was once a fertile, bountiful land and to no longer see the color green among the plants (verse 15). Again, Seth, Neper, Osiris and Isis are all defied—as are Shu, god of the air, and Amun, god of the wind. This terrible plague must have left the nation on the brink of starvation. In desperation, Pharaoh even confesses sin and asks forgiveness—outwardly. But his contrition is short-lived. By now, Moses may have become accustomed enough to Pharaoh’s stubbornness so as to not be surprised when, once again, Pharaoh changes his mind about releasing the Israelites.

Darkness and Warning of the Final Plague (Exodus 10:21–11:10)

April 9

9. Darkness: Here is a plague that lasted for three days. People could not even leave their homes due to the impact of this event. Comparable to being in a dark closet with even the cracks

around the door being covered, this was a major attack on the credibility of the Egyptian sun god—known variously as Re, Ra, Atum, Aten and sometimes Horus. Indeed, though the Egyptians worshiped many gods, none was worshiped as much as the sun. Consider, too, that as much as eclipses were feared in the ancient world, this three-day darkness must have been terrifying beyond belief. Once again, it did not affect the Israelites living in Goshen. Pharaoh again attempts to make a deal by keeping the animals of the Israelites that were not affected by the plagues in Egypt. After all, the food supply of the Egyptians was now at a critical stage—so to him it was not really an unreasonable demand. But before God, Pharaoh was in no position to be making demands. Yet he was angry, to the point of threatening Moses with death if he would not get out of his sight.

10. Death of firstborn: Before leaving, Moses warned Pharaoh of the final plague that was to befall Egypt. The firstborn males of the Egyptians, of their non-Israelite servants and of their animals would surely die—from the palace of Pharaoh to the dungeons (that it was just the males is the direct implication of Exodus 13:11-16, where only the Israelite males needed to be redeemed). Perhaps this terrible plague on Egypt was, in part, a deserved punishment for the Egyptians' slaughtering of *God's* children—the Israelite infants—in previous generations going back to the time of Moses' birth. It was *certainly* for the reason God had given to Moses in Exodus 4: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn"' (verses 22-23). Moreover, in killing the firstborn of the animals too, God was again showing His supremacy over the gods of Egypt: "For I... will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD" (12:12). There would be no doubt left among the Egyptians that the God of Israel was indeed the true God!

Besides the many and varied animal deities, God's action directly challenged Osiris, the giver and ruler of life. Furthermore, in the end, this plague would accomplish the breaking of Egypt—and force Pharaoh to at last release the Israelites. This forcing of Pharaoh to act against his will would demonstrate God's overthrow of his sovereignty and of the gods who represented it: Hu, the god personifying royal authority; Wadjet, the goddess of royal authority; Sobek, the god epitomizing the might of the pharaohs; Maat, goddess of cosmic order under whose aegis the rulers of Egypt governed; and the war goddess Sakhmet, who would supposedly breathe fire against the enemies of the pharaoh. God would, of course, prove Himself victorious over them all—and over Pharaoh too, who, as mentioned earlier, was himself regarded as the divine incarnation of Horus.

Even at the announcement of this warning, Moses and the Israelites were respected throughout the land because of the miraculous events that had taken place. And not just respected. As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on Exodus 11:3: "Another remarkable component of the Exodus was the Egyptian's favor (or grace) toward the Hebrews and admiration for their leader. After all that had happened, we might expect the opposite. But the positive feelings for Moses were shared, amazingly enough, even by Pharaoh's servants. This, too, is a part of the wit and irony of this great victory the Lord had won over His enemy Pharaoh (who represents evil, sin, ungodliness, and even Satan; see [Revelation] 15:3)." God told the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for silver and gold items—in effect, compensation for their years of slave labor. And after all the Egyptians had witnessed, they were not about to complain. But Pharaoh's heart was still hardened, even threatening Moses' life, as already mentioned. Moses, then, having delivered the final warning, at last storms out in anger (11:8). This would be the final confrontation between the two (compare 10:29).

Supplementary Reading: "Archaeology and the Book of Exodus: Exit from Egypt," *The Good News*, March–April 1997, pp. 22-24.

A New Beginning! (Exodus 12:1–13:16)

April 10

God now gives specific instructions to the Israelites in preparation for the final plague to come upon Egypt. It was necessary to record God's Word, as His instructions were to be repeated each year. This was to be a reminder of God's powerful and miraculous intervention among His people. And it was to foreshadow the supreme sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who would eventually come to offer His unblemished life as the sacrifice for the sins of all mankind.

On the 10th day of what God declared to be the first month of the year (12:2, the Hebrew month Abib, see 13:4, which occurred in the spring), the Israelites were to select an unblemished yearling of the sheep or goats. They were to keep it up until the 14th of the month. In the "twilight" portion of the evening that began the 14th day (literally "between the two evenings," which, though disputed, is commonly understood to mean between sundown and darkness), they were

to kill the lamb or kid and prepare it according to the specific instructions God gave them. The Passover consisted of the events that took place during the course of the night and into the following morning. What exactly took place?

1. The lamb was killed.
2. Its blood was put on the entrances of the houses.
3. The lamb was roasted.
4. The Israelites ate it with solemnity and in a state of preparedness, knowing that the events of the next day would entail much organization and travel.
5. The children were to be specifically taught the meaning of these events.
6. None were to go out of their houses until the morning.
7. At midnight, the Lord would “pass over” the homes and, with the evidence of the blood on the entrances, He would spare the firstborn males of man and animals within from death (males implied from the command in 13:12-15).
8. What remained of the sacrifice was to be burned.

When morning came on the 14th, the Israelites, scattered all over the land of Goshen, faced the daunting challenge of gathering themselves and all their belongings and driving their livestock to the departure point of Rameses. For many this required a journey of more than 20 miles, which would have taken all day. We read that there were approximately 600,000 men, besides children, a mixed multitude (those who were not Israelite), and a great number of livestock. So we have possibly more than three million people besides animals that collectively organized and left from Rameses by night, under a full moon (being the beginning of the 15th day). It was certainly a night to be observed. And it began the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Incidentally, the Days of Unleavened Bread beginning “the fourteenth day of the month at evening” in 12:18 is shown by other verses such as Leviticus 23:6 to mean the *end* of 14th and thus the beginning of the 15th—as “evening” or sundown can apply to the beginning or end of a day, depending on the context (see Leviticus 23:32, where the “ninth day of the month at evening” clearly means the beginning of the 10th, verse 27). For the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites were to dispose of any leavened bread or leavening agent (for them this meant yeast) and eat *unleavened* bread instead. The sobering events of the previous evening were embedded in their minds as so many people and animals died throughout the land. Of course, it was also a *joyous* time. For, finally, after their hopes had risen and fallen so many times, the promise that God had spoken to the Israelites through Moses was actually happening! Families that had only known oppression and slavery were now free!

In chapter 13, the details of the Days of Unleavened Bread are again recorded. The Bible reveals that not only was unleavened bread eaten for seven days, as a reminder of coming out of Egypt in haste, but leavening represents those things that are contrary to the way of God. Paul told the Corinthians to “keep the feast [of Unleavened Bread], not...with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). During these days, which Paul’s instructions show that God’s people are still to observe, all leavened bread and leavening agents that can be used to leaven bread—which now includes yeast, baking powder and baking soda (sodium bicarbonate)—are to be removed from the home. (“Bread” is here used to refer to anything made primarily from one or more grains and cooked, including loaf bread, crackers, pancakes, cake, pie crust, cookies, muffins, pasta, etc. Any of these containing a leavening agent must be put out.) This is a reminder for us to purge our lives of spiritual leavening, the sin that so easily spreads and “puffs up” (1 Corinthians 4:6, 18-19; 5:2, 6; 8:1; 13:4).

Supplementary Reading: “The Passover: Why Did Jesus Christ Have to Die?,” *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, pp. 10-19; and “The Feast of Unleavened Bread: The Lesson of Leaving Sin,” pp. 20-23.

The Firstborn Are Sanctified (Exodus 12:1–13:16)

April 10 Cont’d

God instructed the Israelites to sanctify (“set apart”—for a specific religious or spiritual purpose) the male firstborn of both man and animals. Why? Exodus 13:15 explains that it was because the firstborn of both man and beast were slain in Egypt—and the ones God spared, those of Israel, then belonged to Him. The firstborn males of clean animals were to be sacrificed to God while the firstborn males of men and unclean animals were to be redeemed (i.e., “bought back” from God). An unclean animal was to be redeemed with the sacrifice of a lamb. For man, an offering was to be given in place of a literal sacrifice. Numbers 18:16 reveals the redemption value. Through this

offering the Israelites would always be reminded of the miraculous way God delivered Israel from Egypt.

Miracle at the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17–14:31)

April 11

God brought Israel out of Egypt through great signs and wonders. He had communicated to them through His servant Moses and was now miraculously leading them through the wilderness. Israel was now witnessing another miracle—God leading them by a pillar of cloud during the day, which brought welcome shade during the afternoon heat (Psalm 105:39; compare Isaiah 4:5-6; 25:4-5), and by a pillar of fire during the night, which gave them a warm, glowing light. But He was leading them in a way that did not seem to make sense, since it was not in the direction of Canaan and was, instead, heading toward a dead-end entrapment. Pharaoh had once again changed his mind, and now the Israelites found themselves trapped between his army and the sea.

One might think that, after witnessing the tremendous miracles that had already taken place, the Israelites would begin to show evidence of trust and faith in the One who had delivered them thus far. Instead, we find a continually complaining, murmuring and backsliding group of people who just aren't getting the point! However, God reminds us that these ancient examples have been recorded for our benefit today (1 Corinthians 10:13). The people, places and events may be different, but the attitudes prevail throughout the ages.

Are we that different today? Do we ever find ourselves questioning the existence or whereabouts of our Creator? Do we ever doubt God's miraculous intervention in our lives? Do we ever complain, gripe or murmur when things don't seem to be going our way? When our backs are to the "Red Sea" with no relief in sight, do we trust in the words, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD"? An end-time event is yet to occur that will test the faith of God's elect (Revelation 12:13-16). Will God's people remember His miracles, or will they be like the Israelites of old? If one can read about and believe in the One who was so patient, loving and merciful to a stubborn and stiff-necked people, why would one doubt His patience, love and mercy for today? God does not show partiality (Acts 10:34).

While the armies of Pharaoh were encompassed by the dark of the night, the pillar of fire was guiding millions of Israelites, a mixed multitude and millions of animals over the dried bed of the Red Sea. This was an enormous undertaking. One scholar, estimating the throng numbered 2.5 million—when it was likely closer to 3—mathematically "figured that marching ten abreast, the numbers would have formed a line over 150 miles long, and would have required eight or nine days to march by any fixed point" (Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses, A Life*, p. 175). Obviously since they crossed the Red Sea in a single night, the Israelites were lined up in numbers much greater than ten abreast—probably more like hundreds or thousands abreast!

Pharaoh's rebelliousness was finally brought to an end, then, in a miraculous series of events that all were able to witness. Many have claimed that the Israelites simply walked across a marsh or shallow lake when the water level was low. Part of their argument is that the original Hebrew term translated "Red Sea" is *Yam Suf*, meaning "Sea of Reeds"—reeds being plants like cattails, rushes and papyrus. However, the word *suf* can also mean seaweed (Jonah 2:5). In fact, the Gulf of Aqaba, a finger of the Red Sea, is actually called *Yam Suf* in 1 Kings 9:26. Others, accepting this, will argue that the Israelites were walking on a sandbar at low tide—while the Egyptians got swept away when the tide came in. Yet the Bible clearly says that the waters were a "wall" to the Israelites on both sides (Exodus 14:22)—an awesome miracle that cannot be explained by a coincidence of natural phenomena.

To quote biblical historian Eugene Merrill: "The crossing of Israel, which immediately preceded the drowning of the Egyptian chariotry, cannot be explained as a wading through a swamp. It required a mighty act of God, an act so significant in both scope and meaning that forever after in Israel's history it was the paradigm against which all of his redemptive and saving work was measured. If there was no actual miracle of the proportions described, all subsequent references to the exodus as the archetype of the sovereign power and salvific grace of God is hollow and empty" (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 66).

Through this incredible symbolic baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2), would the Israelites emerge with a renewed attitude?

A Joyful Song of Praise—to Complaining (Exodus 15)

April 12

After watching the Eternal miraculously putting a final end to the Egyptian army, the Israelites were in a state of elation. A song was composed by Moses and sung by the multitude in grateful

appreciation for God's deliverance. Miriam, the older sister of Moses and a prophetess, led the women in dancing with timbrels, a type of tambourine. If only the chapter would end with this happy event. But it was time to move on, and three days passed without a water source being found. Their reserves had been depleted and many were very thirsty.

In the arid climate of the region, people and animals alike needed much water every day. Water could be stored in animal skins, which would "sweat." When the dry wind passed over the skin, it would have a cooling or chilling effect on the stored water. But with millions of people and animals, a large supply of water was essential. Do we find the people crying out to God for their needs—the One who had saved them and had met all their needs thus far?

Sadly, only a few days have passed since the wondrous event at the Red Sea and we find the Israelites once again complaining before Moses. On their arrival at an oasis called "Marah," named so because of the bitter water, God again used a miracle to teach the Israelites a lesson. As God in His mercy miraculously purified the bitter waters despite their complaining, He also made a covenant with the Israelites. As long as they trusted in and obeyed Him, He would also be their Healer. The sicknesses and diseases that they had seen befall the Egyptians as a result of ignorance, disregard and disobedience to God's righteous laws would not afflict the Israelites.

A part of God's promise to Israel that they would escape disease and illness involved their obeying the many statutes He gave them that pertained to physical health. Numerous health principles that God gave through Moses are scattered throughout the Pentateuch. They involved public hygiene, water supply, sewage disposal, proper diet and control of infectious disease. Since God gave so much detailed instruction in these areas, it may imply that Israel was not living according to God's health code in Egypt. Medical doctors S.I. McMillen and David E. Stern wrote in their book, *None Of These Diseases: The Bible's Health Secrets for the 21st Century* (2000, pp. 9-11), that Egyptian medical and sanitation practices were abominable. There is a lesson for us in this. God wants us to be healthy and He is also our healer. However, if we do not live in accordance with what we know to be sound health principles today, we are not doing what we can to maintain good health, and we may suffer disease as a result. God expects us to live wisely and do what we can to sustain good health.

When the Israelites arrived at another oasis, called Elim, we find that each tribe had a well provided for it. We also read that there were 70 palm trees there, which, interestingly, was later the number of the elders of Israel (Numbers 11:24-25).

Supplementary Reading: "Miriam: A Lifetime of Faith," *The Good News*, May–June 1997, pp. 25-27.

God Provides Daily Bread (Exodus 16)

April 13

Nearly a month and a half since the departure from Rameses, the food that was prepared and stored for the journey was now depleted. But instead of beseeching God for their needs, the Israelites once again complained and murmured against Moses and Aaron. Moses reminded them that their complaints were not against him but against God Himself. Once again, though, God extended His patience and mercy to His people. He used the next miracle for a test. God now provides the Israelites with their physical daily bread. They called it "manna," meaning "what is it?," as it was a food item never before seen by human beings. Indeed, the Bible says it was "angels' food" (Psalm 78:25—not that angels, as spiritual beings, *needed* food but simply that they were allowed to enjoy the pleasure of eating, as we earlier read about them dining at Abraham's home, see Genesis 18). There were miracles contained in this new provision for the Israelites. Besides the actual miraculous appearance of the food itself, God gave specific instructions for its collection and storage. Storing the manna on any of six days of the week would result in spoilage and a foul odor. Yet this spoilage would not take place when twice as much manna was collected on Friday and stored for the Sabbath day (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset). The manna would now nourish the Israelites for the next 40 years until God allowed them into the Promised Land. God also commanded that a certain amount be set aside in a container to be preserved as a reminder of His promises—and this manna, kept in a golden pot and eventually stored in the side of the Ark of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:4), was miraculously kept from spoiling and stinking for centuries! The miraculous bread from heaven was given as a type of the "true bread from heaven," Jesus Christ (John 6:32-35).

God provided His people with the nourishment that they needed. For their part, the Israelites were expected to be obedient to God's laws, which He was beginning to reveal to them. Indeed, take note here that this episode preceded the events at Mount Sinai, wherein the Israelites were presented

with the Ten Commandments and entered into what is now called the Old Covenant. The evidence from scriptures such as Exodus 15:26 and 16:28 as well as others (e.g., Genesis 2:3; 7:2; 26:5) prove that God's laws and statutes were in effect well *before* the Israelites even arrived at Mount Sinai. Thus, the Old Covenant is not what brought those laws into force—the fallacy argued by those who attempt to say that God's law was done away when the Old Covenant ended at Christ's death.

Again, God provided the miracle of the manna not just to feed the people but to teach them to *keep the Sabbath* (see verse 29)—to obey His *law* (verse 28)—*before* the covenant at Mount Sinai. And He gave it as a *test* (verse 4). Even today, the Sabbath remains a real *test* commandment, one that really shows in a public manner who is fully committed to the way of God. Indeed, in today's society, others will readily accept us if we live according to a code of not stealing, not murdering, not committing adultery, not cursing God, etc. But keeping the Sabbath? That's another matter. That's just plain "weird," some would say.

Sabbath-keepers have lost jobs and gone through all manner of other problems to observe the seventh day as God has commanded. In the end, though, their lives are always better for it—because keeping the Sabbath results in real blessing. Nevertheless, it sometimes takes real faith and courage to live by this conviction. No wonder the Sabbath is a true identifying *sign* of God's people (see Exodus 31:13)—a visible *badge* that shows who is willing to walk in God's way no matter what the obstacles are. Of course, this is not to say that everyone who observes the Sabbath is truly committed to God—it could be a pretense, as it was for most of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Still, the Sabbath is an important outward sign that God has given to His people. And in today's society, it is a real test commandment.

Are *you* passing God's test? Even those of us who already know to observe God's Sabbath should regularly examine whether we are properly keeping it (see Isaiah 58:13-14).

Supplementary Reading: "The Sabbath: In the Beginning," *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*, pp. 4-12.

Is God Among Us? (Exodus 17)

April 14

By now we see a common thread running throughout the book of Exodus. It is not only Pharaoh who was "stiff-necked," but the Israelites also. What was the difference? God was setting the Israelites apart as a special people due to the covenant that He made with Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). They had a very special opportunity because of God dealing directly with them. Yet they constantly set their hearts against God's love for them. Once again they complain and murmur against Moses, this time almost to violence. The event at Massah, meaning "Tempted," also called Meribah, meaning "Contention," even saw the Israelites asking the question, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7). Their attitude was outrageous. They had seen God destroy Egypt through the plagues, had been freed from Egypt by Him, had walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, had seen the Egyptians swallowed up and had bitter water made drinkable. Every day they had the daily miracle of His provision of manna. And every moment the pillar of God's presence blazed above them! Yet, like those stiff-necked Israelites, even *we* sometimes forget God's miraculous intervention in *our* lives—or, worse still, *choose* to forget.

Amazingly, God remains incredibly merciful with the Israelites in this situation. He does not even send a rebuke against the people. Instead, He provides for them. He has Moses strike a rock, causing water to come out of it—evidently becoming a steady source to supply all the needs of the people and their flocks.

Chapter 17 also presents us with Israel's battle against the Amalekites. Amalek was a descendent of Esau or Edom (Genesis 36). A more detailed description of this confrontation is given in Deuteronomy 25:17, which explains that, in a cowardly move, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites from the rear, taking the stragglers and the weary. God regarded this act as dishonorable and despicable. He prophesied that the Amalekites would eventually be blotted out of existence. This prophecy was carried out in part by King Saul (1 Sam. 15:18) and to a much greater degree by Simeonites in the days of Hezekiah (compare 1 Chronicles 4:41-43)—and will likely find its ultimate fulfillment when the Edomites in general are destroyed at Christ's return (see Obadiah 18). In the confrontation with the Amalekites in Exodus 17, God chose to show His dealings with Israel through His chosen servant Moses—as long as he held aloft the "rod of God" (see verse 9). In this way, though Moses was God's chief human instrument at this time, the miraculous power of God was still the focus. As long as the rod of God was held up, Israel prevailed in their battle. Indeed, it is

interesting that Moses was not able to serve God and the people on his own. Rather, he needed help—people to hold up his arms—a point made even more apparent in the next chapter.

Jethro's Advice (Exodus 18)

April 15

It's possible that Zipporah returned to her father in Midian after the confrontation with Moses over the matter of circumcising the son she bore Moses. It is recorded that Moses sent them back, but the timing of that event is not clear. There is no account of the entire family coming out of Egypt. We do find here that Jethro now brings Moses' wife and children back to him.

Jethro also gives Moses some advice in carrying out the responsibilities of a leader among a civil nation. Just as Moses had grown tired in holding God's staff up on his own in the previous chapter, so was he wearing himself out by single-handedly dealing with all the problems of the people himself. Jethro, witnessing this, recommends that an organized leadership be put into place to handle the day-to-day issues of millions of people and animals. Remember that Jethro, a leader among the Midianites, had years of experience in leading people.

Some people have argued that such a hierarchy was against God's will. However, notice that Jethro said to institute such a captain system only if God so commanded Moses (verse 23). And it is inconceivable that Moses, who talked with God every day, would have taken such far-reaching steps without consulting with Him. Furthermore, that God sanctioned this system is clear, for He *later* commands that 70 elders be chosen from among those who are already "officers" over the people (Numbers 11:16)—i.e., having been declared so through the captain system.

Like chapters 15 and 16, chapter 18 also reveals that God's laws and statutes were being taught and expounded even before their formal declaration at Mount Sinai (verse 16).

Israel Arrives at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19)

April 16

God reiterated His covenant with Israel to His servant Moses. Moses called for the elders of Israel and repeated God's words to them. The elders then repeated the words to the people of Israel. This gives a clearer explanation of how Moses communicated with nearly three million people. Now we come to the point where God was planning to speak with Moses and all the people would be able to hear God's voice. But there were special instructions for the people to follow before they could approach the vicinity of God's holy presence. Boundaries were set about the mountain so the people would be restricted from touching it. The prohibition against touching the mountain was to teach them a sense of awe and respect toward the living God—and to demonstrate their need for a mediator. The people were to be clean, having their clothes washed. And on the day that God appeared to Moses on the mountain, married couples were to forego sexual relations. Wearing clean clothes and abstaining from marital relations were outward acts signifying that they had sanctified themselves before God spoke to them. This does not imply that lawful sexual relations are spiritually unclean. In the New Testament, Paul suggested that it is occasionally appropriate to refrain from marital relations *for a brief time*, when specially devoting that time to God through prayer and fasting (1 Corinthians 7:5). After Moses ascended the mountain, God had to send him back down because curiosity was getting the better of the people. After once again warning the people, Moses again ascended the mountain with Aaron.

The timing of all of this is very interesting. Jewish tradition asserts that the giving of the law occurred on the Feast of Firstfruits or Pentecost, which can occur no later than the 10th or 11th day of the third month of the Hebrew calendar, Sivan. Verse 1 does say that it was in the third month after leaving Egypt—but some interpret the phrase "on the same day" here to mean the same day of the month that the Israelites left Egypt. This, however, would mean that they arrived at Mount Sinai on the 15th of Sivan, with the law being given on the 17th (compare verses 10-11)—too late for Pentecost. However, if the phrase "on the same day" is understood to mean the same day that Jethro departed, as stated in the previous verse (18:27), then Pentecost can fit quite well. It could also be that the "same day" meant the same day of the *week* the Israelites had left Egypt—which, again, would allow for the Ten Commandments to have been delivered on Pentecost.

Indeed, there are clear Pentecost themes to be found here: the consecration of Israel as the chosen people, i.e. "firstfruits"; the beginning of the Old Testament "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38 KJV), as Pentecost would mark the beginning of the New Testament Church (see Acts 2); the giving of the law, as God's people would later be given the power to *keep* that law through the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (compare Luke 24:49; Romans 8:7); God descending on the mountain with great noise and trembling and "in fire" (Exodus 19:18), as His presence would later descend upon Christ's disciples with great noise and in tongues of fire (Acts 2); the initiation of the Old Covenant, as

Pentecost would later mark the giving of the “better promises” of the New Covenant, particularly the gift of the Holy Spirit (compare Hebrews 8:6). Though typical of the new relationship God wants with His people, the Old Covenant still involved separation from God, as the boundary markers so vividly picture. To see this even more, read Hebrews 12:18-28.

The contrast between the Old and New Covenants is vividly illustrated by comparing two scriptures. “You shall set bounds for the people all around” (Exodus 19:12) and “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22). Through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and intercession as our High Priest today, God has granted us liberty to come right before His very throne of grace (4:14-16).

Supplementary Reading: “The Feast of Pentecost: The Firstfruits of God’s Harvest,” *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*, pp. 24-29.

The Ten Commandments Spoken (Exodus 20)

April 17

Though they were already known before this, here is the first written record we have of all of God’s Ten Commandments together—commandments that are founded on His most basic law of love (Mark 12:29-31). The first four show us how to have a loving relationship with God. The last six reveal how we can share a loving, respectful relationship with our fellow man. Though knowledge of God’s laws was clearly available earlier (Genesis 26:5), it appears likely that most of the Israelites had forgotten His requirements during their generations of Egyptian bondage and had to have those laws revealed to them once again.

Many today believe that it was *Moses* who gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel. But the Bible clearly reveals otherwise. God Himself spoke them with His own voice from the thundercloud above Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1). And later, God also *wrote* them Himself—with *His own finger*—on two “tablets of stone” (31:18; 24:12; Deuteronomy 5:22). Later still, He even *rewrote* them (Exodus 34:1). To further define who gave these commandments, we must realize that by Christ’s day, centuries later, no one had ever heard God the Father’s voice (John 5:37). The “LORD,” who spoke the commandments, is referred to in the Old Testament as the “Rock” (Deuteronomy 32:4, 15, 31; Psalm 18:2, 31, 46). And according to the New Testament, “that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4). Those who think that Jesus did away with His Father’s commandments are sorely mistaken. In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), He “filled” the commandments by explaining their spiritual intent, in essence making them *even more* applicable to us (5:17-20). Indeed, *Christ* is the One who gave the commandments on the Father’s behalf in the first place—both to Israel and the New Testament Church!

The giving of the law was such a tremendous event that the Israelites feared for their lives. They could not only hear but also feel the ground shaking due to the thunder and the sound of trumpets. There were brilliant flashes of lightning and the mountain smoked. God was exhibiting a fraction of His greatness and glory before His chosen people. This awesome display was not intended to terrorize the people, because God was not there to harm them. God’s purpose was to teach them awe and respect for Him, so that they would not sin (verse 20). It should have been a very humbling experience for the Israelites. But as God said: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29). As we will read, the respect and obedience did not last long.

Supplementary Reading: *The Ten Commandments*; “Who Was Jesus?,” *Who Is God?*, pp. 24-36.

The Judgments (Exodus 21)

April 18

When God gave the Ten Commandments, “He added no more” (Deuteronomy 5:22). It was a complete spiritual law. Still, God knew that for a physical nation, there would have to be a civil administration with much more detail about what constituted crime and what judgments to execute against specific violations. He had already given capital punishment in Noah’s day. It is not known if He had related any other judgments at that time, although it seems likely that He would have. Frankly, judgments were needed because God knew people would not remain chaste and law abiding (see Exodus 22:16). He knew that they would take advantage of others wrongly (22:25)—and He provided for these eventualities. The judgments exist because of human failings. Penalties would not be needed if people always obeyed. But they don’t—and this could wreak havoc in a national setting. So besides the tablets of the Ten Commandments, God here gives Moses the judgments. These judgments were based on God’s law of love and pertained to relationships between the people.

God allowed slavery, but in a much different way than one may perceive today. An Israelite may have become a slave due to poverty, debt or crime. After six years of servitude, God commanded that he be given freedom and help to reestablish himself so as to better avoid getting in the same situation again (Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Israelite slavery was similar to a state of indentured servitude. The purpose was not intended to be heavily punitive. The intention was to enable a person to make a new start and help him succeed in life. God also gave laws regulating the treatment of slaves. In fact, it was expected that some would be treated so well that they would want to stay with their masters even after the time came for them to be set free (verses 16-18).

It was a capital crime to curse or hit one's parents. This judgment was based on the Fifth Commandment, "Honor your father and mother." While the punishment may seem cruel and unusual to our 21st-century minds, its intent was that Israel not raise a nation of rebellious children, as we see so frequently today in our supposedly enlightened societies. This law, like many others, acted as a safeguard for society as a whole. If a rebellious child showed so little respect for authority that he would lash out and strike his own mother or father, there would be little to prevent him from striking out and injuring or killing others. Thus this law helped remove those who scorned authority and lacked the will or desire for self-control before they became too great a threat to innocent people around them. When this law was enforced, society as a whole was kept safe from young, out-of-control thugs who had chosen to live in a way that made them a danger to everyone else.

The words "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" were not intended to encourage vengeful feelings. Nor were the judges required to apply these literally (although "life for life" and "stripe for stripe" were often literal). The principle was that the punishment should fit the crime and not go *beyond* it (we will see more on this in our reading of Leviticus 24). On occasion, capital punishment had to be imposed. But in other cases, we read that there were various ways the guilty party could be redeemed.

God's laws are not given as a burden to His people. On the contrary, they are imposed to *prevent* problems from occurring. All people shared a responsibility in both preventing and solving problems. We will be reading much more about God's laws, comprising commandments, statutes, judgments and ordinances. God revealed them to define what He means by love. Love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10).

Judgments Concerning Property and Immorality (Exodus 22)

April 19

In reading God's righteous judgments, we can conclude that these are not old, worn-out, outdated directives that do not pertain to us today. Rather, these are laws that wisely regulate a civil nation, and we should be able to understand the common sense of their application. Some modern nations, to their credit, have followed many of the principles and guidelines of these judgments. These underlying principles—often referred to as Judeo-Christian ethics or morals—formed the basis of much of British and American common law over the last few centuries. Regrettably, however, most nations today are drifting away from this standard..

We see this in the casual attitude towards and practice of premarital sex, extra-marital sex and homosexuality, as well as other vile sexual practices—so much is "legal" that would have merited a death sentence under the administration God gave. In ancient Israel, witchcraft was also a capital crime. Yet today, Quija boards, seances and delving into the occult are popular pastimes. Television is filled with infomercials inviting people to call and find out about their future from psychics, astrologers or Tarot card readers.

Prisons today are overcrowded and, far too often, only teach criminals to be more violent or how to more finely hone their skills. Yet if nations were to follow the laws of restitution, while there might still be a need for temporary incarceration—i.e., jail until trial if the offender might pose a threat to others—prison overcrowding and violence would not exist since there would be no prisons.

God's people were to be a *holy* people. They were to represent God in their appearance and dress, in their speech and conduct, and even in the way that they killed, prepared and ate animals. God has not done away with these principles. Read these judgments carefully! Various prophecies we will cover later show that God's holy and righteous laws will once again be in force after Jesus Christ returns and establishes His kingdom on earth. Then, *all* people will be given the opportunity to know, understand and live by those just and equitable laws.

More Than "Thou Shalt Not..." (Exodus 23)

April 20

God revealed to Israel laws that prohibit slander, backbiting and lying. All these are based on the Ninth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." God Himself is not a respecter of persons and commands that we treat all people equally. He looks on the attitude of our

heart, which is manifested in how we live each day. Obedience to God is much more than just following a list of dos and don'ts. The law tells us to perform acts of service for others. Even though we may have a problem with our fellow man, if we fail to help him when there is a need, we have broken God's law.

God also revealed laws that regulate mankind's relationship with the environment. One of these laws, the land Sabbath, is recorded in this chapter. The purpose of this law was to allow the land to regenerate the nutrients in the soil. When followed, this would allow for a much healthier crop to be harvested in the future. Today, man disregards this law and dumps all kinds of chemical fertilizers and pesticides on the soil. There indeed is a way that seems right to a man, but the result is the way that leads to all kinds of unforeseen problems—including, ultimately, death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Interestingly, there was another purpose to the land Sabbath law—to allow the poor to glean whatever produce grew on its own in the year when the land wasn't planted or harvested (and there would certainly be produce for them in the vineyards and orchards). Thus, even this law promoted loving treatment of one's neighbor, particularly those who were less well-off. Moreover, it was also an act of faith—as the Israelites had to trust God to meet their needs during the year they neither planted nor harvested crops.

A Married People; Dining Before God (Exodus 24)

April 21

It was, no doubt, quite a task to put into writing the words that God spoke to Moses. These writings were written as a part of a book called "The Book of the Covenant," or, in other places, "The Book of the Law." Moses read God's words to the people, who agreed to do all that God had commanded—thus affirming the marriage covenant that God made with the nation of Israel (compare Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32), which was then sealed with blood. This covenant, continually broken by Israel, was eventually terminated through the very blood of Jesus Christ—which then initiated the *New Covenant*.

God's command in verses 1-2 of this chapter, it should be understood, are not acted on until verse 9, when Joshua, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel are allowed to go part of the way up the mountain with Moses to worship God apart from the congregation. Yet only Moses is allowed to come *close* to God—indeed, the implication of verse 11, that God did not touch any of the nobles, i.e. the elders, seems to be that he *did* touch Moses. Here, the elders apparently saw a manifestation of God in the person of the preincarnate Jesus Christ. It seems that they were also given a vision of the very throne of God. The sapphire is used in other scriptures to describe God's throne (Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1). Moses then goes with Joshua up into the mountain, leaving Joshua below him at some distance, and he was on the mountain with God for 40 days and 40 nights.

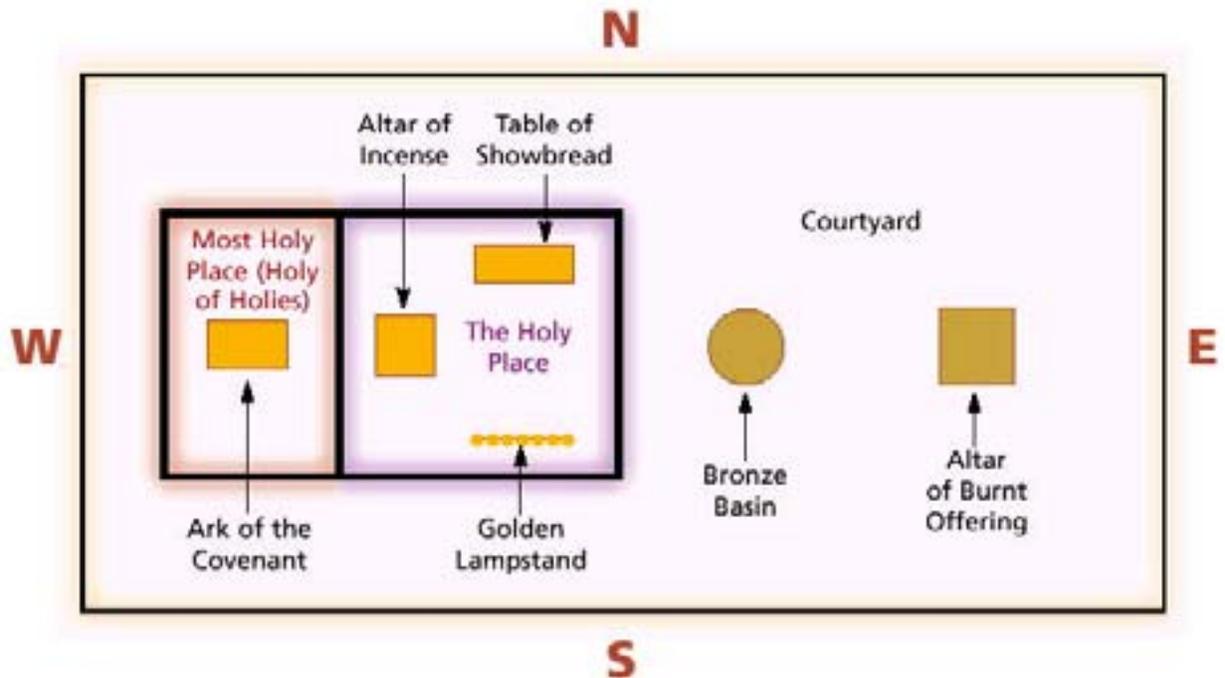
Plans for the Tabernacle Interior (Exodus 25)

April 22

Now we read of plans for the construction of the tabernacle, where God said He would dwell on earth with the Israelites. Notice some points that one may otherwise quickly read over.

Certain offerings were given by the Israelites. Only the offerings that were giving willingly were to be accepted. God does not want us to give of necessity or with a begrudging attitude, but cheerfully and thankfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Ark of the Testimony, elsewhere called the Ark of the Covenant, would contain the two tablets of the Ten Commandments—indeed, they were apparently the only items that were actually *in* the Ark (see 1 Kings 8:9). While Hebrews 9:4 does seem to say that the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded were in the Ark, it has been speculated that there was perhaps some kind of satchel attached to the side of the Ark containing these items. (Some have suggested that the pot and rod were originally in the Ark and then removed. But it seems unlikely that someone would have lifted the Ark's lid and trifled with its contents—except perhaps for the one period in which it was taken by the Philistines and then peered into by the men of Beth Shemesh, 1 Samuel 6:19. However, God supernaturally made sure of the Ark's return from Philistia and struck the men of Beth Shemesh for merely looking inside the Ark. He mentions nothing about them taking any items from inside—and why would He not have ensured their return also. Still, it is *possible* that the manna and rod were in the ark to start with and later turned up missing.)



Layout of the Tabernacle

Beside the Ark was placed the Book of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:26). All the items mentioned are “testimonies”—as if witnesses providing evidentiary testimony in court—of God’s miraculous intervention for the children of Israel. Placed on top of the ark was the mercy seat, another “testimony” of God’s everlasting mercy, which represented His very throne.

God also gave understanding of the appearance of the cherubim, part of the angelic realm created in service to God. Embroidered patterns of cherubim were also woven into the curtains of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:1). The artistic representations of these wondrous creatures, which are described in greater detail in the book of Ezekiel, were the only “images” of heavenly beings permitted in God’s worship system. They were, of course, not to be worshiped. And it is clear that there was no image of God in all of the tabernacle accoutrements—as was so common in pagan temples.

The showbread, constituting 12 loaves for all the tribes of Israel, is itself described more fully in Leviticus 24:5-9. Its name derives from its symbolic placement before the face of God. Other translations render it “bread of presence” or “bread of the Presence.” That is, it was in the presence of God, just as the nation of Israel was—since God’s presence was among *them*.

The last verse of the chapter informs us that Moses was not only told how to make the implements, but he actually “saw” a heavenly pattern for them. Indeed, the book of Hebrews assures us that the tabernacle and the items within it were “copies of the things in the heavens” (see 8:5; 9:11, 23-24).

The Tabernacle: More Detail in Design (Exodus 26–27)

April 23-24

The word tabernacle comes from a Latin word meaning “tent.” The Hebrew word translated tabernacle literally means “dwelling place.” It may refer to either just the tent—or to the tent with the surrounding courtyard. In any case, the sense of being portable and temporary is obvious. And this sense of God having a temporary dwelling will continue all the way up to Solomon’s time, when the tabernacle is replaced by the temple, a more fixed structure. This later event is seen by many as a foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God—when Christ takes up permanent residence on earth. The time of the tabernacle is thus seen as God inhabiting His people in the fleshly tent of our temporary bodies (compare 2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

In Exodus 26 and 27, we again read of the intricate designing of the Master Builder Himself. Only the finest materials available were used in construction of the tabernacle and its contents. Acacia wood was a light, strong and beautiful wood—durable and resistant to insects and disease—that grew in this region. God was very specific in His instructions for the building of the tabernacle. His

instruction to be very precise in following the detailed building plan was repeated. He is the same when it comes to His righteous laws. Mankind is not to add to His laws or take away from them (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19). Whenever God designs and builds anything, He does so according to a careful advance plan. His creation is not the result of some massive random cosmic explosion with colliding planetoids later accidentally forming a globular mass right where the earth needed to be in the solar system to make it advantageous for human life. Could you imagine reading the words, “In the beginning, God said, ‘OOPS’?”

When reading these chapters, take time to appreciate the fine detail of our Creator’s perfect craftsmanship. And consider the lesson in Luke 16:10 to see how God judges our character: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

Supplementary Material: Audiovisual presentation by Roy Holladay, “The Tabernacle, Parts 1 and 2” 1998, available on-line at www.ucg.org/brp/materials.

Garments for the Priesthood; The Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28)

April 25

As Moses was the civil leader of the nation of Israel, the priesthood would be perpetuated through Aaron’s lineage. The service of the Levites in general is not yet here established—as it is not implemented until after Israel’s rebellion with the golden calf, which we’ll soon read about. Consider once again the attention that is given to the wondrous and planned detail that God laid out for the adorning of the priesthood. Worshiping God is not a matter that is to be taken casually. When we come before God today, these principles still exist. Since God calls His Church a holy and royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9), our dress and grooming at worship services should, to the best of our ability, be of the highest standard.

Everything God does is filled with purpose. In this case, He sent His Spirit to guide the artisans in fashioning the priestly garments. The onyx stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel and the breastplate with their names symbolized the priest’s intercessory work of representing the people before God. They were to be over his heart to impress upon him his responsibility. And over his forehead, representing the thoughts of the mind, was the engraving denoting devotedness to God. The bells on the garment “would tinkle as the priest moved about within the sacred places. This sound would assure those outside that the priest was interceding on their behalf” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 33-35).

Note the mention in verse 30 of “the Urim and the Thummim”—literally, in Hebrew, “the lights and the perfections.” The Greek Septuagint renders this “revelation and truth.” Indeed, as light often represents the knowledge of God in Scripture, perhaps the Hebrew wording denoted perfect knowledge of His will—discerned through this device, which seemed to constitute a plurality. Actually, we don’t know for sure exactly what the Urim and Thummim was except for the testimony of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who, in relating the details of the ephod (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 3, chap. 7, sec. 5), refers to the breastplate as the “oracle” (Greek *logion* or “words”)—as it evidently communicated a message from God. He goes on to imply that the Urim and Thummim was the breastplate stones shining in concert with the onyx (or sardonyx) stones on the shoulders, which held up the ephod on which the breastplate was affixed:

“For as to those stones which we told you before, the high priest bare on his shoulders, which were sardonyxes... the one of them shined out when God was present at their sacrifices; I mean that which was in the nature of a button on his right shoulder, bright rays darting out thence, and being seen even by those that were most remote; which splendour yet was not before natural to the stone. This has appeared a wonderful thing to such as have not so far indulged themselves in philosophy, as to despise Divine Revelation. Yet will I mention what is still more wonderful than this: for God declared beforehand, by those twelve stones which the high priest bare on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great a splendour shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God’s being present for their assistance” (chap. 8, sec. 9).

God used this same device to impart more specific information as well. David consulted the Urim and Thummim concerning whether King Saul would come down to the city of Keilah and destroy it lest the residents betray David into his hands (1 Samuel 23:9-12). The answer? “He will come down” (verse 11). Exactly how this decision was communicated, we don’t know. Perhaps they shone a certain way to indicate yes and no. Whatever happened, it should be pointed out that the Urim and Thummim was not in itself “magical.” It was clear that God, who had Himself ordained this manner

of contact—probably to demonstrate the importance of His nation approaching Him through His priesthood—was the one communicating. And it was clearly He who caused any supernatural emanations such as those described.

Preparing Aaron and His Sons for Service (Exodus 29)

April 26

In order to be placed in the service of God’s tabernacle, there needed to be specific duties carried out that would prepare and purify Aaron and his sons. Aaron and his sons were consecrated (purified) and sanctified (set apart for a special purpose) before God. The priests officiated at the earthly altar of the Creator God of the universe. They were to carry out their duties with a sense of awe, because of His holiness (Psalm 99:9). They were not to be careless in any way. To violate what might have been viewed as minor details in their duties could have resulted in death. God is holy and He must be obeyed and worshiped according to His will. As *The Nelson Study Bible* notes on Exodus 28:43: “It is difficult for us to grasp the gravity of the priests’ responsibility as they ministered before the living God. They had to serve God with a pure heart, to represent the people without guile, and to worship without deviating from the commands of God. To fail would invite judgment—even death. Sadly, priests did die because they failed to show respect for the holiness of God (Leviticus 10:1, 2; 1 Samuel 4:17; 2 Samuel 6:7). Of course, these are major issues with which we must all be concerned. In light of the fact that, as mentioned before, God refers to His people today as “a holy priesthood” and even “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5, 9), we should consider such passages very soberly. Still, God is a God of grace. If we slip up and sin, the answer is to repent and go to Him for forgiveness and restoration, trusting in His kindness and mercy.

Incense, Water and Oil; Ransom Money (Exodus 30)

April 27

In Exodus 30, we pick up the rest of the instruction for the furnishings that were to be placed in the tabernacle. In this chapter Moses was given the instructions on making an altar to burn incense upon. This altar was to be located just before the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (verse 6). Sweet and compelling, the incense represented the prayers of God’s people coming before His throne (compare Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8). He therefore wanted His typical throne room filled with this incense. But He certainly did not want “strange incense” (Exodus 30:9), for as the book of Proverbs explains concerning “one who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (28:9). The bronze laver was placed outside of the Holy Place for Aaron and his sons to wash their hands and feet in water before entering to officiate—symbolic for spiritual cleansing. Also, instructions were given for making the holy anointing oil, which—like the incense—was not to be copied by others in the congregation for personal use. Only the priests could administer the holy anointing oil, just as only ordained elders today can anoint the sick with oil. Oil in such contexts is clearly representative of God’s Holy Spirit.

One other thing in Exodus 30 that is very interesting is the offering for atonement collected at the census, also known as the ransom money. Moses was instructed that when he took a census of those 20 years of age and older, an offering of one half-shekel was to be taken up from each person for the service of the tabernacle. The point here was that each person was paying a price for his life—acknowledging that his life was from God and that God was owed because of it. It is noteworthy that the same amount was required of everyone, be they rich or poor.

Tabernacle Artisans, the Sabbath and the Tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 31) April 28

Bezalel of the tribe of Judah and Aholiab of the tribe of Dan were chosen to build the items for the tabernacle. Though naturally born with these talents—and, as a result, skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, as well as in carving and embroidered work—the most important thing to notice is that, just as He did with the garment makers, God also filled them with wisdom by His Spirit to enable them to accomplish this most important responsibility.

Also in this chapter, God stresses that it is important to keep His Sabbaths (weekly *and* annual), as they are a sign between God and His people. It serves as a visible badge and witness to others manifesting those who serve the true God. Furthermore, verse 12 says, “It is a sign...that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” Thus, it is a sign that regularly points us to the true God. Indeed, the weekly Sabbath memorializes *creation*, as stated in this passage—and creation points to the *Creator*, the true God. The Sabbath is a reminder that we do not worship “gods” of rocks and trees, sun moon or sky, or figments of human imagination, but the very Creator who *made* all these things—including the human mind. And all of God’s Sabbaths reveal His plan for the salvation of all

mankind. Notice that the Sabbath is given as a special covenant—a *perpetual* covenant—*distinct* from the Sinai covenant (verse 16).

Indeed, God’s Sabbaths are important for us even today, as He said they would be “a sign between Me and the children of Israel *forever*” (verse 17). Notice: “...for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth...” (same verse). Why would this only be for the Jews alone? That wouldn’t make any sense. Rather, it is clear that, as Christ said, “the Sabbath was made for *man*” (Mark 2:27-28)—that is, for *all mankind*. What ties it all together is that all people must become part of *spiritual* Israel (compare Romans 11:17, 24; Galatians 3:28-29; 6:16)—and that is defined as those who obey God’s law (Romans 2:25-29), which includes His Sabbath.

After God finished talking with Moses, He gave him the two stone tablets of His Ten Commandments, which He had already written (24:12) with His very finger (31:18). Though we often think of each of these tablets as containing separate sections of the Ten Commandments, it is possible that “all ten commandments appeared on each tablet. Middle Eastern treaties were typically written in duplicate” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 24:12). As these were “tablets of testimony,” it would seem that this would provide the testimony of “two witnesses,” a requirement of God’s law for judgment to be carried out (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Perhaps that is even one reason the Ten Commandments are recorded twice in the *Bible* (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). Still, as the front and back of the tablets were written on (Exodus 32:15), it is possible that the first four commandments, concerning duty to God, were inscribed on one side, while the last six commandments, concerning duty to man, were engraved on the other side. In that case, putting the two tablets together, with one turned over, would still yield the traditional picture.

The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)

April 29

With Moses gone for almost a month and a half, the people quickly became disoriented and asked Aaron to give them another god-symbol to lead them. Interestingly, they still seem to have viewed this idol as a representation of the Eternal (verses 4-5). God, however, saw it otherwise, saying that they “worshiped *it* and sacrificed to *it*” (verse 8) rather than “to *Me*.” With all God had done for them, it is amazing how quickly they forgot His commands—and dismissed Moses as if he were a fraud. The apostle Paul even warns us to learn from what they did and not do the same thing (1 Corinthians 10).

Another incredible aspect of this whole affair is Aaron’s part. It seems almost stupefying that he would consent to it—and seemingly so readily. When the people approached Aaron with the suggestion to make an idol that they could worship, it was he who told them to give him their golden earrings. It was then Aaron who formed and shaped the idolatrous object. Perhaps Aaron himself had begun to wonder what had become of Moses. It is likely that he viewed the people’s “request” as an implicit threat—which it probably was—that if he didn’t go along with what they wanted, the consequences would be dire. Aaron likely feared for his own safety and that of his family if he opposed the movement underway. He should have shown more stamina and trust in God, but he went along. To top it off, rather than face up to his responsibility, he told Moses a ridiculous lie (verse 24). In any case, there was certainly a failure of leadership at a high level. This too should be a lesson for all of us. No matter who we are, no matter how much we have seen God do in our lives, we can be led astray if we aren’t constantly on guard spiritually.

Concerning the Israelites’ chosen object of idolatry, they were well acquainted with Egyptian calf worship, detailed in the discussion of the plagues. It’s not surprising that they would choose a calf as a symbol of their worship, because it was common in the Egyptian culture in which they had been immersed for many generations. Centuries later the Israelite king Jereboam would fashion similar idols (1 Kings 12:28) after being banished to Egypt (11:40), and this idolatrous worship would remain prevalent throughout most of the time of the northern kingdom of Israel. Among the Canaanites, the bull was also seen as an embodiment of Baal. Perhaps the widespread worship of oxen in paganism, as in India today, has been directly inspired by Satan, as his main face—him being a cherub—is that of an ox (compare Ezekiel 10:14; 1:7-10).

“The bull was revered throughout the ancient Near East as the symbol of fertility” (Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses: A Life*, 1998, p. 264). It may have been the fertility connection involved in this idolatrous worship that stimulated some of the Israelites to become involved in sexual “play” (verse 6). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* has this to say about verse 6: “The verb *sahaq* signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play (‘conjugal caresses’)” (1990, Vol. 2, p. 478). In reaching this level, the unseemly episode had probably gone way beyond what Aaron had agreed to or perhaps

even imagined. We read earlier that the apostle Paul compared sin to leavening (1 Corinthians 5:8). He even used an example to show that sin, like leaven, can spread to affect more and more people unless it is stopped in its tracks (verses 1-7). The incident with the golden calf seems like a classical case of allowing some leaven in and, as is the proclivity of leaven, before long the leaven had permeated insidiously. We need not necessarily think that the entire congregation of Israel had degenerated into extensive sexual immorality, but it was widespread enough that God told Moses, “Your people whom *you* have brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves” (verse 7)—effectively disassociating Himself from the Israelites.

Though God forgave Israel’s sin—including that of Aaron—they paid a costly fee for such gross violation of God’s law. Moses told the Levites to take their swords and begin to slay the people. About 3,000 were killed (verse 28). Those who were slain may have been among the ringleaders or those who pushed things to an extreme once the partying started. Verse 35 states that God plagued the people because of the golden calf incident. This may be a reference to the slaying of the 3,000, or it may refer to an additional, unspecified punishment. The lesson that rings loud and clear from all this is that *sin exacts a penalty*. There is no exception to this principle.

Moses Intercedes for God’s Presence and Asks to See His Glory (Exodus 33) April 30

Following the incident with the golden calf, God told Moses to go ahead and lead the people to the Promised Land, and that His angel would go before them (32:34; compare 23:20-23)—a statement He repeats in this chapter (33:1-2). It is not clear whether this “angel” (Hebrew *malach*, “messenger”) refers to the preincarnate Christ (as He sometimes conveyed the words of the Father) or to an angel such as Michael, who stands watch over Israel (compare Daniel 12:1). In favor of the latter is God’s statement that He Himself would not go up in Israel’s midst (Exodus 33:3) and Moses’ complaint to God: “You have not let me know whom You will send with me” (verse 12). Understandably, the people having to go to the Promised Land without God’s presence is perceived as “bad news” by them (verse 4). However, if this is what God meant, He relents and agrees to accompany the people after Moses intercedes for them (verses 12-17).

Yet there is, perhaps, another explanation—one in which God intended to go with them all along. The Lord, we see, informs Moses that His presence would be with *him* (verse 14). And as Moses was leading the people, God’s presence would necessarily be going before them. The key to this explanation is God’s statement that He would not go up to the Promised Land *in the midst* of the people. The pillar of cloud and fire would lead them, but it would not come right down into the camp. Rather, the Lord descended in the pillar to meet Moses *outside* the camp. This is why Moses set up his own tent outside the camp and called it the “tabernacle of meeting” (verse 7)—God, at this time, would not meet with the nation. Moses’ intercession is that it is not enough that he alone have God’s presence with Him—all the people needed it (verses 15-16). So God responds that He will do as Moses has spoken. Thus, we later see that the tabernacle of the sanctuary is set up right *in the midst* of the people—and *it* becomes known as the “tabernacle of meeting” (40:2; Numbers 2:17), where God would, in a sense, meet with the entire nation. Of course, God’s promise that His Presence would go in the midst of His people was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ as a human being and then dwelling in His people through the Holy Spirit—eventually to bring them permanent *rest* in His Kingdom.

Indeed, Moses, the intercessor, was himself a type of Jesus Christ. In this chapter we see quite clearly the very special relationship that developed between this man and the Everliving One. God, the preincarnate Jesus, spoke to Moses face to face as to a friend (verse 11). Perhaps this was similar to the way Christ was manifested to Abraham. But Moses was allowed to see even more of God than is recorded of Abraham’s experience. When Moses requested to see God’s glory, God explained to him that no physical person could see His glory as it blazed from His face and survive—so He would let Moses see His *back*, proving that God does have form and shape, even as a Spirit Being. Indeed, God later says, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My House. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; *and he sees the form of the LORD*” (Numbers 12:6-8).