

# Exodus

The Hebrew title of the book of Exodus comes from its first Hebrew word *shymot*, translated “and these are the names of.” This is followed by the genealogy of Jacob and his family, developed into the multitude of Israelites in Egypt. The book begins with letting the reader know that Yahweh has been fulfilling His promise to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation. The English title “Exodus” comes from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) meaning “exit” or “departure.” The Septuagint translators gave the book this title because of the major event in it, namely the departure of the Israelites from Egypt.

The book of Exodus is the second book in the Torah, also known as the Pentateuch. *Torah* is the Hebrew name for the first five books of the First Testament. The name means “teachings” or “instructions” and is considered the foundational teachings of the Jewish faith and, later, the Christian faith. The Torah covers the history of Yahweh’s choosing the people of Israel, entering into a covenant relationship with them, and giving them instructions for living in a covenant relationship with Him in the Promised Land.

The first word of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers has a prefix—the Hebrew letter *vav*. This is called a *vav*-consecutive, which creates a conjunction with the meaning of “and” or “and the.” This means they were meant to be read as sequels to Genesis—and sequentially from there. The whole purpose of the Torah is to teach who this Yahweh is and what it means to be the covenant people of Yahweh.

Though many parts of the Torah were written by Moses after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9), the author and editor of its final composition is unknown. The Torah started off as a collection of independent narratives and laws. Over time, a series of editors compiled them into a unified narrative.

## Setting

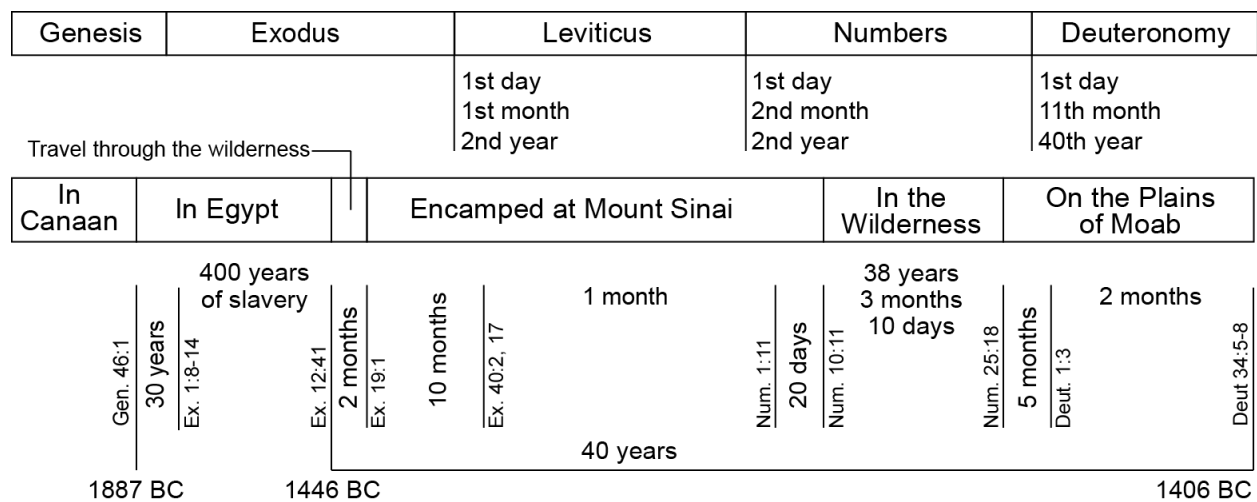
Genesis began by revealing, first, that Yahweh is the unique and sovereign creator over all creation (Gen. 1). Therefore, He is superior to all other gods and the only one worthy of devotion. Second is that He brought order to the cosmos so that life would thrive and flourish for His humans. Third is that He created humans as His image in order to have a relationship with them and to rule and subdue creation by maintaining the order and goodness of creation along with Him. The three emphases in the creation account are Yahweh, humanity, and the land/garden (Gen. 2). The garden was filled with bountiful life and was where Yahweh and humanity could dwell in a covenant relationship with each other.

However, humanity lost their intimate relationship with Yahweh and their right to rule and subdue when they chose autonomy (self-law) instead of obeying Yahweh and being in a relationship with Him. As a result of this broken trust, they lost their intimate covenant relationship with Yahweh. Cut off from Him and the garden, they were left to their autonomy and their own ability to maintain order in creation (Gen. 3). Yet humanity lacked the wisdom, ability, and care that were necessary to maintain order, and so humanity and creation fell into a downward spiral of chaos and death (Gen. 4–11).

Yahweh then chose Abraham and His descendants to work out His plan of redemption for all of humanity and creation. Yahweh promised to give them land, to make them a great nation, to

bless them, and to make them a blessing to the whole earth. Yahweh’s ultimate goal was to work through Israel as His chosen image and people so that He might restore humanity back into an intimate covenant relationship with Himself and restore order, blessings, and life to His people and creation. Although Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s twelve sons demonstrated faith in Yahweh, they ultimately failed to obey Him and truly become His image. Thus Yahweh’s choosing of Abraham and his descendants was to prepare them for the exodus redemption and the Mosaic Covenant that Yahweh would implement. Only the Mosaic Covenant could restore their relationship with Yahweh and restore order, blessings, and life to creation. Genesis ends with Jacob’s family *not* living in the land of Promise nor being a great nation, and though Joseph has saved Egypt from starvation, the family is a long way from redeeming the world. The book ends with a great sense of unfulfilled promises but with a confidence in Yahweh’s character that these promises will be fulfilled.

Exodus begins with the narrator showing that the family of Jacob, which had entered Egypt at the end of Genesis, had grown into a great multitude, just as Yahweh had promised Abraham in Genesis. However, this people group had also become slaves in Egypt and had begun to take on the identity of Egypt and the worship of their gods. In response, Yahweh called Moses out of the wilderness—to go to back to Egypt, to deliver His people from bondage, and to bring them to Mount Sinai, where they would be brought into the presence of Yahweh and officially become His covenant chosen nation.



Though scholars debate the actual dates of this chart, most agree on the times frames of the events.

## Purpose

The purpose of Exodus is to show how Yahweh sovereignly delivered Israel from their bondage in Egypt in order to bind them to Himself in a covenant relationship in which He would dwell with them and restore order, blessings, and life to His people. Genesis already established the uniqueness of Yahweh as a sovereign and loving God who desires to be in a covenantal relationship with His humans. In Exodus Yahweh demonstrated this for the first time and in the ultimate way, establishing His absolute uniqueness by doing what no other god could do or cared to do: stepping into space, time, and matter to deliver His people out of slavery in Egypt. No other god has ever demonstrated the power Yahweh did through the plagues He brought down on Egypt and by His bringing Israel through the Red Sea. Likewise, no other god has ever

demonstrated such a great act of redeeming love as Yahweh when He honored His promises to Abraham and saved the Hebrews from slavery. In this act He fulfilled His promises to Abraham (Gen. 15; 17; 22) and redeemed His people so that He could begin to restore the Kingdom of Yahweh through Abraham's descendants.

Second, He stepped into space, time, and matter to enter into a covenant relationship with His people so they could dwell with Him as His righteous and holy people. Here is Yahweh's greatest desire: to dwell with His people in intimate fellowship just as He had in the garden. If Israel was obedient to their calling, then they would enjoy a unique relationship with Yahweh as He dwelt with them. Ex. 19:4-6 is the theological center for the book of Exodus. It is the link between the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-4; 15; 17; 22) and the Mosaic Covenant that was to follow (Ex. 20). This passage clearly states that Yahweh had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt and that their purpose was to obey and follow Him. If they did this, then He would dwell with them and bless them and use them to restore His kingdom on earth. Here He revealed to Israel that He had redeemed them so they could be an example to the world and that He would use them to redeem the nations as well.

Yahweh's deliverance of Israel via the exodus and His establishment of the Mosaic Covenant are the foundation to Israel's identity and to all of their history that follows in the rest of the First Testament. It also is the foundation the redemption of humanity that Jesus provided through the cross and His resurrection.

## Themes

Though there are many themes in the book of Exodus, the three major themes that flow through the book are deliverance, covenant, and presence. These are taken from the purpose of the book in Ex. 19:4-6 and so form the foundation to everything else in the book. Though these themes become the major divisions in the outline for this study, they are not limited to just certain chapters in the book; rather, they are the threads that are woven into every chapter.

### ***Deliverance from Bondage***

Given that the purpose of the book is to tell of the redemption of Israel, it is only natural that deliverance would be one of its major themes. Yahweh told Abraham that his descendants would spend four hundred years in slavery before He would bring them into the land that He promised (Gen. 15:13-16). The reason Yahweh allowed this slavery is not specifically mentioned in Genesis or Exodus. However, it was Yahweh's action of deliverance and, later, the cross that became His greatest work in history.

In Exodus Pharaoh and Egypt are portrayed as the symbols of slavery, sin, and death, as they had enslaved the people of Yahweh (Ex. 13:3). It was in one great act that Yahweh redeemed His people from these two evil forces, bringing both glory to Himself and deliverance to His people. It was then in the wilderness that He would begin the process of redeeming them from their own sinful nature and revealing to them Himself and how they could have a relationship with Him.

However, it was not Yahweh's desire to free Israel from bondage simply so that they could be free to do whatever they wanted as autonomous individuals. Rather, they had been freed from their bondage and service to Egypt to be brought into bondage and service to Yahweh their Redeemer. The Hebrew word *abad*, translated as "slave labor" or "service" and used to describe their condition in Egypt (Ex. 1:14; 2:23; 5:9, 11; 6:6, 9), is also used to describe the "service"

Yahweh requires (Ex. 12:25-26; 13:5; 27:19; 30:16; 35:24; 36:1, 3, 5; 39:32, 42). Yahweh never told Moses to tell Pharaoh just to “let my people go”; rather, He told him to tell Pharaoh to “let my people go *so that they may worship me.*” Yahweh was bringing Israel under His headship in order to serve Him, not Egypt, which was an inferior master. Thus, Exodus tells of the movement from one master to another. If you are serving anything other than Yahweh, then you are a slave. Yet service to Yahweh is not hardship, for He is sovereign over all things and has our best interests in mind. In fact, as He demonstrated through the exodus and later through the cross, He was willing to move heaven and earth to redeem His people. This bondage to Yahweh is clearly seen when He brought them to Sinai and established a covenant of requirements and blessings with them. But unlike slavery to other masters, obedience to the Law of Yahweh does not bring oppression but life, for the one obeying Yahweh is living in accordance with how He designed creation to function.

### ***Covenant and Law***

In Genesis Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to make him into a great nation, give him land, and bless the world through his descendants (Gen. 12:1-4; 15). Ex. 1:6-10 states that Abraham’s descendants had multiplied greatly, reminding the reader of the Abrahamic Covenant and laying the foundation for Yahweh to begin fulfilling those promises.

It is after the redemption of His people, the descendants of Abraham, that Yahweh could establish a new covenantal relationship with His people through the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 19-24). This covenant did not replace the previous one but established and maintained the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Whereas the Abrahamic Covenant marked Israel as His people, the Mosaic Covenant bound Israel to Yahweh their God (Ex. 19:1-6).

This covenant was like the vassal treaties of the ancient Near East, in which a more powerful king entered a relationship with a lesser king. This type of treaty laid out laws that the sovereign king imposed on the vassal (lesser king) and blessings and curses upon the vassal for keeping or breaking the covenant law. This covenant relationship with Yahweh as sovereign king demanded obedience from Israel, His vassal, in order to maintain and receive the blessings of a relationship with Him. Because He had redeemed them and bought them, they were now indebted to Him.

### ***Absence to Presence***

Genesis made the point that humanity was cut off from Yahweh due to its sin. However, Yahweh chose one man, Abraham, through whom He would grow a nation and begin to restore the relationship between Himself and humanity. Exodus tells of Yahweh’s revealing Himself in a more personal and intimate way. It is interesting that Yahweh is not mentioned until the end of the first chapter (Ex. 1:20-21) and then again at the end of Ex. 2 when He heard the cries of His people (Ex. 2:23-25). The author creates the sense of Yahweh’s absence and yet shows that He was still at work even though He seemed absent (Ex. 1:20-21). It was Yahweh’s compassion for His people that moved Him to act and make Himself known (Ex. 2:23-25).

In Exodus Yahweh gradually made Himself known through four major events. First, He revealed Himself through fire at the burning bush where He called Moses and laid out His plans for His people (Ex. 3-4). It was at the burning bush that Yahweh revealed Himself in a new, intimate, and more direct way to Moses than He had for any others in the past. Second, He appeared as the large pillar of fire to lead His people out of Egypt. Just as He came to Moses through fire, He also came to the people through the image of fire. Third, He brought His people to Mount Sinai

and revealed Himself through fire and earthquake (Ex 19) on top of the mountain. The mountain is a common image in the ancient world used to symbolize the home or presence of the gods. Yahweh will use this image to speak to the people but uses it in a much greater way than the pagan gods. Here, He made His presence more known to Moses (Ex. 33:18-23) and initiated a covenant relationship with the people. Fourth, He made Himself known through the Law and the tabernacle (Ex. 25-40). Through the Law He revealed His character and the requirements and means for a relationship. Through the tabernacle He came down to the people and, physically, through the image of the fire and the sacrificial system, dwelt among His people. Yahweh is unique in this: unlike the other gods, who are aloof, uncaring, and high up on a mountain, Yahweh came down to the people, made Himself known to them, and redeemed them from their bondage.

However, there is also the theme of the sin of the people and how it continued to separate them from the presence of Yahweh. With each act of sin and rebellion—the golden calf, their grumbling, their refusal to enter the Promised Land, etc.—was the constant danger of losing their relationship with Yahweh and of His presence being removed from them. Yet time and time again, Yahweh would demonstrate His patience and unrelenting desire to make Himself known to them and restore them to Himself.

## Structure

The structure of Exodus is broken into two divisions: Ex. 1–18 and Ex. 19–40. Chapters 1–18 detail what it was like for Israel to be enslaved in Egypt and how Yahweh came to them in order to reveal His power and judge Egypt for their sins. It is here that Yahweh claimed Israel as His own firstborn son. Yahweh then demonstrated His ability to deliver them from their bondage to Egypt and bring them through the testing of the wilderness in order to lead them to Mount Sinai.

In Ex. 19–40 the people of Israel encountered Yahweh's glory on Mount Sinai, and He verbally spoke to them the requirements and blessings of the Mosaic Covenant. The division covers the year they spent at Mount Sinai receiving the Law and the instructions for building the tabernacle, followed by their building of the tabernacle.

The narrative of Exodus changes in plot, characterization, and theology just as Genesis does. Genesis began with Yahweh as the main character in the book doing much of the action and ended with Yahweh barely being mentioned while the human characters in the story were doing most of the action. In the same way, Exodus continues from there with Yahweh being mentioned only a couple of times in the first two chapters. It is in Ex. 3–4 that Yahweh first shows up and reveals Himself to Moses. He then displays His power through the plagues and the exodus and by leading Israel through the wilderness. In Ex. 19–24 Yahweh appears to Israel in a tremendous display of glory at Mount Sinai and reveals His character and holiness to Israel through His Law. In Ex. 25–40, through the building of the tabernacle, Israel encounters Yahweh in a more direct and intimate way as He comes down from Mount Sinai and dwells with them in the tabernacle.

## Outline

- I. Yahweh Saves Israel from Egyptian Bondage (1:1–18:27)
  - A. Slavery in Egypt (1:1-22)
  - B. Birth and Early Life of Moses (2:1-25)
  - C. The Call of Moses (3:1–4:31)
  - D. Pharaoh’s Oppression of Israel (5:1–6:27)
  - E. The Plagues (6:28–11:10)
  - F. The Redemption of Israel (12:1–13:16)
  - G. The Exodus from Egypt (13:17–15:21)
  - H. Yahweh’s Provision in the Wilderness (15:22–18:27)
- II. Yahweh Gives His Covenant Law and Tabernacle (19:1–40:38)
  - A. The Preparations for the Covenant (19:1-25)
  - B. The Ten Commandments of Yahweh (20:1-17)
  - C. The Covenant Code (20:18–23:33)
  - D. Ratification of the Covenant (24:1-18)
  - E. Instructions for the Tabernacle (25:1–31:18)
  - F. The Breaking and Renewing of the Covenant (32:1–34:35)
  - G. Construction and Dedication of the Tabernacle (35:1–40:38)

## I. Yahweh Saves Israel from Egyptian Bondage (1:1–15:21)

The first division of Exodus focuses primarily on Israel's bondage in Egypt and Yahweh's great deliverance of His people. This is by far one of the greatest character traits of Yahweh—His desire to pursue and redeem humanity. Yahweh's redemption and continual deliverance of His people is not only the focus of the entire Scriptures, but the exodus itself is continually referenced throughout the Scriptures. Time after time, Yahweh would remind His people of what He had done for them in the past as a reason for their devotion and obedience and as a calling to do the same for others. It is in these chapters that Yahweh would reveal not only His character more fully but also what He was willing and able to do for a humanity that had wandered so far away from Him.

### A. Slavery in Egypt (1:1-22)

This section begins with the oppression of Israel and the narrator establishing Israel's need for deliverance and Egypt's need for judgment. The narrator portrays a bleak picture of Israel's bondage by continually repeating words like *service*, *labor*, *oppression*, and so on. Ex. 1:1-2:10 is not about Moses but about how the Israelites are still not dying at the hands of pharaoh. The focus is on Israel as a people. The first individuals introduced are the midwives at the end of Exodus 1.

Israel's oppression is further highlighted by the fact that the mention of God is very sparse in the first couple of chapters. Just as Yahweh was barely mentioned at the end of Genesis in the story of Jacob's family (Gen. 37-50), so also Yahweh or God is not mentioned until the very end of the chapter. The narrator shows that, from the human perspective, it appears Yahweh is not involved in the lives of the people. However, Israel's continued growth despite oppression and Yahweh's continued thwarting of the plans of Pharaoh show that He is very much involved in their lives. The narrator does not introduce the name *Yahweh* until Ex. 3:2, even though he used it 175 times in Genesis. This is to heighten the significance of the revelation of the name Yahweh to the people and the focus of the covenantal theology that dominates the rest of the Torah.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible never mentions the reason for Israel's slavery in Egypt, yet one can perhaps find an answer in how all throughout the Bible we see a God who allows trials in the lives of His people in order to build their character. Typically in history, the powerful dominate and oppress the weak, and perhaps Israel's slavery was used to counteract this tendency. Not only did Yahweh express His desire to make Israel into one of the greatest nations in history, but He would continually command them to look out for the needy, the weak, and the oppressed. Perhaps if Israel had herself been oppressed, she would be more likely to heed the command of Yahweh in the height of her power and dominion.

**1:1-7** The author states the number of Jacob's family as seventy to contrast their small group as they entered with their large multitude as they exit to show Yahweh's blessing on the family despite their slavery in Egypt.

This phrasing first tells the reader that Exodus was a direct continuation of Genesis. "These are the names of the sons of Israel who went..." is identical to the first six words (in Hebrew) of Gen. 46:8. The background of this great host was traceable to a single man's family.

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<sup>1</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 55-56.

Second, it reveals that Yahweh is faithful to His promises to Abraham to multiply his descendants. The verb “filled” is the same verb used of the swarming multiplication of frogs in the second plague (Ex. 8:3). This verb is used of humans only here and in the blessing upon Noah and his sons (Gen. 9:1-7; esp. 7). The multiplication is further dramatized by five separate statements concerning Israel’s increase. The multiplication in Exodus also roots Israel back into the garden of Eden. “Be fruitful, increase, multiply, fill” found in Gen. 1:22, 28 continues throughout Genesis and Exodus, making the point that creation was not a one-time event but an ongoing process throughout history (Gen. 8:17; 9:1, 7; 17:20; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4). For example the establishment of Jerusalem (Ex. 15:17; Isa. 65:18) the new creation (Isa. 65:17) and the new people of Yahweh through Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10).

**1:8** It is difficult to identify this “new king” or any of the Pharaohs of the Bible, since the chronology of ancient Israel and Egypt is continually debated. Except for a few cases (1 Kgs. 11:40 [2 Chron. 12:2]; 2 Kgs. 17:4; 2 Kgs. 19:9 [Isa. 37:9]; 2 Kgs. 23:29 [2 Chron. 35:20]; Jer. 44:30), the Scriptures do not mention the historical names of the pharaohs. The first reason for this is that the authors of the Bible are interested in portraying the *symbol* of pharaoh as one entity that opposes the Kingdom of Yahweh, and so, in a way, all the pharaohs written about in the Bible are the same because they all oppose Yahweh and thus are a part of the kingdom of Satan (a concept developed in the Second Testament). The second reason is that these great, powerful, and worldly pharaohs are nobodies in Yahweh’s Scriptures. They oppose Yahweh’s kingdom, so their names are forever erased from Yahweh’s Word. In contrast, people like the midwives are mentioned by name because they feared God and so are forever remembered in Yahweh’s Word.

**1:9-10** This new king feared the growing numbers of the Israelites, most likely due to the fear of another Semitic overtaking. What he fears is not their leaving the country but rather their uprising. The Hebrew word translated in the NIV as “leave the country” is an idiom that does not mean to exit the country but to rise up over the land. It is used to refer to the rising of water or people (Gen. 2:6; Ex. 1:10, 11; Hos. 1:11).<sup>2</sup>

The king may have also seen this growth as a threat because, in the ancient Near East, fertility was a sign of blessing from the gods and also would have been indicative of their power. Thus, the fruitfulness of Israel would have been a reflection of Yahweh’s blessing and power. Egypt, serving the pagan gods, would have naturally reacted with hatred and fear of Yahweh’s presence and so sought to destroy it. The blessings of Yahweh—here, the growing numbers of the Israelites—become a threat to those who are not aligned with His will.

Thus, rather than present the facts, the king began a propaganda campaign against the Israelites to create fear and hatred for them among the Egyptians. In portraying his own people as the minority threatened by “those” outsiders who had become the majority, he inspired nationalism and made it easier to violate the human rights of the Israelites. Referring to “the nation of the Israelites” was more pejorative. It dehumanized the Israelites by focusing on their category rather than on their humanity. It also identified them as a separate nation and people.<sup>3</sup> This is very similar to what Hitler did with the Jewish people in Germany during the 1930s.

The irony here is that although the king sought to wipe out the Israelites, they flourished anyway within the blessings of Yahweh. If Yahweh accelerated Israel’s growth as a result of suffering,

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<sup>2</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 63.

then this makes it clear that there is a purpose and a resolution to their suffering that Yahweh is unfolding in this story, which will be seen in their exodus from Egypt.

**1:11** Pharaoh, now with the approval of his people, enslaved the Israelites to reduce their population growth. The forced labor would separate the men and women and reduce the time and opportunity to conceive. The Israelites' agriculture would also have suffered, due to the men having less time to work in their own fields, leading to starvation. Also slave labor does not tolerate ill health, leading to quicker deaths.

Pharaoh conscripted the Israelites to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses. These cities were probably military store cities being built in the northeast corner of Egypt, where invasion would first come from Asia. Pithom has been identified with the Egyptian word *prtm*, that is the "house of Tum" (the house of the god Atum, a city located somewhere east of the Wadi Tumilat near Heliopolis).

Rameses may be derived from *riamses*, meaning "Re created it/him" (as in the Egyptian god Re/Ra). It was the royal city of the pharaohs of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties in the delta region from about 1300 to 1100 BC. In Gen. 47:11, Rameses seems to function as a metonymy for the whole region of Goshen. The city that Ramses II (1304-1236 BC) built could be a rebuilding or expansion of *riamses*.<sup>4</sup>

The reference to the city Rameses has led many scholars to believe that Rameses II (1304–1236 BC) was the pharaoh of the exodus (as seen in the movies *The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt*). Therefore, they give the exodus a later date that contradicts the 1 Kgs. 1:6 date of 1446 BC. However, if Rameses II was the builder in Ex. 1:11 during the oppression of the Israelites, then it is important to note that Moses was not born yet. There is a large amount of time between the beginning of building of the cities and the birth of Moses (maybe twenty or more years). Then it was eighty more years before Moses stood before Pharaoh to judge Egypt with the plagues and lead Israel in the Exodus (Ex. 7:7). Thus, Rameses II would have had to be ruler more than eighty years, which is not true of the historical Rameses II. What is even more determining is that the pharaoh who oppressed Israel had died before Moses returned to Egypt (Ex. 2:23; 4:18). Thus, the pharaoh of the oppression and the pharaoh of the exodus are not the same. Those who take this view are not really taking the text seriously.

There are possible reasons for the name of the city. One possibility is that Rameses II finished the building of the city during his reign and named it after himself, which he was known for doing. Alternatively, later editors updated the name from what it was called during the slavery of the Hebrews to what the audience currently reading it would have known it as.

This is the first time that the king of Egypt is called *pharaoh*. Pharaoh derives from an ancient circumlocution Egyptian word for "big house," which became used of the king over time and eventually became a title.

**1:12-14** The statement "to oppress them with hard labor" becomes the motif of the paragraph, with the idea of oppression being repeated five times: "the Egyptians oppressed them," "serve rigorously," "made their lives bitter," "by hard service," and "was rigorous." This is further developed with a description of the type of service that was required of them. The narrator makes sure that the reader does not miss Israel's desperate need for deliverance. Yet the more Israel was oppressed, the more Yahweh blessed them as He continued to honor His promise to increase

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<sup>4</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 67.

their numbers. Apart from faith in Yahweh, there is no explanation of how the population could increase under such conditions.

The Hebrew word *abad* can mean “work, serve, labor, perform, do, make” and also “worship, live for, be under the control of.” Later the narrator will use this word to refer to Israel’s desire to “worship, live for, be under the control of” Yahweh. What Israel needed was not independence from Pharaoh and Egypt but a shift in dependency to the true and living Yahweh.<sup>5</sup> This will be developed more in Exodus 19–20.

**1:15-17** Since the oppression of the Israelites was not producing the results that Pharaoh wanted, he moved to infanticide. He commanded two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to carry out his will. Shiphrah means something like “dawn” or “fair.” Puah means something like “fragrant” or “splendid.” They were the senior midwives functioning as administrators over a group of other midwives. Midwives in the ancient Near East were women who had no children of their own and so were seen at best as useless and at worst as cursed by the gods. Yet because they feared God, He identified them by name, unlike Pharaoh, and will use them to save His people and, in doing so, bless them.

This is the first time that the narrator uses the term *Hebrew* instead of *Israelite*. The word “Hebrew” is probably similar to the word *‘apiru* (found in Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite texts), referring to an ethnically diverse group of people seen as socially inferior.<sup>6</sup> People of other cultures tended to lump the Israelites together with other related ethnic groups and refer to them generically as Hebrews. The consistent pattern in the Scriptures is that non-Semitic people refer to the Israelites as Hebrews and when the Israelites are speaking of themselves when dealing with non-Semitic people. The Israelites will not be called Jews until the Romans control the land of Judea.

Pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill every male infant at the moment of their delivery. This would not be too hard to do without the mothers knowing since childbirth without any anesthesia was very difficult for the woman and since many children in the ancient world did not survive childbirth. Pharaoh targeted the boys rather than the girls for several reasons. First, males were those who fought in wars and so were more of a threat when they grew older. Second, women were more dependent on males, and if enough males died, then the women would naturally begin to die as well. Third, in agrarian societies, people were used to killing the male animals and keeping the females alive.

However, once again Yahweh thwarted Pharaoh’s plan, for the Hebrew midwives feared God more than they feared Pharaoh and so disobeyed him. “Feared God” does not imply believing in the true God of Israel. In the Torah, “fear God” tends to mean “to be honest, faithful, trustworthy, and upright.”<sup>7</sup>

**1:18-21** Several years have passed between Ex. 1:17 and Ex. 1:18. Pharaoh summoned the two Hebrew midwives back because he had noticed that the number of Hebrews males had not decreased. Why did it take Pharaoh so long to notice this detail? First, in the ancient world, there was no machine-made clothing, and little boys and girls often dressed in similar clothes and had similar length hair, so they could easily be confused. Second, Pharaoh could not openly

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<sup>5</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> See Ronald F. Youngblood. *Exodus*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 79.

command Egyptian soldiers to go door to door looking for boys without it being obvious what he was trying to do. If he had been willing to send soldiers, then he would not have needed the midwives.

The midwives responded to Pharaoh by stating that the Hebrew women were not like the Egyptian women and that the babies were already birthed by the time they got there. The midwives refer to the Hebrew women as more *hayot*, often translated “vigorous,” as if they were stronger than the Egyptian women. But a better translation is “more involved.”<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew women were more communal, and the women of the community would assist in the birth of the children, while the Egyptian woman were more likely to seek outside, “medically trained” midwives. It was not a genetic or physical difference but a cultural difference. Because of the midwives’ faithfulness to love the Hebrews rather than to execute an immoral command, Yahweh blessed the midwives with the same blessing of children that He was pouring out on Israel. Obedience results in blessing. This is the first time that God is mentioned in the story. With all the suffering of Israel and Yahweh’s behind-the-scenes work of blessing the people, the narrator makes clear what should already be evident to the reader: that God is truly blessing them. This is specifically unveiled after the amazing courage and obedience of the midwives. The focus of the end of this chapter is on the incredible courage of everyday women who defied the Pharaoh because they feared God.

Some scholars view the comment of the midwives to Pharaoh as a lie and struggle with how Yahweh would bless them for this deception. First, the belief that they were lying is an assumption. They could have very well been telling the truth. If they were deceiving Pharaoh, then it is important to notice that they were blessed because they feared Yahweh (Ex. 1:20-21), not because they were perfect. Yahweh has never expected perfection in order to bless us.

“The central idea [in this pericope] is that God faithfully fulfills His covenant promises in spite of severe and life-threatening opposition. Even Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth could do nothing to thwart God’s purpose. In fact, God actually used Pharaoh’s opposition as a means of carrying out His promises.”<sup>9</sup>

**1:22** Pharaoh, seeing that all his plans to reduce Israel’s population had failed, gave up subtlety and moved to the direct and public extermination of all the infant Israelite males by commanding that they be thrown into the Nile River. But why not just kill them with the sword? Why throw them into the Nile? First, the Nile was viewed by the Egyptians as a god by the name of Hapi, and it would have been an offering to that god. Second, it could be a shifting of the responsibility from Pharaoh to Hapi. If they died, then it was Hapi’s judgment on them. If they lived, then it was his mercy. Third, the Nile is convenient and clean. There would be no blood nor visual death in front of all the people, and the evidence would all be swept away.

The narrator ends with a statement that suggests Pharaoh had finally come up with a plan to defeat the Hebrews’ growth. The author ends the section by building the tension and creating the question, “What will happen?” Also, after Yahweh is mentioned in Ex. 1:20-21, the reader is asking, “Will He step in to rescue the Hebrews?”

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<sup>8</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon H. Johnston, “I Will Multiply Your Seed [Exodus 1],” *Exegesis and Exposition* 1:1 (Fall 1986), p. 27.

## B. Birth and Early Life of Moses (2:1-25)

In Exodus 2, the story of Moses becomes the answer to the question that the reader asked at the end of the previous chapter: “What is Yahweh going to do?” Yet the story of Moses as an infant, about to be killed, and as an Egyptian man, with no real Hebrew identity or devotion to Yahweh, does not seem to paint him as Israel’s deliverer. Yet this is exactly who Yahweh picked—not a man of great strength and will but a nobody who could be turned into a great man by Yahweh’s means. Yet before Moses becomes the focus, the narrator begins the chapter by focusing on the lives of three women who are the heroes of the story. Moses’ mother, Moses’ sister, and Pharaoh’s daughter are all unlikely heroes whom Yahweh uses to preserve the life of His deliverer so that he could one day deliver the people of Israel from bondage.

**2:1-4** The narrator introduces a couple from the house of Levi. The reader will be told later that the father is Amram and the mother is Jochebed (Ex. 6:20; Num. 26:59). The fact that they are unnamed here could be to emphasize their ordinary lives yet extraordinary faith. The mention of Moses’ coming from parents who were both from the house of Levi, which would become the priestly tribe of Israel, foreshadows the sacred nature of Moses’ leadership over Israel. At this time, Levi was a tribe cursed by Jacob (Gen. 49:5-7), but by the end of the book of Exodus and for the original readers of the book, Levi was the tribe chosen by Yahweh to mediate between Himself and the people. This is the sixteenth and final time that Moses used the phrase “she became pregnant and gave birth to...” It is clear that Moses saw himself as the final figure in a long line of people whom Yahweh had been preserving and preparing to form Israel as His nation.

Here we see Moses’ mother, an ordinary woman, defying the Pharaoh’s edict and hiding her child for three months until she could hide him no longer. She decided to save her son by putting him in the Nile, just as Pharaoh commanded, except she places him in a basket to preserve his life. It was not uncommon for rivers to be associated with life and thus with the provision of the gods. Moses’ parents placing him in the river was an act of faith in Yahweh to take care of and lead him down the river to safety (Heb. 11:23).

The Hebrew word for “basket” is the same Hebrew word for the “ark” of Noah (Gen. 7-9). The ark was a symbol of Yahweh’s preservation and deliverance from the chaotic waters (evil/judgment) that threatened to engulf the world.

“As Noah’s ark was God’s instrument for preserving one savior of the human race, Moses’ ark proved to be His means of preserving another savior of the Israelites. Moses’ parents obeyed Pharaoh and put Moses in the river (1:22), but they also trusted God who delivered their baby.”<sup>10</sup>

The basket and child were set among the reeds, and the oldest daughter watched over the basket as it floated down the river. This verse introduces Miriam, who will be named later (Ex. 15:20), and shows that the family was together in protection the baby. It also suggests that Miriam was older even than Aaron.

Critics of the Bible have accused the author of Exodus of copying the story of Sargon the Great (2334-2279 BC), a similar story of a baby being placed in a basket into the river for protection and then being drawn out to later become the Akkadian king. This writing was actually written by the later Sargon of the Assyrian Empire during the 700s BC. Given that Moses wrote Exodus

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 14.

in the 1400's BC, it is more likely the other way around. Yet these critics also claim a later date for the book of Exodus. However, the similarities in the stories are better explained by the ancients' views of rivers and their customs associated with it. Despite the similarities, there are also major differences. First, the meaning of the Sargon story is unclear. Second, there was no threat to his life. Third, Sargon is abandoned and has no father. Where Sargon's story emphasizes his greatness at birth and as king, Exodus emphasizes that Moses was an ordinary baby and never becomes great in the Egyptian household, let alone king. Exodus emphasizes the greatness of Yahweh in the deliverance of Moses.

**2:5-6** Down river from where the Hebrew boys were dying, Pharaoh's daughter came out to bathe in the Nile. It was not uncommon for the Egyptians to use the river for bathing and many other things. They believed that the Nile was not only sacred but the great god Hapi himself. Life revolved around the Nile because life was dependent upon the Nile. She saw the basket and had it brought to her. The narrator's drawing out the moment of her opening the basket to see a Hebrew boy creates tension for the reader as to what will happen to him in the hands of Pharaoh's daughter. When she opened the basket, she recognized him as not just a "baby" but a Hebrew boy.

In the Hebrew, the participle introduces the unexpected, what Pharaoh's daughter saw when she opened the basket: "and look, there was a baby boy crying." This is an important addition because it puts readers in the position of looking with her into the basket and explains her compassion. Her response was not hatred or a desire to kill him but deep compassion for his helplessness.

"What she felt for the baby was strong enough to prompt her to spare the child from the fate decreed for Hebrew boys. Here is part of the irony of the passage: What was perceived by many to be a womanly weakness—compassion for a baby—is a strong enough emotion to prompt the woman to defy the orders of Pharaoh. The ruler had thought sparing women was safe, but the midwives, the Hebrew mother, the daughter of Pharaoh, and Miriam, all work together to spare one child—Moses (1 Cor. 1:27-29)."<sup>11</sup>

**2:7-9** Miriam, seeing the compassion of Pharaoh's daughter and knowing that she could not provide milk for the child, offered quickly and intelligently to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. Of course, Miriam got her mother and brought her to Pharaoh's daughter. The turning point of the story is when Pharaoh's daughter commanded Moses' mother "to go" and "to take" and the child was delivered safely back into her arms. In the continued blessing of Yahweh, not only did she have her child back alive, but the Pharaoh's daughter also paid her to take care of her own child. Yahweh once again did the unexpected and the seemingly foolish by bringing Moses into the house of the very person who had ordered his drowning. Once again, He uses an insignificant woman, Pharaoh's daughter, to save His people. Though she was an Egyptian princess, she was a Gentile who did not know Yahweh and was outside the covenant people of Yahweh. Yet it was this woman whom Yahweh used, showing that He cares about all people and wants to draw them toward Himself (Gen. 12:3-4).

**2:10** The phrase "when the child grew" or "was weaned" is understood by some as a weaning period of about two or three years, as in the ancient times children were nursed for three to four years before being weaned. Pharaoh's daughter took the child and named him Moses. *Moses* is

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<sup>11</sup> The NET Bible footnotes.

an Egyptian name that means “one born of water.” It relates obviously to the names of other great Egyptians of that period (e.g., Ahmose, Thutmose, et al.).<sup>12</sup>

“The adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses enjoyed the highest privileges in his education. In commenting on Moses’ training Stephen said that he became “a man of power in words and deeds” (Acts 7:21-22). Josephus wrote that Moses was a general in the Egyptian army that defeated the Ethiopians and that he married the daughter of the king of Ethiopia. We cannot prove the accuracy of this statement, but it suggests that Moses may have risen high in Egyptian society before he fled Egypt.”<sup>13</sup>

Moses most likely still had contact with his family, especially considering his reunion with his brother Aaron in Exodus 4. The point here is that Moses would be shaped by his Hebrew and Egyptian parents. The question is over whom he would identify himself with when he becomes older.

**2:11-12** Here, the focus of the story turns from the Hebrew people in general and the family of Moses to Moses himself. The statement “when Moses had grown up” refers to Moses as a grown man. Acts 7:23 states that Moses was forty years old when he fled from Pharaoh. The author shows Moses’ identification with his people’s plight. The repetition of the phrase “among his people,” and its connection with the word *Hebrew*, sets him apart from the Egyptians and shows the depth of his sentiments for his people. It also demonstrates that Moses was not ignorant of his ancestry. Heb. 11:24-27 states that Moses’ actions in these verses were motivated by faith and by his desire to no longer be known as an Egyptian but to join his people. The author never explains why after forty years Moses was now willing to sacrifice his Egyptian background.

Moses, seeing an Egyptian attacking a Hebrew, was filled with a desire to see justice implemented. Moses’ looking around to see if anyone was nearby shows that the murder was premeditated, and his burying the body in the sand reveals his own guilt. According to Genesis 9:6 and the Law that would come in Ex. 20:13, he was guilty of murder and deserved execution. Though He did not approve of the murder, Yahweh used this event to extract Moses from Egypt. And by the grace of Yahweh, He would redeem Moses and use him as a redeemer of His people.

**2:13-15** The next day, Moses saw two Hebrews fighting with each other and tried to step in and act as their mediator. The response of the Hebrew slave showed that they had no respect for Moses, seeing him as traitor to his own people who grew up with privilege in Pharaoh’s palace while they remained slaves. The Hebrew mocked Moses by asking if he was going to kill him as he did the Egyptian. Moses then realized that what he had done had not remained hidden, and he became very afraid. The Israelites would hate him because it would be very likely that they would be blamed and punished for the murder of the Egyptian overseer. When Pharaoh heard what happened, he issued a death sentence on Moses, causing him to flee into the wilderness. Moses was now not accepted by either the Egyptians or his own Hebrew people, and so he had no home. Moses intended to be his people’s deliverance (Ex. 5:19-21; 17:3; Num. 14:2; Deut. 1:27), yet because he did not know or trust Yahweh, his attempts failed. His desire for justice for his people was godly, but the way he went about it was not. Yahweh would now take him into the wilderness to humble him and then train him to be a true deliverer of the Israelites.

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<sup>12</sup> See Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 15.

**2:16-20** The Midianite priest Reuel and his family are introduced. The name Reuel (meaning “friend of God”) is given here, while in Ex. 3:1; 4:18 and other places he is called Jethro (meaning “abundance”). It was not uncommon for ancients, like Sabeian kings and priests, to have more than one name; several of the kings of Israel, including Solomon, did. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2) and may have remained, to some extent, worshipers of Yahweh (Ex. 18:12-23). Yet it is clear in later passages that they were also syncretistic in their beliefs. The exact location of the land of Midian is uncertain but seems to lie east of Egyptian territory. The most likely location is somewhere in the eastern part of the Sinai Peninsula or the Arabah, which is south of the Dead Sea. Because they were nomadic shepherds, they would have moved around a lot in these regions.

Reuel’s seven daughters went to the well to draw water, which was routine for women in the ancient Near East. Moses seemed to come to the rescue of the women at the well with the same aggressiveness he had brought to the defense of the Hebrew back in Egypt. One could assume that Moses’ instinct was to confront using physical strength, which would be the mentality of an Egyptian pharaoh. However, this shows that he is still willing to intervene against injustice. He was assertive and imposing but also generous and helpful even to people he hardly knew, not simply from personal loyalty. Between his desire to defend the Hebrew slave and now these women, the author is showing that Moses was naturally a deliverer—just not yet the kind that Yahweh desired. The daughters immediately rushed back to tell their father about what had happened. Jethro’s surprise to see the women back so early implies that the oppression at the well was a common occurrence, yet no one had done anything up to this point.

**2:21-22** Reuel invited Moses to live with them and eventually gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. The name Zipporah means “warbler” or “twitterer” and is the name of a small desert bird. Moses and Zipporah had a son and named him Gershom, which means “one driven out or thrust forward.” Moses used the word as a pun with the Hebrew word “stranger.” Moses stated that he was now a stranger in the land of Midian (Acts 7:29). Despite having a family and a home, Moses expressed that, emotionally, he did not belong here. Either he knew where he belonged (i.e., in Egypt with his fellow Israelites) or he felt, despite having a family, so dejected and insignificant that he had no purpose or place in the world. The latter is more likely given his responses to Yahweh in Ex. 3-4. Moses spent the first forty years of his life as part of the Egyptian royalty thinking he was a somebody who could just deliver the people through his own strength. He would now spend the next forty years of his life as a nobody shepherd, being humbled by Yahweh. Yahweh would use the wilderness, a place of testing and of stripping away all that is not godly, in order to humble and teach Moses, so that Yahweh could enter his life and teach him how He uses humble nobodies to redeem His people and do amazing things in the kingdom of Yahweh just as he did with the women in the first two chapters.

**2:23-25** Now that the oppression of the people and Moses’ situation has been summarized, these verses conclude the introduction to the exodus story. The author states that “a long period of time” has gone by, which according to Acts 7:30 has been forty years, making Moses eighty years old at the beginning of the next chapter. The pharaoh has just died, meaning Moses is no longer in danger in Egypt. Yet despite the new pharaoh, the oppression of the people continues, along with their cries to Yahweh for help. This shows that all pharaohs are the same and will continue to oppress the people of Yahweh.

Yahweh’s hearing, remembering His covenant, and responding to the cries of His people does not mean that He had not cared all these years or somehow just now has the ability or time to

help; rather, it goes back to Gen. 15:13-15, when He told Abraham that Israel would be enslaved for four hundred years and that He would then bring them out of Egypt and make them into a great nation. Once again, we are not told specifically why Yahweh allowed the slavery of Israel for so long, but Gen. 15:13-15 makes it clear that this was His plan all along—and it was now time to act. The statement “God remembered His covenant” shows that He desired to honor His promises to Abraham to make his descendants into a great nation and bless them so that the world could be blessed; He was just waiting for the right time to fulfill His greater purpose. Moses was now where he needed to be for Yahweh to enter his life and use him to deliver His people. The theological issue here is not how people suffer but whether suffering goes unnoticed.

### C. The Call of Moses (3:1–4:31)

In this section, Yahweh finally steps into the story, begins to make Himself known, and works on behalf of His people by initiating His plan of redemption and freedom for His covenant people. Moses had spent forty years in the wilderness feeling insignificant and broken, and now Yahweh would come to him to make him into the man and deliverer that He saw him to be. It is also here that Yahweh would reveal His divine name that would communicate His true character as a sovereign and covenantal God who is intimately involved in the lives of His people in order to redeem and transform them.

**3:1-2** Moses was now shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law, a Midianite priest, as he had been doing for the past forty years. Rather than being royalty in the palace of Egypt, he was taking care of someone else's sheep. And though he was from the tribe of Levi, the future priests, he was not the priest in this tribe, but rather his father-in-law was. At the same time, Moses saw himself so much as an Israelite that he was willing to work as a shepherd, a profession no Egyptian would ever take on (Gen. 36:32-34; 37:1-6). Thus, he would return to Egypt as an Israelite, not an Egyptian.

Moses took his sheep to the outskirts of the desert looking for grass for grazing, when he came to Horeb. Horeb is another name for Sinai. *Horeb* seems to be used in reference to the mountain range, whereas *Sinai* is the name of a specific peak of the mountain range. No one knows where Mount Horeb is located today. The three most prominent theories are the southern point of the Sinai Peninsula, the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula, and the east side of the Red Sea in the Arabian desert. The author called it "the mountain of God" because it was the place where Yahweh would later give the Mosaic Law to Israel and make them into a nation.

Then an angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. This was not merely a desert bush that spontaneously burst into flames, which was actually common in the wilderness and Moses' experience. The fact that it caught Moses' attention shows that it was something unnatural and uncommon. The fact that the fire did not consume the bush, however, makes it very unique—not to mention the voice coming out of it! There is a play on words here with the Hebrew word *senah* "bush" sounding similar to *sinay* "Sinai." Yahweh used a bush because in the biblical culture bushes and trees are symbols for people groups.

In the ancient Near East, fire was often used in the burning of homes and people as a judgment against them or in the consuming of sacrifices to the gods, and so fire became symbolic of judgment. Yahweh uses the imagery of fire in association with His judgment throughout the Bible: Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), the plagues (Ex. 9:24), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), the golden calf (Ex. 32:20; Deut. 9:21), the people of the wilderness (Num. 11:1; 21:6; 26:9-10), and the enemies of Yahweh (Num. 21:28; Deut. 4:24; 32:22; Josh. 6:24; 8:8; Jud. 1:8; 2 Sam. 22:7-9; 2 Kgs. 18:37-38; 2 Kgs. 1:10; Ps. 11:6; 21:9; 46:9; 106:18; Isa. 5:24; 9:18-19; 29:6; 30:27; 66:15-16; Jer. 11:16; Ezek. 22:18-22; 38:22; 39:6-10; Mal. 4:1; Matt. 3:10, 12; 7:19; 13:40; 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; Heb. 10:27; 12:29; 2 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 8:5-8; 11:5; 14:9-10; 19:20; 20:9-10, 14-15; 21:8).

With the same idea as judgment, fire is associated with the cleansing of sin, such as in the refining of metals. In the Bible, all humans will go through the fire of judgment, but the believers will have their sin burned away in judgment and come out refined (Num. 31:23; Ps. 11:5-6; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 43:2; Mal. 3:2-3; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Thus Yahweh chose fire and smoke as the physical image to represent Himself, and He appeared to the people as the pillar of fire and smoke that led Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 13:21-22), appeared to them at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18), indwelt the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34; Ezek. 1:4, 26-28), and indwelt the believers (Acts 2:1-4). The image of the fire and smoke links directly back to the Abrahamic Covenant, where Yahweh initiated the covenant through fire and smoke (Gen. 15:17-20). The image of fire also connects Yahweh back to creation as the God of light (Ps. 27:1; 119:105; Isa. 60:1; Dan. 2:22; Mal. 4:2; John 8:12; 9:5; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23) who brought light into the world (Gen. 1:3; John 1:1-5).

Deut. 33:16 references the fact that Yahweh “dwelt in the burning bush.” The Hebrew word for “dwelt” is *shakan*, which is why the Hebrews called it the Shekinah glory of Yahweh. The idea is that Yahweh is a God who is transcendent, mighty, and holy yet also comes down to dwell with His people. The imagery is Yahweh sitting enthroned on the earth (Isa. 6:1; 40:22); the Shekinah glory of Yahweh signifies His legs coming down to earth into the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle, where the Ark of the Covenant is His footstool (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 132:7-8; Isa. 66:1; Ezek. 1:26-2; 43:7).

The image of fire is fitting for Yahweh as the holy and mysterious God, for unlike the other elements, fire cannot be manipulated or controlled. It is mysterious, beautiful, and mesmerizing as well as scary and dangerous. Modern science still does not know how to define fire or light or what they truly are.

**3:3-6** Moses chose to turn from what he was doing to go investigate the unnaturalness of this event, the fiery bush challenging his view of what was real. It was in this supernatural, unreal event that Yahweh would change Moses’ view of reality with a paradigm shift. Yahweh called out from the bush, and Moses responded to Yahweh’s call. Repeating a name twice is an expression of endearment and friendship (1 Sam. 3:4, 10; 2 Sam. 18:33; 19:4; Matt. 7:21-22; 27:46; Luke 6:46; Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14).

Yahweh then tersely commanded him to *stop* and come no closer (Ex. 19:9-25) because he was on holy ground. Moses, as an unrighteous being, would die stepping into the presence and glory of the Holy God of the universe (Ex. 33:20). Yet through the grace of Yahweh and the shielding of the angel, Moses was able to live. He was commanded to remove his shoes, which was custom when entering a superior person’s house in the ancient Near East. In this way, Sinai was implicitly identified as Yahweh’s place. Though the entire universe belongs to Him, Yahweh was communicating to Moses that He was entering space, time, and matter in order to make this mountain His home. Thus, the very ground was holy, which is said of no other location in the Bible. Removing one’s shoes was also a way of worshiping the gods in the ancient Near East. It may also be connected to the fact that men went before their gods naked to remove all pretense as they approached. Though Yahweh had the Levitical priests wear a linen robe for modesty (Ex. 20:26), He did require them to enter the tabernacle barefoot as an acknowledgment of His holiness.<sup>14</sup>

Yahweh’s calling Himself the “God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” communicated first that He is the same God who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with whom he initiated and reconfirmed the Abrahamic covenant and promises. Second, by appearing to Moses He was showing that He would be faithful to fulfill his promises

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<sup>14</sup> See R. Alan Cole. *Exodus*, p. 65.

to Moses and Israel—because He is faithful to His covenant, not because Moses was worthy. Third, whereas so many gods were known as the god of some element in nature, Yahweh was communicating that that although He is creator and sovereign over all creation He wanted to be known as a God of His *people*.

The fact that Moses' immediate response to seeing the fire and hearing the voice was fear and submission communicates what an awesome and overwhelming presence this symbol of Yahweh was.

“God begins his discourse with Moses by warning him not to come near to him because he is holy (v. 5). As we will later see, the idea of God's holiness is a central theme in the remainder of the book. Indeed, the whole structure of Israel's worship of God at the tabernacle is based on a view of God as the absolutely Holy One who has come to dwell in their midst. We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that at the same time that God warns Moses to stand at a distance, he also speaks to him ‘face to face’ (cf. Nu 12:8). The fact that God is a holy God should not be understood to mean that he is an impersonal force—God is holy yet intensely personal. This is a central theme in the narratives of the Sinai covenant that follow.”<sup>15</sup>

It is significant that it was Yahweh who initiated contact with Moses by calling to him from the burning bush; Moses had not been searching for Yahweh all these years.

**3:7-10** Yahweh had come down because He had compassion for His people and wanted to deliver them, to alleviate their suffering, and bless them as He promised. Yahweh was one who did not operate outside of history, but in and through history. Here, Yahweh revealed His compassion for His people and His desire to rescue them.

The phrase “a land flowing with milk and honey” does not refer to some fantasy Candyland. This is a metaphor for both abundance from Yahweh and dependence on Yahweh for that abundance. The idea is that the land would be so blessed with rain that plants would grow abundantly. Plenty of grass for the cattle and goats to graze on would produce an abundant supply of milk, and plenty of flowers for the bees would produce an abundant supply of honey. Milk and honey were rare and sweet and very valuable, and honey was also seen as an aphrodisiac. Yet these two things can come only by rain, which only Yahweh can control, emphasizing the need for obedience in order to receive Yahweh's blessing (Deut. 11:11-12; 28:12-14; 1 Kg. 8:35-36; 18:39-45; Mal. 3:10).

The list of six Canaanite territories both clarified the land that Yahweh would give His people and clearly identified their future enemies. Gen. 15:19 lists *ten* nations, a number symbolic of worldly empires. Deut. 7:1 lists *seven* nations, a number symbolic of their completeness or totality. The listing of *six* here is symbolic of man. This may be intentional in the book of Exodus, a book about man's need for redemption or else Yahweh's judgment.

Yahweh then stated why He had revealed Himself to Moses. He would be sending Moses up against Pharaoh to orchestrate the deliverance of His people by leading them out of Egypt. The command to Moses was that of reflecting and representing Yahweh by going. This is the same command given to Adam and Eve: to rule and subdue (Gen. 1:26-28). The command to *go* was

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<sup>15</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 245.

the same command given Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4); however, whereas Abraham went without hesitation, Moses would drag his feet and try to negotiate a way out.

“The question that must have loomed large in [Moses’] mind was, what could a man of eighty do for his people now? The answer to this question was to come from God Himself and in a most unusual way.”<sup>16</sup>

This chapter communicates three reasons for Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel. First, Yahweh honors His promises. Second, He does care about suffering and comes to display His love and compassion for His people. And third, He can use people who have failed.

**3:11-12** Moses responded to Yahweh with the question, “Who am I?” This was not an expression of self-confidence but a form of politeness or acceptance of an honor rather than declining (1 Sam. 18:18; 2 Sam. 7:18). Yet based on Yahweh’s response, there was also a disbelief in his ability to handle the task given him. Yahweh responded by saying that it did not matter who he was, only who Yahweh was, and that He would be with Moses. Yahweh was indicating that His presence should be enough for Moses and should bring an end to all excuses. Yahweh’s reply contains a promise of guidance along with a fulfillment sign that Moses would return to this mountain with the people of Israel to serve Yahweh. A fulfillment sign is a confirmation that a prophet has completed a task from Yahweh. Here, the narrator continues the theme that Yahweh would not be delivering the people from service to allow them to do whatever they wanted but rather to enter a new service to Him.

**3:13-15** Moses’ question, “What is your name?” is an idiomatic phrase that asks more about Yahweh’s authority and nature than “What should I call you?” Names communicated the nature and character of individuals in the ancient Near East. Moses and the Hebrew people knew who Yahweh was; the question after four hundred years of silence was whether Yahweh really cared or was even capable. This was the same question that Gideon would ask in Jug. 6:13. Moses was not confident that Yahweh would be with him, nor did he think the Hebrews would be either.

God revealed His name as “I AM that I AM,” which is known as “Yahweh” (or “YHWH” since the original Hebrew did not have vowels). When God first spoke His name, it was in the first-person form *'ehyeh* (the Qal imperfect verb form) from the verb *haya*, which means “to be.” Based on the use of the grammar of the word, the first meaning of the name Yahweh is that it indicates that God is not bound by time, that he has always been I AM, is currently I AM, and will always be I AM. The Greek translation of the First Testament used a participle (continuous action) to capture the idea.

“To the Hebrew ‘to be’ does not just mean to exist as all other beings and things do as well—but to be active, to express oneself in active being, ‘The God who acts.’”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the second meaning of the name is that Yahweh is transcendent and sovereign over all creation. There is no other god in the ancient Near East that claims this past, present, and future eternity; with this claim, Yahweh makes Himself unique to all the other gods.

Yet the context of Yahweh’s conversation with Moses and how He uses His name through the rest of Scriptures gives the name a third meaning. All throughout Yahweh’s conversation with Moses, He continuously emphasized that He has heard His people’s cries and is responding to

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<sup>16</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961):127.

them, that He is with Moses, that He will go with Moses, and that Moses is to communicate to the people that Yahweh is with them.

In these verses, Yahweh also went on to state that “Yahweh—the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.” He connected this name to the Abrahamic Covenant and promises. So, the fourth meaning of His name is that His presence and character guarantees the fulfillment of the covenant promises to Israel. So, the whole point of Yahweh revealing His name to Moses was to communicate that He is a God who is not just sovereign over creation but also intimately present in the lives of His people. A good translation for the name of Yahweh would be “the sovereign creator who is the ever-present helper who is always with you and faithful to fulfill His covenant promises.”

In the ancient Near East, names were not chosen because people liked the way they sound, as in the modern western world. Names communicated character. Moses’ asking, “What is His name?” was the equivalent of asking, “What is His character?” Thus, Yahweh was not just giving a name; He was communicating His character to Moses and the people. The character of this transcendent and sovereign God, who has always existed yet is intimately involved in history and the lives of His people, makes him utterly unique to any other god or being in the universe. This God will enter space, time, and matter and shake Egypt on a cosmic level in order to deliver His people from bondage and then dwell with them to make them into a new and great people and nation.

However, Moses was not allowed to use the “I AM” form of the name because he is not “I AM.” No human can use the first-person form properly. So, in Ex. 3:15, Yahweh told Moses that when he went to the people of Israel, he was to use the third-person form of the name and say that “He is’ has sent me.”

It is important to understand that in Genesis and the rest of the Scriptures, the names *‘elohim*, *el shaddai*, and many others are not His names but titles. He has been known by many titles, and these titles are, in fact, shared by many other gods. The name *Yahweh*, however, is His personal name by which no other god or being in the universe is known. Yahweh wants to have a relationship with His people, and so He was giving them permission to call Him by a personal name rather than by His formal name. It is like giving someone permission to call you Bill instead of Mr. William Jenkins. Yahweh went on in this passage to state that this was the name that they were to use forever, through every generation, as a reminder of who He is.

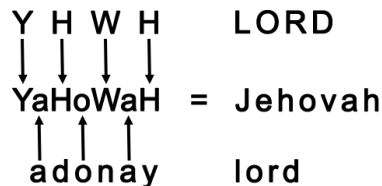
The context here makes it sound as if Yahweh was revealing His name to Moses and His people for the first time, yet the name Yahweh appeared many times in the book of Genesis. Later Ex. 6:3 states, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them.” What does He mean by this if the name Yahweh appears in Genesis? It is important to recognize that the times the name Yahweh appears, it does not appear in isolation, rather it appears along with another title of God, like “Yahweh *‘elohim*.” It is not until Exodus that the name Yahweh appears in isolation. The statement in Ex. 6:3 can be understood in one of two different ways. Scholars debate between these two views and there is no real consensus.

The first understanding is that no one in Genesis had ever heard the name Yahweh, but Moses, being the author of both Genesis and Exodus, may have inserted the name “Yahweh” alongside the other titles of God in Genesis so that his readers would know that the God of Genesis and Exodus are not different gods; rather, He is the same God with different titles.

The second understanding is that the patriarchs of Genesis may have known the name of Yahweh, but they did not know the meaning of the name or how it related to the character of God. Ex. 6:3 is not saying that they had not heard the name Yahweh but that they did not fully know the character of Yahweh as it would be revealed in the exodus and at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Law. Thus, they may have called Him Yahweh, but they related to Him as *'elohim* or *el shaddai*. Likewise, the generation after Jacob and all the generations after him had lost the knowledge of the one true God Yahweh, so Yahweh had to reveal Himself to His people again. But this time He was going to do it more fully in the exodus.

So, another question is, why do you not see the name Yahweh in your Bible? During the intertestamental period of Israel (500 BC to 30 AD; the time of Christ), the Jews became very concerned with making sure that they held Yahweh in proper reverence and did not disobey Him and thus reap the judgment of the exile again. Part of this effort was that they became very concerned with not blaspheming the name of God (Lev. 24:10-16). So, rather than saying the name *Yahweh*, they would say *Elohim* instead, which is the Hebrew word for any god. In addition to this, magicians from the Greco-Roman world were starting to use the name Yahweh as a magical incantation. In the magical arts, to know the name of a powerful being is to be able to harness some or all of the power of that being. To protect the sacredness of Yahweh's name, they decided to replace it in the Scriptures.

The Jews decided that when they came to the name "YHWH," they would say the Hebrew word *adonay*, which means "Lord," like "sir" or "master." To remind the reader to say *adonay*, and to maintain the presence of the word "YHWH," they assigned the vowels of *adonay* into the consonants of "YHWH." However, it was never intended that this form be read aloud. The consonants would make you aware of His divine name, but the vowels would trigger you to say *adonay*. During the Middle Ages, European scholars began to read aloud the consonants of "YHWH" with the vowels of *adonay*, which resulted in the word "Yahowah." Because the Germans were the first to make this transfer, it was written as "Jehovah" instead of "Yahowah," since j's and w's are pronounced as y's and v's. "Jehovah" is an artificial word bearing no relation to the name of the God of Israel in biblical times.



"It is quite certain, however, that the ancient Israelites never used this term for their God; formally it is like a genetic hybrid, as artificial as the words 'eledile' and 'crocophant.'"<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the name "Jehovah" is gibberish, based on an ignorant mistranslation. This is not the proper name of Yahweh, for it means nothing and communicates nothing about His character, which was the whole point of revealing the name in the first place. To call Him "Jehovah" is just as disrespectful as calling a spouse by the wrong name all the time. Though Jehovah does not make it into the English translations, the translators maintained the Jewish mindset by not using the name Yahweh. Instead, they use the word LORD in all capital letters. This lets the reader know that it is not just Lord (*adonay*) but Yahweh. However, this thinking is also incorrect

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<sup>18</sup> Trygve N. D. Mettinger. *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names*, p. 16.

because Yahweh gave us His name because He meant for us to use His name. He makes this clear by first stating in Ex. 3:15 that the people are to use his name forever as a remembrance of who He is. Likewise, over and over throughout Scriptures, the authors of the Bible and the people of Israel use the name Yahweh. And if names communicate character, then to use His name makes one more aware of His uniqueness and character. This was the whole point of Him giving it to us—to drastically and distinctly separate Him from all other gods as unique and relational. Using His name reminds us of who He is.

**3:16-20** Yahweh told Moses to go back to the elders of Israel and tell them that Yahweh the God of their fathers had appeared to him, that Yahweh was aware of their suffering and had come to deliver them from bondage. “I have been watching over you” is an idiom that communicated that Yahweh had noticed, known, and remembered His people and was going to do something about it. It emphasized His awareness of their situation as well as His determination to act.

Despite his own difficulty trusting in Yahweh, Moses was assured that the elders of Israel would listen to him and believe. Then, with their backing, Moses was to go to Pharaoh and demand Israel’s freedom to leave Egypt. Many people have assumed by this request that Moses was first to ask for a three-day journey into the wilderness to worship Yahweh and then later he would extend it to a full-blown exodus. However, Moses’ request implies full and permanent departure from Egypt. First, people in the ancient Near East made requests in suggestive and restrained ways as opposed to coming right out and saying what they wanted. Second, a “three-day journey” was an idiom for a major trip. Pharaoh would have heard Moses saying, “We want to leave Egypt for however long we want.” Third, the demand to make sacrifices to Yahweh was a way of saying, “We are going to worship another God of another land,” which would mean, “We are defecting from your gods and their authority over us.”

Yet unlike the elders, Pharaoh would not listen or capitulate to their demand because this was exactly what the previous pharaohs had feared—the Israelites developing their own national identity. However, this was exactly what Yahweh wanted so that He could demonstrate His power and glory to the Egyptians. This becomes the first hint of Yahweh’s desire to not only deliver His people but also to demonstrate His authority and power and hold Egypt accountable for their sins.

**3:21-22** Yahweh promised Moses that the Hebrews would leave with the wealth of Egypt. This would pay the Hebrews for their years of slavery, but beyond that, it would equip them for their journey into the wilderness. This looks back on Gen. 15:14, where Yahweh told Abraham that his descendants would come out of Egypt with great plunder. What is interesting is that there is no mention of food, weapons and armor, cattle, and so on.

**4:1-9** Moses asked, “What if they do not believe me or pay attention to me, but say, ‘Yahweh has not appeared to you’?” Moses now feared how the Hebrews, who had shown that they did not trust him, would personally receive him. His lack of faith is evident both in the continued excuses that he gave and in his apparent disregard for the fact that Yahweh had already told him that they would listen to him. He asked for proof that he would not be seen as a crazy old man who had visions out in the desert.

Yahweh first answered this question by claiming Moses’ staff as His own. In all parts of the ancient world, the staff, rod, or scepter was universally seen as a symbol of the authority and power of the staff bearer to rule over and to judge evil in the community or nation of the staff bearer. A shepherd’s staff or rod represented a man’s authority over the sheep; the patriarch

would carry a rod to represent his authority over the clan or tribe; the pharaoh carried both a rod and shepherd's staff as a symbol of his authority over Upper and Lower Egypt. By taking control of the staff, Yahweh was claiming it as a symbol of His authority and power over creation. Moses would then be the human representative, or image bearer, of Yahweh. Moses would have the right to carry the staff of Yahweh into Egypt in order to demonstrate Yahweh's authority, power, and control over Egypt.

To demonstrate this power and control, Yahweh then answered Moses' question by giving three signs that would prove to the Israelites that Yahweh was with him and that he represented Yahweh. First, Yahweh turned the staff into a serpent because the serpent was a symbol of protection in Egypt. It was also a symbol of chaos. Thus, by turning the staff (authority) into a serpent (chaos) and back again Yahweh was showing that He was the one with the authority to subdue and control the chaos.

The word leprosy in the Bible is a general term to cover all skin disease and does not always refer to the more technical term *leprosy*, as a specific disease. Disease was associated with the Egyptian gods and their ability to inflict them on people as punishment. In Leviticus and the rest of the Bible, leprosy is also a symbol of sin. Yahweh was showing that He is the true authority over disease. But also He wants to bring healing, and He is capable of healing people of their diseases and sin. The Nile was a god who brought life to all of Egypt. By turning it into blood, Yahweh showed His ultimate control of life, His authority over man and nature, and His ability to execute judgment.

**4:10-12** Moses gave the excuse that he was not an eloquent person or capable of speaking well. This excuse may have had less to do with some kind of speech impediment or bad public speaking skills and more with an expression of exaggerated humility, often used in situations where one is appealing for help or mercy from someone else or showing self-deprecation at being given an assignment (Gen. 18:27; Ex. 4:10; 1 Sam. 9:21; 18:23; 24:14; 26:20; 2 Sam. 9:8; 1 Kgs. 3:7; 2 Kgs. 8:13; Isa. 6:5; 56:3; Jer. 1:6; 1 Cor. 2:3; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15).<sup>19</sup> Yahweh's response that He is the author not only of speech but also of hearing and sight shows that this is a general encouragement in response to a general feeling of incapableness rather than to an inability to speak well.

**4:13-17** Moses finally got to the real point of all his excuses, stating that he did not want to do it and telling Yahweh to send someone else. Though he refused Yahweh, his refusal was worded as gently as possible. But despite his polite nature, he was still refusing to do what Yahweh had commanded him to do. He was in the presence of the almighty Yahweh, standing on holy ground, and he refused to do Yahweh's will. Moses and Jonah are the only two prophets who refused to do Yahweh's will. Yahweh responded with anger at Moses' refusal, but in an incredible act of mercy, he did not reject Moses' calling or punish him. Yahweh sovereignly stated that Moses was going whether he liked it or not, but in an act of grace, he made provision in that Aaron, his brother, was already on his way to speak for Moses. Yahweh would speak to Moses, who would speak to Aaron, who would speak to Pharaoh. Yet at the same time, Moses would be missing out on the many blessings of not stepping fully into the role to which he had been called.

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<sup>19</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 133-134.

**4:18-23** Moses did not go to his father-in-law to seek permission to leave; rather, what Moses sought was a blessing or a happy departure, rather than a forced one. Despite Moses' immaturity of faith, he was responsible in his duties with his family. He did not simply take off for Egypt because Yahweh told him to; rather, he made sure that all of his responsibilities were taken care of. Moses took his wife and sons—who are later identified in Ex. 18:4 and 1 Chr. 23:15, 17—and headed back to Egypt after forty years.

Yahweh reminded Moses of his mission and what he was to say. But he also reminded him that Pharaoh would not capitulate; in fact, Yahweh was going to harden Pharaoh's heart. The phrase "harden his heart" means "I will make strong his will" or "I will strengthen his resolve." In the ancient Near East, the heart was the location of decision making, will, and desire (Prov. 16:1, 9). The idea of "strengthening" meant that Pharaoh had already decided to reject Yahweh. This phrase is thus a reference to Yahweh's judgment against Pharaoh for his rebellion against Him. Divine hardening is never arbitrarily implemented, but it comes in response to rejection of Yahweh's authoritative word or standards (this will be discussed more in the following chapters as Pharaoh's heart is hardened).

Here, Yahweh declared Israel to be His firstborn son. The title *firstborn* does not refer to a biological birth order; rather, it was a title of privilege and authority that could be given to any son. For example, Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn, yet Isaac received the firstborn title. Jacob received the firstborn title over Esau, and Judah and Joseph (Jacob's fourth and eleventh born) shared the firstborn title. However, with the Egyptian pharaohs, the firstborn biological son did carry a divine uniqueness and would thus always receive the title as well as the blessing. Yahweh was saying here that He was adopting and declaring Israel to receive the fullness of His blessing and headship in order to represent Him to the world as if they were His son. Yet Pharaoh had enslaved Yahweh's "son." If the people of Israel were Yahweh's "son," then they should be serving him, not Pharaoh. In the end, just as Pharaoh killed the male boys of Yahweh's firstborn, so Yahweh would do the same to Pharaoh's house.

**4:24-26** The statement "Yahweh met Moses and sought to kill him" could mean that Yahweh inflicted an illness upon Moses that would eventually kill him because he had not circumcised his son. Moses' wife saved Moses' life by circumcising the son, which resulted in Yahweh removing the sickness. This is a strange event, and it is difficult to figure out what Zipporah meant by her words and actions. Moses himself was most likely circumcised, or it would have been him that Zipporah circumcised. Either he had been circumcised by his parents as an infant, or he had been circumcised a few weeks before his marriage, which was common in the Midianite culture. The focus in these verses is not on Moses but on his son. In the previous verses, the focus was on Yahweh's killing the sons of Egypt because of what they had done to Yahweh's covenant firstborn son. Now Yahweh was going to kill Moses because he had not made his son part of the Abrahamic Covenant. This was serious because those who were not circumcised would, according to Gen. 17:14, be cut off from the people, and Ex. 12:40-51 states that no one who had not complied could take part in the Passover and exodus—Israel's salvation. How could one who did not have his own firstborn son circumcised and under the Abrahamic Covenant then represent Yahweh to deliver his firstborn, Israel, from bondage?

"If God takes the 'hardness of Pharaoh's heart' so seriously as to kill his firstborn son (Ex. 4:21-23), then He must likewise deal with the sin of Moses who by not circumcising his son has endangered him greatly. According to the word of the Lord recorded in Genesis 17, his

son should have been ‘cut off from his people.’ The holiness of God is clearly manifested in the near fatal illness of Moses. God does not look lightly on any sin.”<sup>20</sup>

Zipporah’s taking action rather than Moses suggests that he was too ill to be capable of the circumcision. Being the daughter of a Midianite priest, she would mostly likely have known what to do and say. Zipporah’s words, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,” have been interpreted by some scholars as her rescuing him from death with blood, and so he had become her bridegroom again (as in the spilling of blood on the wedding night). Yet this does not make sense, since it is their son who spills blood, not Moses or her. Others have suggested that the Hebrew words *hatan damim* should not be translated as “bridegroom of blood” but rather a “relative of blood,” an expression used of any relative, especially a son.

The touching of Moses’ feet with the foreskin is even more elusive in its meaning. Feet can be a euphemism for genitals in the Scriptures (Deut. 28:57; Isa. 6:2; 7:20; Ezek. 16:25). She may have been transferring the act of circumcision of their son to Moses, who was the head of the family, by touching Moses with the cut of skin, who was the head of the family. Or it could be that Moses was actually not circumcised, but the son’s foreskin became a substitutionary circumcision for Moses, who could not afford to be incapacitated as he went into Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps Zipporah and Gershom did not continue on because Gershom would have been in physical pain and unable to continue. Perhaps Yahweh waited until now in the journey because they were about to cross the border into Egypt, a scene similar to Jacob’s wrestling with the angel at the border to Israel (Gen. 32). In both cases was a brush with death that could not be forgotten.

**4:27-31** Yahweh’s calling of Aaron and his response were much briefer, implying no hesitation on his part in being obedient to Yahweh. Aaron, not Moses, was the subject speaking to and performing the signs before the elders. Moses was an outsider, someone most of them had never met. Aaron was an Israelite elder and respected in the community. The irony here is that it took less to convince the elders than it did to convince Moses. They showed more faith than he did after his personal encounter with Yahweh! Likewise, they believed the message Yahweh sent, just as Yahweh said they would.

On the one hand, Moses showed very little faith in and obedience to Yahweh, so one wonders how he ever came to be known as the great man of faith we know him as today. On the other hand, he had a much more humbled and lowly perspective of himself after forty years in the Midian wilderness than during his forty years in the Egyptian palace. It was the lowly mentality that Yahweh desired more than pride, for He can now reform and remake Moses as His own image (Gen. 1:26-28).

“As long as a man holds that he is easily able to do some great deed of heroism and faith, he is probably incompetent for it, but when he protests his inability, and puts away the earliest proposals, though made by the Almighty Himself, he gives the first unmistakable sign that he has been rightly designated.”<sup>22</sup>

“This section makes it possible for us to gain great insight into Moses’ feelings about God’s promises to his forefathers and about his own life. Moses had become thoroughly

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<sup>20</sup> Bob Deffinbaugh. *Exodus: The Birth of the Nation*. <http://www.bible.org>, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 153-156.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick B. Meyer. *Devotional Commentary on Exodus*, p. 45.

disillusioned. He regarded himself as a failure, the objects of his ministry as hopeless, and God as unfaithful, uncaring, and unable to deliver His people. He had learned his own inability to deliver Israel, but he did not yet believe in God's ability to do so. Even the miraculous revelation of God at the burning bush and the miracles that God enabled Moses to perform did not convince him of God's purpose and power."

"One supernatural revelation, even one involving miracles, does not usually change convictions that a person has built up over years of experience. We not only need to believe in our own inability to produce supernatural change, as Moses did, but we also need to believe in God's ability to produce it. Moses had not yet learned the second lesson, which God proceeded to teach him."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 27.

## D. Pharaoh's Oppression of Israel (5:1–6:27)

This section sets up the tension between Moses, who represented Yahweh, and Pharaoh, who was the embodiment of the god Horus. It is important to understand that, in Egyptian thought, the pharaoh was believed to embody the principle of Ma'at and was responsible for maintaining Ma'at. Ma'at is the Egyptian concept of truth, order, and cosmic balance over heaven and earth, which were central to all life in creation. The pharaoh was responsible for maintaining the order of the cycle of the flooding and ebbing of the Nile River, staving off the unexpected (whether in natural or human forms), and defending against the forces of chaos that constantly threatened to break into order or destroy order. Thus, the pharaoh became a divine bulwark against the ever-present forces of chaos. The role of Pharaoh was necessary for the good of humanity and the gods because the existence and the actions of the gods depended upon Ma'at. Therefore, the pharaoh existed simultaneously in the human and the divine world, maintaining Ma'at.

Because the sun god Horus was also the embodiment of Ma'at, Pharaoh was seen as the divine incarnation of Horus and thus was himself divine and ever-ruling as well. Each pharaoh then was understood to be the one divine, ever-reigning pharaoh so that each king embodied the one eternal Pharaoh. Thus, the deeds of one pharaoh could legitimately be claimed by another pharaoh, for in a sense they were the same Pharaoh. The individual king may be an unwise ruler or die of disease, but the divine Pharaoh always remained perfect and in control. And only at certain times—while they were on the throne or in ceremonies—did the individual kings fill the role of the divine Pharaoh. Other times, he was just an individual king with his own failures.

Now Yahweh has come to dethrone Pharaoh as Ma'at by bringing judgment on Egypt with the ten plagues that would undo Pharaoh's grip on the principle of Ma'at and of maintaining order. Yahweh revealed Pharaoh for who he really was in his sin, corruption, arrogance, and inability to maintain order.

**5:1-5** Moses and Aaron asked Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go on a three-day journey into the desert so that they might sacrifice to Yahweh just as He had commanded in Ex. 3:18. It would not be hard for them to gain access to the Pharaoh because kings were expected to be available to the lowliest and greatest alike. This is the first use of the prophetic messenger speech formula "Thus says Yahweh." Pharaoh would have recognized the formula, judging from its regular use in the Amarna Letter. The "God of Israel" clarifies that Moses is not talking about a minor Israelite king.

Yet Pharaoh refused their request, just as Yahweh said he would. Pharaoh replied, "Who is Yahweh, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go." This does not mean that Pharaoh did not know who the God of the Hebrews was; rather, he did not recognize His power or authority. Pharaoh believed himself to be the incarnation of the Egyptian sun god Ra and had dominated and enslaved the Hebrews for four hundred years, so to him Yahweh was a pathetic and weak slave god. Everyone in the ancient world believed that there were many gods, that all nature was divine to some degree, and that all religions had at least some validity. The question was "What makes you different?"

"The Egyptian state was not a man-made alternative to other forms of political organization [from the Egyptian point of view]. It was god-given, established when the world was created; and it continued to form part of the universal order. In the person of Pharaoh a superhuman being had taken charge of the affairs of man.... The monarch then was as old as the world,

for the creator himself had assumed kingly office on the day of creation. Pharaoh was his descendent and his successor.”<sup>24</sup>

“It required no ordinary daring to confront the representative of a long line of kings who had been taught to consider themselves as the representatives and equals of the gods. They were accustomed to receive Divine titles and honours, and to act as irresponsible despots. Their will was indisputable, and all the world seemed to exist for no other reason than [to] minister to their state.”<sup>25</sup>

Pharaoh’s question, “Why do you cause the people to refrain from their work?” is a rhetorical question. Pharaoh is not asking them why they do this, but rather is accusing them of doing it. He suspects their request is an attempt to get people time away from their labor.

**5:6-14** Pharaoh responded in a disproportional way by commanding the foreman to no longer provide straw stubble for the Israelites but to still require the same amount of bricks to be produced each day. Stubble was the part of the corn or grain stalk that remained standing after field hands had harvested a crop (Ex. 5:12). After the harvest, the stubble was pulled out of the ground, chopped up, and mixed with the clay in order to strengthen bricks. When the Israelites did not meet their quota, Pharaoh had them beaten. Once again, the author reveals Pharaoh to be an unreasonable and harsh man who saw himself as a god, revealing the need and justification for Yahweh’s judgment.

**5:15-21** This section contains several repetitions of information already known from prior verses in the chapter. The repetition reinforces the severity of the problem confronting the Israelites. When Moses and Aaron showed up performing signs, the people may have thought that their deliverance would be immediate, so they believed in Yahweh and worshiped Him. Now that their deliverance was not going the way they imagined and Yahweh seemed like a failure, they turned on His representatives, Moses and Aaron, as the cause of their trouble. The narrator reveals the shallowness of the Israelites’ faith and their need for immediate gratification lest they be unhappy. This is also the beginning of a pattern that the Hebrew people would demonstrate for the next forty years and then throughout their entire history.

**5:22-23** When the people came complaining to Moses, he turned on Yahweh, complaining and blaming Him for causing the trouble and for being incapable of delivering the people. Moses’ immaturity of faith was also being exposed. He showed that he also thought that the conflict would have been resolved quickly. The overall lack of faith in Yahweh and the shifting of blame reveal that everyone needs Yahweh to teach and grow them in their character and in their dependence and trust in Him.

**6:1-8** Yahweh showed that He is completely sovereign and all knowing when He stated that everything was going the way He wanted and that Pharaoh’s resistance was exactly what was needed for Him to demonstrate who He is to the Israelites and the Egyptians. This is the first time in Exodus that Yahweh says, “I am Yahweh” (He said this only two other times, in Gen. 15:7 and 28:13). “I am Yahweh” is the same as saying “I am Yahweh, your covenant God.” Also, it is a statement of relational identity, as in, “He is not just any God; He is my God.” Concerning His statement of previously not being known as Yahweh, see the comments on Ex. 3:14-15 above.

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<sup>24</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick B. Meyer. *Devotional Commentary on Exodus*, p. 88.

Yahweh assures Moses by repeating all that He had already promised to Abraham and now to Moses and the people. Here, Yahweh promises that He would do three things. First, He would deliver the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage (Ex. 6:6). Second, He would adopt Israel as His nation (Ex. 6:7 Jer. 7:23; 11:4), which would take place at Sinai (Ex. 19:5). Third, He would bring Israel into the Promised Land (Ex. 6:8). These are the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Notice the seven-fold repetition of the phrase “I will” in these verses, emphasizing that Yahweh would certainly do this for Israel.

**6:9-13** Moses delivered Yahweh’s message to the Israelites, but they did not believe because of their discouragement. Optimism is often diminished by suffering, especially ongoing suffering. Faith is diminished by hardship because emotions affect human thinking so powerfully. And thinking can become pessimistic when suffering continues without ceasing. One must believe that Yahweh is truly sovereign and wants to bless them in order to persevere in faith and hope.

Yahweh instructed Moses to take this message back to the people and to Pharaoh. But Moses did not see how Pharaoh would listen if even the Israelite people did not believe. Moses’ statement “I speak with difficulty” in the Hebrew is literally “my lips are uncircumcised,” which means he did not feel ready for public speaking.

Moses returned to his previous mode of whining and protesting. This is not the person anyone else would have chosen for the task. Yet Yahweh wants to redeem and grow people so that they can realize the fullness of what Yahweh designed and created them to be. The narrative stops right where Moses said he cannot do it.

**6:14-26** The narrator pauses in order to list names in a genealogy going from Jacob through his third son Levi to Aaron and his sons. The purpose of the genealogy is, first, to link Moses and Aaron to Jacob. It ends with Aaron’s grandson Phinehas bringing the genealogy into Judges and providing a way for the future leaders to link themselves to the present leaders. Second, it authenticates Aaron and the true priesthood, which is a major concern for Moses in the rest of the Torah. It shows the reader where Korah, the leader of the wilderness rebellion (Num. 16:1-49), found his claim to leadership. Third, it reminds the reader that Moses was from a priestly tribe and thus was qualified to perform priestly duties. And fourth, it reminds the reader, by mentioning the Canaanite women (Ex. 6:15), that Israel was not ethnically or ethically pure. Regarding the women, it calls attention to the importance of proper, godly marriage for priests, which is reflected in the later laws.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 175-176.

## E. The Plagues (6:28–11:10)

It is in this section that Yahweh displays, through the ten plagues, the full power of His sovereignty and His power over creation and humanity. The central question that sets up the plagues and becomes the basis for the rest for the book comes from Pharaoh: “Why should I obey your God?” Basically, what makes your God unique to all others? Yahweh responded with the ten plagues to both judge Egypt for its sins and display His glory, sovereignty, and uniqueness among all the other gods. This is seen most clearly at the final plague, where Yahweh said, “and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment” (Ex. 12:12). Likewise, in Numbers 33:4, He stated that the plagues were an attack on the gods of Egypt. Yahweh demonstrated His power in order to show that He is the only true God and the only one worthy of worship. The gods were seen as being limited in power to a particular land and to the people who worshiped them. The plagues demonstrated that Yahweh is not limited to any region; His sovereignty and power are universal. Thus, He gave not only the nations a powerful and unforgettable demonstration of His sovereignty and power (Josh. 2:8–13) but also Israel, in order to encourage them to never go after lesser gods. These plagues also served to demonstrate Yahweh’s desire for repentance and His ability to deliver His people from bondage. Yahweh could have easily smashed Egypt in one instant, but He chose to draw out the plagues in order to reveal His glory.

Yahweh showed through the plagues that He is the author over all creation and how one should live in His creation in order to have life; obeying His commands allows one to live in harmony with His creation and thus experience order and life. Going against Yahweh’s commands brings deterioration into one’s life, which results in death. Genesis 1–2 revealed that Yahweh created and ordered the universe in a specific way, and thus one should live in accordance with that order or they will experience chaos. As a result of Pharaoh’s and Egypt’s disregard for His commands, they experienced a disintegration of their nation.

Therefore, these plagues can also be seen as a type of *de*-creation. In Exodus 7–12, Yahweh took the creation order of Genesis 1 and reversed it, turning that order and structure into chaos to bring judgment on Egypt. What was originally declared good in Genesis 1 was now a curse on the Egyptians.<sup>27</sup> The plagues were a further attack on the gods of Egypt since the gods had been credited for the creation of the earth and humanity. Now the true Creator was undoing creation right before them to show who really had the power, almost as if to say, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.”

A further testament to the divine power and protection of Yahweh was the fact that throughout the *de*-creation of Egypt, Israel remained mostly unaffected; Israel was affected by only the first three plagues and not the remainder. Israel experienced life within Yahweh’s creation while the Egyptians suffered around them. They would then be made into a new creation and nation through the exodus and their entrance into the Promised Land.

The plagues themselves have a structure and pattern to them. The first three plagues (blood, frogs, and biting insects) were relatively brief and did not cause death. They were more of an annoyance and inconvenience, affecting the people’s patience. The next three plagues (swarming insects, animal disease, and skin sores) were much more harmful, eventually causing the death of animals but not resulting in massive death of humans. The next three plagues (hail, locust, and darkness) were more severe, destroying the agriculture, animals, and the economy of Egypt,

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<sup>27</sup> See John D. Currid. *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, pp. 115-17.

which would lead to starvation. The tenth plague (the death of the firstborn sons) receives the greatest attention and was devastating to the people.

There is also a warning given before the first two plagues but no warning for the third. This pattern is repeated for the next two sets of three. And finally, the rod of Aaron is mentioned in the first three, no rod is mentioned in the second three, and the rod of Moses is mentioned in the following three.

Some critics would like to explain the plagues of Egypt away as merely natural events that were common in Egypt. However, there are several reasons these cannot be mere acts of nature. First, while many of these things are known to happen in Egypt, they were intensified beyond any normal occurrence (Ex. 10:6-7). Second, the fact that Moses predicted their arrival and end sets them apart from normal events (Ex. 8:10, 23; 9:5, 18, 29; 10:4). Third, all the plagues came within the period of one year, the likes of which have never been recorded as happening in other countries (Ex. 10:6-7). Fourth, the plagues were discriminatory—they did not occur in the land of Goshen where Israel was living (Ex. 8:22; 9:4, 26). Fifth, there was a gradual increase in severity of the nature of the plagues, not typical of ordinary acts of nature, concluding with the death of the firstborn sons.

One might ask why these plagues are not found in the historical records of the Egyptians. Most ancient civilizations were less concerned with recording history accurately as they were with recording history in a way that made them look grand and superior to those around them.

“The peoples of the ancient Near East kept historical records to impress their gods and also potential enemies, and therefore rarely, if ever, mentioned defeats or catastrophes. Records of disasters would not enhance the reputation of the Egyptians in the eyes of their gods, nor make their enemies more afraid of their military might.”<sup>28</sup>

Pharaoh was inseparably connected to the course of events that occurred in Egypt, for he was the “lord of the world” and a god. An event like the plagues, which so humiliated Pharaoh and Egypt’s gods, would not make it into their historical records.

“The Egyptians suffered from a sort of official amnesia with regard to the unpleasant facts; one has the feeling that the conquest (by the Hyksos) would never have been mentioned at all if there had been a reasonable way of glorifying a king for liberating his country without referring to what he was liberating it from.”<sup>29</sup>

**6:28-30** Once again, we see Moses’ lack of faith, as he complained and tried to get out of what Yahweh had asked him to do. The repetition of conversations with Yahweh emphasizes Moses’ lack of faith and unwillingness to do as Yahweh had commanded. But all that was required of Moses was that he should be Yahweh’s spokesman.

**7:1-5** Yahweh stated, “I have made you God to Pharaoh.” The word *'elohim* (“god”) is used a few times in the Bible for humans (Pss. 45:6; 82:1) and always clearly in the sense of a subordinate to Yahweh. This means that Yahweh had made Moses His representative on earth and only Moses was allowed to speak to Pharaoh with such authority and give him commands. This would be seen physically in the symbol of the staff of Yahweh that Moses now carried. The emphasis is not on Aaron’s speaking to the people but to Pharaoh. Once again, Yahweh’s intent

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<sup>28</sup> Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and the Bible History*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Mertz, *Temples, Tombs and Hieroglyphs: The Story of Egyptology*, p. 150.

was that Pharaoh would resist so that Yahweh could demonstrate His power and be glorified as He delivered Israel. The goal is not merely to get the people to accept Yahweh's plan but to get the king to accept Yahweh's will.

What is new here is Yahweh's intention to multiply His signs and wonders across the plagues, which would humiliate the Egyptian gods and Pharaoh, in order to demonstrate that Yahweh alone is sovereign over creation and in control. However, Yahweh had not told Moses how many total plagues would come.

“The ultimate purpose of God's actions was His own glory (v. 5). The glory of God was at stake. The Egyptians would acknowledge God's faithfulness and sovereign power in delivering the Israelites from their bondage and fulfilling their holy calling. God's intention was to bless the Egyptians through Israel (Gen. 12:3), but Pharaoh would make that impossible by his stubborn refusal to honor God. Nevertheless the Egyptians would acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty.”<sup>30</sup>

**7:6-7** The scene here is dramatic: two men over 80 years old standing before one of the greatest kings of the ancient Near East at that time. This statement not only informs the reader of the ages of Moses and Aaron but also makes clear that they did not stand against Pharaoh in their own strength and youth.

**7:8-10** Yahweh commanded Moses and Aaron to perform before Pharaoh the sign of turning Yahweh's staff into a serpent. As mentioned above (Ex. 4:1-5), the serpent was a symbol of protection in Egypt. The cobra was almost always portrayed rearing up and with its hood dilated. The Greek word *uraeus* is typically used to describe the cobra in this pose. The word may have its origins in Egyptian words that meant “she who rears up.” The species of cobra represented by the uraeus is the *Naja haje*. The uraeus was a symbol for various things from early times, including the sun, Lower Egypt, the king, and a number of deities. The cobra was also called the “fiery eye” of Re, and two uraei were sometimes depicted on either side of the solar disk, which represented the sun / eye of Re). Egyptian goddesses were the creator deities and the protectors of the pharaohs in the form of the cobra, vulture, or lioness. The two “protectors of the realm” of Egypt were originally Nekhbet, vulture goddess of Upper Egypt, and Wadjet, cobra goddess of Lower Egypt. It is Wadjet who rears up over his brow on the royal crowns and headdresses, and she has the power to blast the enemies of the pharaoh. The Egyptians chose the cobra and the vulture as the royal symbols because they were thought to be self-producing and therefore creators, or divine. Together they symbolized the unification of the two lands. The creatures also appear together in the pharaoh's neby or “Two Ladies” name.

The fact that Yahweh turned the rod into a cobra suggests that He is the one who holds true sovereignty over the god from whom they sought protection. Yahweh used this sign to demonstrate to Pharaoh that He was such a great threat that not even their god of protection could stand against Him. This is emphasized in Yahweh's serpent swallowing the serpents of the magicians. The sign was designed to confirm the fact that the message brought by Moses and Aaron was indeed from Yahweh, whom Pharaoh had refused to obey.

**7:11-12** The magicians—whom the Scriptures later named Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim. 3:8)—were able to recreate the sign. The art of charming the cobra is a skill practiced in Egypt, and this kind of conjuring was not uncommon. The magicians accomplished their imitation “by their

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 40.

secret arts,” which can be translated “trickery,” rather by supernatural means. They were questioning if Yahweh really thought a small miracle that magicians could duplicate would convince Pharaoh. Yahweh had previously made it clear, however, that He purposed to start small and build in severity. The real point was not the transformation of the staff but that Yahweh’s serpent swallowed the magicians’ serpents. Even if the magicians had tapped into some kind of demonic power to perform this trick, Yahweh still dominated and humiliated them by consuming their serpents.

**7:13** In response, Pharaoh’s heart became hard. Though Yahweh had several times mentioned the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, this is the first time that his heart has actually been hardened. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 7–12 has since become a major passage in the theological discussion of free will and predestination, especially since Paul specifically discusses it in Romans 9. Though the topic of predestination will not be discussed here, we will look at the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart on a literary level—what it meant for Pharaoh’s heart to be hardened, by himself and by Yahweh, in the context of the plagues and the book of Exodus.

In the ancient culture, the heart was known not only as the center of one’s emotions but also as the seat of the will. When the Scriptures state that Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, the idea is that He was strengthening Pharaoh’s will. Pharaoh had already decided to reject Yahweh, and so Yahweh simply strengthened or reinforced that choice in order to judge Pharaoh and glorify Himself. Divine hardening is never arbitrarily implemented; it comes in response to rejection of Yahweh’s authoritative word or standards. The Scripture pictures Pharaoh from the start as a self-willed, obstinate man who continually resisted Yahweh. Six times Yahweh gave demands and warnings to Pharaoh, giving him the chance to repent. Each time Pharaoh refused (at times even hardening his own heart), thus he placed himself in a position to be hardened.

“While it is true that God desires all men to repent and be saved (Ezk. 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), it is equally true that God reserves the right to judge sin and the sinner whenever He desires.... It is really the mercy of God that allows the sinner to continue to live.”<sup>31</sup>

“Morally, God is fully vindicated in any act by virtue of His very nature. As God of love and mercy, He will permit the sinner to live even though that sinner may resist a life-long revelation of truth. On the other hand, as a God of holiness He has the inalienable right to punish sin and the sinner at any point in his life.”<sup>32</sup>

Although there were times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, it was Yahweh who first hardened Pharaoh. Yahweh hardened Pharaoh in response to his rejection of His commandments. Thus, the divine hardening was a form of judgment for his choosing to rebel and reject Yahweh. In fact, five times Yahweh reversed a seemingly positive response by Pharaoh. However, these times of yielding by Pharaoh were a result of haste and panic and not a genuine fear of Yahweh. In the end, Yahweh kept Pharaoh alive in order to draw the event out so that He might reveal His greatness through humiliating and defeating Pharaoh.

There are five cycles of Yahweh hardening Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 5:1-7:24; 7:25-8:19; 8:20-9:12; 9:13-35; 10:1-14:31), each of which begins with an ultimatum and ends with divine hardening.<sup>33</sup> In each cycle, Yahweh issues an ultimatum to which Pharaoh responds through his own choice to

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<sup>31</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> These cycles are detailed in Robert Chisholm. “Divine Hardening in the Old Testament.” in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December, 1996.

refuse Yahweh's demand. Yahweh then responds by hardening Pharaoh's heart and then demonstrating His power and glory through a plague or a series of plagues. After each case, Yahweh releases Pharaoh's will and issues another ultimatum, beginning the next cycle, and allowing Pharaoh to refuse again through his own free will. Four times in Exodus 4–14 Yahweh declares that He would harden the heart of Pharaoh and/or the Egyptians (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 14:14, 17), and six verses describe Him as having done so (Ex. 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). Three verses state that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32; 9:34). Six verses attribute hardness to his heart (Ex. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35).

**7:14-21** Because of Pharaoh's hard heart, Yahweh commands Moses to bring the first plague, turning the Nile River into blood. Yahweh makes it clear that this is not just to punish Egypt but to make it clear that He, the God of the Hebrews, is the most sovereign God over Egypt. This is seen in the fact that it is the staff of Yahweh that brings the plague. The staff was not simply a visual device but rather a symbolic reminder that Yahweh, not Aaron or Moses, was performing the miracle. Yahweh demonstrates His sovereignty by attacking the most important thing to Egyptian life, the Nile River.

The most important thing in Egypt was the agricultural life that the Nile brought to Egypt. "Egypt was the gift of the Nile." From ancient times to the present, the Nile has been the lifeblood of Egypt. There is no other country in ancient or modern times that has been so dependent on its waterways as ancient Egypt. Its annual rise and flooding provided new deposits of fertile soil, along with vital water for the surrounding fields. The Nile extended agricultural life eight miles to either side of its banks. Not only did the Nile irrigate the crops, but it also supplied its marshes for pasture and hunting wild game, so often depicted in their paintings. The river also contained a wealth of fish basic to the diet of the Egyptian. Beyond the life of the Nile was nothing but lifeless desert, and the Egyptians knew that without the Nile, their flourishing area of Egypt would be as barren as the nearby deserts. Many gods were associated with the Nile, but beyond that, fertility, blessing, and happiness were associated with the faithfulness of the river.

"Hail to thee, Oh Nile, that issues from the earth and comes to keep Egypt alive! ... He that waters the meadows, which Recreated, in order to keep every kid alive. He that makes to drink the desert and the place distant from water: that is his dew coming down (from) heaven....

"If he is sluggish, then nostrils are stopped up and everybody is poor. If there be (thus) a cutting down in the food offerings of the gods, then million men perish among mortals, covetousness is practiced. The entire land is in a fury, and great and small are on the execution block (but) people are different when he approaches. Khnum constructed him. When he rises, then the land is jubilation, then every belly is in joy, every backbone takes laughter, and every tooth is exposed."<sup>34</sup>

The god Hapi was believed to be the "spirit of the Nile" and its "dynamic essence." Hapi was an androgynous being whose body was believed by the Egyptians to be the Nile River itself. He was capable of both fertilizing the land (male) and nourishing it (female). He was one of the primary deities in the



<sup>34</sup> ANET. *Hymn to the Nile*, trans. by John A. Wilson, p. 272.

Egyptian pantheon and was given the attributes of the primeval water-mass Nu. The fact that Egypt could not survive without the Nile made Hapi more powerful and revered than Re.

Many of Egypt's gods were also associated either directly or indirectly with the Nile and its productivity, including the great Khnum, who was considered the guardian of the Nile sources and the creator of people; Osiris, who was the god of the underworld; Tauret, the hippopotamus goddess of the river; and many others.



Most likely the Nile did not literally turn to blood, for the Hebrew word for “blood” here can also be translated a color as well as a substance. All the other plagues that Yahweh brings upon Egypt are things already found in nature. The plague may have been some kind of natural contamination. There is no special theological significance given to the water being turned into blood. However, the text makes it clear the plague was a supernatural act of Yahweh. This is seen by the fact that it was the staff of Yahweh that brought the contamination of the Nile, and the plague immediately went into effect. The intensity and the extent of the plague throughout the Nile and even into the ponds and reservoirs also show that it was supernatural. Yahweh's control over the Nile would not have been missed by any thoughtful Egyptian. The important punishment in the element is not the color nor its substance but the pollution of the water. The pollution was so bad that it killed the fish, which began to rot, and no one could drink the water.

**7:22-25** The magicians were able to mimic the plagues by their secret arts to the satisfaction of the Pharaoh. However, it is difficult to understand how they could prove that they were doing the same thing after Yahweh had already turned the water into blood. Pharaoh completely disregarded the impact that the plagues were having on Egypt and showed no sign of giving in. His pride and arrogance were revealed in his stubbornness to the fact that these two plagues could completely devastate Egypt.

The text states that seven days passed from when Yahweh struck the Nile to when He told Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh with the second plague. It is not clear whether this statement marks the end of the first plague or whether the plague lasted into the following one; the text seems to suggest the former.

**8:1-6** Yahweh told Moses to go to Pharaoh to bring the second plague: frogs. The frogs were so numerous that they covered the land and even invaded every square foot of the homes. Ps. 78:45 and 105:20 mention how the frogs covered the land and devastated Egypt. The presence of frogs in Egypt was not unusual, for they were common to the marshlands and were depicted in numerous Egyptian paintings and inscriptions. To the Egyptian, the frog represented fruitfulness, blessing, and the assurance of a harvest. The sacredness and significance of the frog are demonstrated by the archaeological discovery of amulets in the shape of frogs.

The goddess Heqet, a frog, was the wife of the great god Khnum. She was the symbol of resurrection, the emblem of fertility, and an assistant in childbirth. (Consider the irony in the statement that the frogs invaded Pharaoh's bedroom and even jumped on his bed.) Heqet was one of the four primeval gods who personified the primeval water, infinity, darkness, and that which is hidden. During this age of the earth, it was believed that nothing evil existed and everywhere abundance reigned.



Each December, the Nile receded from its flooding stage, leaving behind ponds and marshes, and the sound of frogs would fill the air as they claimed these waters. To the farmer this sound indicated that the gods who controlled the Nile and made the land fertile had completed their work. This demonstrated that Hapi was active since he was the one who controlled the soil deposits and the waters that made the land fertile, guaranteeing the coming harvest. The frog was one of numerous animals in Egypt forbidden from being intentionally killed; even the involuntary killing of a frog was often punished with death. Yahweh turned the frog, which was seen as pleasant and desirable to the Egyptian, into something loathsome and overwhelming.

“Like a blanket of filth the slimy, wet monstrosities covered the land, until men sickened at the continued squashing crunch of the ghastly pavement they were forced to walk upon. If a man’s feet slipped on the greasy mass of their crushed bodies, he fell into an indescribably offensive mass of putrid uncleanness, and when he sought water to cleanse himself, the water was so solid with frogs, he got no cleansing there.”<sup>35</sup>

**8:7-15** The magicians were able to reproduce the multiplying of frogs; it is not clear how they were able to do this. What is clear, however, is that they were not able to remove the plague. Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron to rid the land of the frogs. Moses asked Pharaoh to pick the time for the plague to end. This emphasizes the fact that the magicians could not do this. When Pharaoh saw that the plague had ended, he hardened his heart and went back on his promise. This shows what kind of man he was and that neither his word nor his words of granting mercy meant anything.

**8:16-19** Yahweh brought the third plague and stated that the dust of the land would literally become gnats. The Hebrew term may come from the Egyptian word *chenemes*, which means “gnats” or “mosquitoes.” Nevertheless, it was like the dust in number and size.

They were “...a species of gnats, so small as to be hardly visible to the eye, but with a sting which, according to Philo and Origin, causes a most painful irritation of the skin. They even creep into the eyes and nose, and after the harvest they rise in great swarms from the inundated rice fields.”<sup>36</sup>

It is not clear against what specific deities this plague was directed, but it may have been directed towards Geb, the great god of the earth. Egyptians gave offerings to Geb for the bounty of the soil—yet it was from “the dust of the soil” that this plague originated. It is possible that it was designed to humiliate the official priesthood. The priests in Egypt were a group that was to be reckoned with not only religiously but also economically and politically, for they controlled the minds and the hearts of the people. This would be significant because the priests would not be allowed to enter the temple to pray to their gods for deliverance because of their physical defilement.



<sup>35</sup> Harry Rimmer. *Dead Men Tell Tales*, p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 483.

“The priests in Egypt were noted for their physical purity. Daily rites were performed by a group of priests known as the *Uab* or ‘pure ones.’ Their purity was basically physical rather than spiritual. They were circumcised, shaved the hair from their heads and bodies, washed frequently, and were dressed in beautiful linen robes. In the light of this it would seem rather doubtful that the priesthood in Egypt could function very effectively having been polluted by the presence of these insects. They, like their worshipers, were inflicted with the pestilence of this occasion. Their prayers were made ineffective by their own personal impurity with the presence of gnats on their bodies.”<sup>37</sup>



The author states that the gnats irritated both man and beast and covered all of Egypt. This is significant since the previous two plagues seemed to be concentrated in the capital and along the Nile and were not a direct attack against the living by causing pain. The small insects were around in great numbers, and the Egyptians dedicated much of their effort and resources to constructing devices to keep them away, especially from the Pharaoh and the priests.

The magicians attempted to duplicate the plague but were unable. It is clear that from here on, Yahweh was not going to allow them to have any power of any kind. He had put them in their place. The expression “this is the finger of God,” in light of its usage in Ex. 31:18 and Deut. 9:10, would seem to mean something more like a supernatural act of Yahweh rather than referring literally to the finger of Yahweh.<sup>38</sup> It also shows that they realized there was a different and much greater power at work here than what they had been tapped into. Perhaps it was the fact that Yahweh produced life from the dust that confronts their lack of power (Gen. 2:7). Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not listen.

**8:20-24** Yahweh sent Moses back to Pharaoh to bring the fourth plague: flies. The narrator does not use the word *flies* but a Hebrew word meaning “swarms.” The idea of flies comes from the Septuagint rendering “dog fly,” which may carry some weight since those who translated the Septuagint lived in Egypt. The blood-sucking dog fly (gadfly) was a great abhorrence and may have been responsible for the blindness in the land. It might also be the Ichneumon fly, which deposits its larvae on living things so that it can feed. The Egyptians saw this as the manifestation of the god Uatchit. Many other insects may have been revered in the same way. It is also known that the fly, in Egyptian mythology, gave protection against disease or misfortune. Stone amulets in the form of flies were being made in Egypt as early as 3500 BC. The fly was also depicted on various ritual artifacts, including the so-called “magic wands,” often carved from hippopotamus ivory and probably intended to protect the owner from harm.

There are some scholars who do not accept the Septuagint rendering and think the passage implies the scarab beetle, which was actually a dung beetle. Swarms of scarabs, with mandibles that could saw through wood, were destructive and worse than termites. Deification of the scarab was found in the creator- and king-god Amon-Ra.

“Ra, the Sole Creator, was visible to the people of Egypt as the disc of the sun, but they knew him in many other forms. He could appear as a crowned



<sup>37</sup> Don J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, p. 111.

<sup>38</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 212.

man, a falcon or a man with a falcon's head and, as the scarab beetle pushes a round ball of dung in front of it, the Egyptians pictured Ra as a scarab pushing the sun across the sky."<sup>39</sup>

In the Hebrew, the phrase “grievous swarm” suggests something oppressive, like a yoke. It may also carry the idea of massive numbers or abundance. This communicates the intensity and the severity of the plague and that all in the land were experiencing the wrath of Yahweh. This was the first plague for which the narrator clearly states that Israel would be untouched. Ex. 8:23 states that Yahweh would put a “division” between His people and the people of Egypt.

**8:25-32** Pharaoh gave in and told Moses that he could take his people into the wilderness and make sacrifices to Yahweh and requested that Moses pray for him. When the plague ended, however, Pharaoh hardened his heart again and did not release the people.

**9:1-7** Yahweh sent Moses back to Pharaoh to announce the fifth plague: disease. It has already been stated that the Egyptians worshiped and deified almost all animals in Egypt, so a plague on the livestock would be an attack against many of the gods. Yet it may be more directed against the bull since in the previous section Pharaoh changed his mind in allowing Israel to go and sacrifice. Bulls and cows were considered sacred, and many areas in Egypt chose them as their emblems. A temple was discovered in Memphis that contained the Apis bull, which was considered the sacred animal of the god Ptah. There could be only one bull at one time in the temple, and it was identified as a deity by 28 physical marks. To honor it, the bull was fed delicacies and given as many heifers as it wanted. In Memphis, 64 burial chambers were found, each containing a mummified Apis bull. Hathor—the goddess of love, beauty, and joy—was represented by a cow and was often depicted as a cow suckling the Pharaoh, giving him divine nourishment. In addition to the gods already mentioned, this plague would have been a direct insult to Khnum, the ram-god, and to Bast, the cat goddess of love. Mnevis, a sacred bull, was also worshiped and was associated with the god Ra.

All the livestock, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, and the herds and flocks died. This was investigated and confirmed by the representatives of Pharaoh. Once again, Israel was unaffected by the plague. Pharaoh's heart remained hard from the previous plague, where he had hardened his own heart. Thus, he did not respond to Moses and Aaron's request to let Israel go.

**9:8-12** Yahweh sent Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh to announce the sixth plague: boils. The furnace mentioned here may be one of the furnaces used by the Israelites to bake the bricks that they were forced to make for the pharaoh. Whereas previously Yahweh's people had experienced the suffering and pain of their slavery, Yahweh now took the ash from their work and caused it to become suffering to the Egyptians. Sekhmet, a lion-headed goddess, had the power of both creating epidemics and bringing them to an end. A special priesthood called the *Sunu* was dedicated to her. Amulets were often used by the Egyptians to ward off evil and sickness in their lives. Serapis was the god of healing, and Imhotep was the god of medicine and the guardian of the healing sciences. Like the plagues of the gnats and the flies, this plague of boils would also affect the purity of the priests and hinder them from entering their temples and praying to their gods.



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<sup>39</sup> Geraldine Harris. *Gods & Pharaohs from Egyptian Mythology*, p. 24.

This plague not only affected all of Egypt, but the severity of it is seen in Ex. 9:9, where the boils were breaking out in “blains” and “sores.” Even the magicians were so crippled by the plague that, when summoned, they could not physically go to the palace. Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not listen to Moses.

**9:13-21** Yahweh announced again that Pharaoh was to let His people go so that they could serve Him, else He would bring “all” of His plagues. This expression either points to the rest of the plagues and anticipates the appropriate outcome, or it means that He is going to bring the full brunt of His attack on the Egyptian people. Two things are revealed about Yahweh’s plan at this point. First, the narrator shows that the plagues were going to intensify in their severity. Second, Yahweh could have wiped out all the Egyptians from the very beginning, but He was drawing it out and letting it escalate to reveal His glory and give the people a chance to repent. This is seen in the phrase “so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.” This was a call to all on earth to grasp the significance of the plagues, that Yahweh is sovereign over creation.

Even though Yahweh was bringing His judgments on Egypt, He also demonstrated His mercy by warning everyone and telling them to get all their livestock into shelter so that they might live. This is the first time it had been announced that Egyptians were going to die. Some of the people heeded the warning, while others did not. At this point, there are three categories of people in the story: those who ignored Yahweh’s word, those who had become convinced of Yahweh’s existence and power and would be willing to be rescued by Him, and the Israelites who worshiped Him.

**9:22-26** Yahweh now brought the seventh plague, which was hail. The northern part of Egypt gets about two inches of rainfall each year, and in the southern part of Egypt, rain is so rare that sometimes there is no rainfall in an entire year. Ironically here, when something does come from the sky, it comes to destroy. Since this plague of severe hail originates from the sky, it would have been an attack against Nut, the sky goddess. Nut was also considered by the Egyptians to be the mother of five other gods: Osiris, Hathor, Set, Isis, and Nephthys.

“Her most general appearance, however, is that of a woman resting on hands and feet, her body forming an arch, thus representing the sky. Her limbs typified the four pillars on which the sky was supposed to rest. She was supposed originally to be reclining on Geb, the earth, when Shu raised her from this position.”<sup>40</sup>



This plague would have also damaged many of the monuments that the Egyptians were obsessed with building to honor the glory of their gods and the Pharaoh. Now those glorious images representing their gods were being defaced.

The narrator says for the first time that Moses stretched out his rod to initiate the plague, not Aaron or them both sharing the responsibility. Moses had been growing in his faith in Yahweh throughout the plagues and was finally stepping into the role of leader and deliverer that Yahweh intended for him from the beginning. Moses was becoming the great leader of faith that he is now remembered for. This also shows Yahweh’s forgiveness and His desire and willingness to give second chances and restore people to their positions of ministry.

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<sup>40</sup> Lewis Spence. *Ancient Egyptian Myths and Legends*, p. 173.

**9:27-35** Pharaoh did not send for the magicians, rather he sent directly for Moses and Aaron first. Unlike the previous times, Pharaoh stated that he had sinned, and he even requested that Moses pray for him. However, after the plague ended, Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart again, and he once again resisted Moses and Aaron.

The only crops that were destroyed were flax and barley. In Egypt, flax and barley were harvested in February-March. Wheat and spelt were harvested in March-April, which was when the tenth plague and the exodus occurred. These later crops were too small to be damaged by the hail. But the locusts were on their way. That means that these final four plagues all happened within a month or two.

**10:1-20** Yahweh sent Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh to bring the eighth plague: locusts. Moses was to hold up Yahweh's staff and then either face different directions or turn in a circle to symbolize the pan-nation extent of the plague. The servants of Pharaoh show that they are not in agreement with Pharaoh's decision of refusing the release of the Israelites. The fact that all of Pharaoh's advisers oppose his will shows how illogical, unrealistic, obsessive, and hard hearted he had become.

In ancient times, locusts could destroy an entire village's food supply in a matter of minutes. One square mile normally contains from 100 million to 200 million of the creatures. We know of its devastating effects because history supplies us with numerous cases of such.

“No one who has ever seen the locust at work accuses the Bible account of hyperbole. In 1926 and 1927, small swarms of the African migratory locusts were spotted in an area 50 by 120 miles on the plains of the river Niger near Timbuktu. The next year swarms invaded Senegal and Sierra Leone. By 1930 the whole of West Africa was flailing away at the pests with everything moveable. But the locusts didn't seem to notice; swarms reached Khartoum, more than 2,000 miles to the east of Timbuktu, then turned south, spreading across Ethiopia, Kenya, the Belgian Congo, and in 1932, striking into the lush farm land of Angola and Rhodesia. Before the plague finally sputtered out fourteen years after it began, it affected five-million miles of Africa, an area nearly double the size of the United States.”<sup>41</sup>

However, the plague of locusts that Yahweh sent would have made this account pale in comparison, for Ex. 10:15 states that the whole land was darkened (Ex. 9:14). There were many gods associated with the crops of Egypt, for the crops and the Nile were the source for all life in the country. There was Nepri, the god of grain; Osiris, a later god of the grain; Ermutet, the goddess of childbirth and crops; and Thermuthis, the goddess of fertility and the harvest. There have been discoveries of many amulets in the shape of the locust that were probably worn by the Egyptians to ward off the swarms that would ravage their crops.



Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron in “haste,” confessing that he had sinned against Yahweh and against Moses and Aaron and pleading this time for forgiveness and for the plague to cease. However, Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let Israel go.

**10:21-23** Yahweh once again commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh, in order to bring the ninth plague: darkness. The phrase “darkness so thick it can be felt” did not mean that they would literally be able to feel it but communicated that it would be so dark that it would cause some to

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<sup>41</sup> Daniel DaCruz. *Plagues Across the Land*, p. 21.

be groping around.<sup>42</sup> Darkness was greatly feared in the ancient world. People closed the city gates and barred their doors at night for protection. People at night were assumed to be and were criminals. People were at the mercy of criminals when they went out at night, unless well armed and in large groups. They understood that the darkness was chaotic and an enemy. They considered confinement to the darkness a grave punishment from the gods and viewed it as death.

This would have been an attack against Amon-Ra (Amun-Re), the chief deity of Egypt and the sun god, who was part of a very important triad of deities that also included his wife, Mut—the divine mother, queen of all gods, and a bisexual represented by the body of a woman and the head of a vulture—and their son Khons, the god of the moon.

“The moon was a god, perhaps the oldest of all that were worshiped in Egypt; but in the official theology the greatest of the gods was the sun. Sometimes it was worshiped as the supreme deity Ra or Re, the bright father who fertilized Mother Earth with rays of penetrating heat and light; sometimes it was a divine calf, born anew at every dawn, sailing the sky slowly in a celestial boat, and descending into the west, at evening, like an old man tottering to his grave. Or the sun was the god Horus, taking the graceful form of a falcon, flying majestically across the heavens day after day as if in supervision of his realm, and becoming one of the recurrent symbols of Egyptian religion and royalty. Always Ra, or the sun, was the Creator: at his first rising, seeing the earth desert and bare, he had flooded it with his energizing rays, and all living things—vegetable, animal and human—had sprung pell-mell from his eyes, and been scattered over the world.”<sup>43</sup>

The sun god, Ra, was considered to be a great blessing to the land for his faithfulness in providing the warmth and light of the sun each day without fail.

“Hail to thee, beautiful Re of everyday, who rises at dawn without ceasing, Khepri wearying (himself) without labor! Thy rays are (one’s) face, without one knowing it. Fine gold is not like the radiance of thee. Thou who has constructed thyself, thou didst fashion thy body, a shaper who was (himself) not shaped; unique in his nature, passing eternity, the distant one, under whose guidance are millions of ways, just as thy radiance is like the radiance of heaven and thy color glistens more than its surface.”<sup>44</sup>



In Egyptian mythology, Horus was the god of light, who personified the life-giving power of the sun. He was usually represented as a falcon-headed man wearing a sun disk as a crown. There was also the god Ptah, the one who created the moon, the sun, and the earth; Atum, the god of the sunset; and Shu, the god of sunlight and air. Khepre, who often appeared in the shape of the scarab, was a form of Ra. The plague would also have been a direct attack against Pharaoh, for he was the divine representation of the sun god Ra. Darkness covered the land for three days, and no one could see anything or leave their homes. Yet where Israel was, they had light!

**10:24-29** Pharaoh said that he would allow Moses to take Israel and sacrifice, except that they would have to leave their animals behind. Moses stated that they needed the livestock in order to make sacrifices. But Yahweh hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not allow them to go, telling

<sup>42</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 256.

<sup>43</sup> Will Durant. *History of Civilization*, Vol. 1. “Our Oriental Heritage,” p. 198.

<sup>44</sup> ANET. *The Hymn to the Sun*, pp. 367-68.

Moses to leave his sight or he would kill him. In the end, Pharaoh commanded Moses to never let him see Moses' face again or he would die. Moses agreed to this. The irony is that Pharaoh would indeed never see his face again, for Moses would be leaving Egypt with the Israelites after the next plague, and it would be Pharaoh's son who would be dead.

**11:1-3** Yahweh stated that this was the final plague and that it would be so devastating that it would result in the final relenting of Pharaoh and the true deliverance of the people of Israel. Not only would the people be freed, but, again Yahweh stated, they would leave with the wealth of Egypt. Previously, Yahweh had not revealed how many plagues there would be, and now Yahweh reveals that this would be the last one and that it would leave a mark on Egypt. In Ps. 135:8 and 136:10, the death of the firstborn is the only plague mentioned at all, probably because this plague made such a powerful impression on future generations. The narrator makes it clear that Moses and Israel had gained great respect among all the Egyptians—except for Pharaoh. The psychological distance between Pharaoh and the people is attested to on several occasions (Ex. 8:19; 9:20; 10:7; 11:2-3).

**11:4-10** Yahweh stated that this would not be a natural phenomenon but that He would specifically move through Egypt, killing the firstborn of each family. This personal involvement of Yahweh signifies a further heightening of the severity of the plagues. Whereas the previous plagues affected everyone in Egypt, this final one would affect only the firstborn son of each family. The firstborn was not just the heir of a double portion of his father's inheritance, but he represented special qualities of life (Gen. 49:3). The law of succession decreed that the firstborn son would inherit the major portion of a family estate when the father died. The death of the firstborn son would cripple a family legally and emotionally. It is interesting that even the animals are included in this death.

As mentioned earlier, Egypt saw Pharaoh as the incarnation of the god Horus, the firstborn of the gods, so to speak. Yahweh had declared Israel to be His firstborn son (Ex. 4:22) and had commanded Pharaoh to release His firstborn son. Pharaoh had enslaved Yahweh's firstborn, killed them, and refused to let them go. Pharaoh denied Yahweh's authority over Israel and so refused to give Yahweh's firstborn back to Him (Ex. 5:1; 7:16; 8:20; 9:1, 17; 10:3). Thus, Yahweh responded with His own authority and right by taking the life of Egypt's firstborn (Ex. 4:23).

Yet Yahweh also states that a distinction would be made between true Israelites who demonstrated faith and would thus survive and those who did not demonstrate faith and would thus die. The expression "not even a dog will bark" is unusual and may indicate that no harm or threat would come against the Israelites. The dog's reputation was somewhat akin to a rat in the ancient world (1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Kgs. 8:13; Ecc. 9:4; Matt. 7:6; Luke 16:26).

Pharaoh was not the only guilty party in the enslavement of the Israelites and the death of their children. Likewise, the judgment was not just an act of retribution but also a definitive display of His superiority to all the other false gods. Pharaoh himself was now left without an heir to the throne; this would be devastating to a king, especially one who was the representation of the god Ra. It would have undermined his immortality through his inability to protect his son, who was a god as well, and it undermined his ability to provide unity and protection over the land of Egypt.

This plague was directed against “all of the gods of Egypt” (Ex. 12:12) and would show the total inability of the gods of Egypt to protect their subjects in the face of unparalleled tragedy. This would have been humiliating to Isis, the winged goddess of fertility; to Meskhenet, the goddess who presided at the birth of children; to Hathor, one of the seven deities who attended the birth of children; to Min, the god of procreation; to Selket, the guardian of life; and to Renenutet, the cobra-goddess and guardian of Pharaoh.



## F. The Redemption of Israel (12:1–13:16)

The narrator develops the tenth plague to a far greater extent than the previous plagues in order to give instructions for Passover festival and the status of the firstborn son. The Passover festival celebrated the passing over of Yahweh's wrath on the houses of Egypt and Israel if they offered up, in faith, a substitutionary lamb. This festival would become the most important and foundational theological principle for the identity of the nation of Israel. It is this festival that would become the foundation to how Israel could be redeemed back to Yahweh and be made righteous again. Not only would the Passover festival enable them to escape death on this night, but also every year, as they were required to celebrate it (Ex. 12:14). Yahweh would not strike them down immediately, as He did this first night, if they failed to celebrate the Passover festival, but failure to do so would bring the judgments of Yahweh detailed in Deut. 27-31. This festival was so important that it would also be fulfilled by Christ in the last Supper as the foundation to the theology of the cross and the believers as the new community of Yahweh in Christ.

**12:1-2** “This month” (Nisan) would now be the new first month of the Jewish calendar because it commemorated Israel's redemption and its beginning as a new nation. Yahweh tied Israel's redemption into the Jewish calendar, making it a celebration that begins the new year. Here, Yahweh decided that history would determine the calendar. The Canaanite culture celebrated a fall new year, so Yahweh could also be separating the Israelites from the Canaanites, among whom they would eventually be living. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not move fully to this new calendar. Instead they maintained two calendars: the religious, which began in the spring, and the civil, which began in the fall.

**12:3-11** Yahweh required each family on the tenth day of the month of Nisan to choose a male lamb that was spotless and healthy to be sacrificed in place of the family. If their family was too small to eat a whole lamb, then they were to join their neighbor in the consumption of the lamb. The idea is that this is a both a communal meal and that the lamb was to be consumed in its entirety, with no leftovers. The reason is that this was a sacred festival meal and not to be eaten in an ordinary sense. For four days, the lamb would be inspected for imperfections, and on the fourteenth day it would be sacrificed. (Note that this is the exact day of the month on which Christ was sacrificed.) The blood of the lamb would be placed on the top and side door frames of the door.

The omitting of the yeast was because baking bread with yeast takes too long, and they were to leave in haste the next morning. Also, yeast is symbolic of sin, and omitting it represented sin's absence as the lamb's blood was cleansing them of their sins. Eating the bitter herbs—perhaps endive, chicory, and/or other herbs native to Egypt—would later remind the Israelites of the bitter experiences of life in Egypt.

Yahweh directed that the Israelites roast the lamb in the same manner the nomads did. First, the Canaanites ate their meat raw or boiled, so Yahweh was again making them distinct from the surrounding cultures. Second, boiling takes too long, and they were supposed to leave in haste the next morning. Third, roasting allowed for the lamb to be placed on the table undivided and unchanged in its essential structure and appearance. This would have strengthened the impression of the substitutionary nature of the lamb. The eating of the lamb was necessary in order to partake of the blessings of Yahweh. Fourth, the roasting involved the lamb going through the flames, a symbol of judgment.

The thoughtful Israelite and reader knows that there is no way that a sacrificed lamb can truly be an adequate substitute to pay for the sins of the person. Especially as this would have to be done year after year, it would become quite evident that the previous sacrifices were not sufficient. Thus, the only thing truly “saving” them is their faith in Yahweh and obedience to His instructions. Yahweh has them do this not because it actually atones for their sins but because it has them put into action an understanding of the significance of sin, debt, and salvation. They are forced to process the reality of these ideas rather than leaving them as abstract and unprocessed ideas in the back of their minds.

**12:12-14** This festival became known as “Passover,” for it was the day that Yahweh *passed over* the firstborn son of all those who sacrificed a lamb in their place (Heb. 11:28). Their faith in Yahweh, that He would do what He promised, is what saved them that night. Ex. 12:14 states, “you will celebrate it perpetually as a lasting ordinance,” meaning that those who belong to Yahweh are to celebrate this festival forever.

As mentioned earlier, Egypt had continually sinned against Yahweh and His firstborn, and they had a debt of sin to pay. Even though Yahweh had every right to take the life of the firstborn of every family, He also in His mercy provided a lamb as a substitutionary sacrifice. Notice that Yahweh made it clear that the destroyer was coming to every home and that neither Egyptian nor Israelite would survive without the sacrifice of the lamb. What Yahweh was saying was that the destroyer was not coming just for the evil, pagan Egyptians but also for the Israelites. This means that no one is innocent and can stand up in the judgment of Yahweh. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of Yahweh (Rom. 3:23).

That night, after the Passover, in every family was either a dead firstborn (the justice of Yahweh) or a dead lamb (the mercy of Yahweh). In other words, the lamb got what the firstborn was supposed to get. Every firstborn looked at the lamb on the table and thought, “I am not dead because that lamb died for me.” The only way they were able to live was through their faith in grace of Yahweh. This is the incredible love and mercy of Yahweh for all people, that He would provide a substitutionary lamb for their lives. Yet this is still not true justice, and the life of an animal cannot really pay the debt of these families. This will be seen in the sacrificial system, in which over and over, year after year, Israel would continually have to offer sacrificed lambs as a covering of their sins. But if the life of an animal could really pay for their debt of sin, then why did they have to continually offer the sacrifices (Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1-4)? Because it is the mercy of Yahweh that puts off the debt of sin that will one day have to justly be paid. But if He requires humanity to pay it one day, then there will be no mercy from Yahweh.

Later, Jesus, the God-man, steps into human history, and John declared in a loud voice, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). At the Passover meal, the night before Jesus’ crucifixion, Jesus as the head of the twelve was responsible for officiating and explaining the festival meal. He was supposed to say, “This is the bread of our affliction. Our ancestors suffered in the wilderness so that we can be free.” But instead, He gets up and said, “This is my body broken for you.” What He was saying here is, “This is the bread of *my* affliction that I am going to suffer for you to give you the ultimate freedom from sin and death.” Jesus is the firstborn of Yahweh and the fulfillment of all the promises of Yahweh and His prophecies for a future for humanity. He became the Lamb (Jn. 1:29, 36; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 7:10; 21:22; 22:21) who paid the debt for humanity as their representative sacrifice (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 1:3-4; Heb. 9:24-27; 1 Jn. 2:2). As a human, He can justly pay the debt for humanity, and as God, He can defeat death and be resurrected to give humanity life. Therefore, in His death

and resurrection He brings together the tension of the justice and mercy of Yahweh. For the debt of sin of humanity is justly paid for in Christ. And in Yahweh's grace, Christ pays the debt for humanity so that they may live (Rom; 3:23-26). The Passover teaches and trains Israel to look forward to the future and the true Passover Lamb that can do what no other lamb could do. The final chapter of the Bible is the Lamb who sits on the throne of Yahweh and brings all believers through faith into the presence of Yahweh to dwell with Him because there is no more sin in them.

**12:15-20** Yahweh carried out the eating of bread without yeast for seven more days after the Passover, which would become known as the Unleavened Bread festival. This festival would last from the fourteenth to the twenty-first day of the month. It would be a time of removing all the yeast from the house and eating bread without yeast to make the Israelites aware of their sin. Yahweh emphasizes the seriousness of the festival by stating that those who did not participate would be cut off from Him and removed from the community. There was no salvation for those who were cut off from Yahweh. Once again, Yahweh says of the Unleavened Bread festival in Ex. 12:17, "keep this day perpetually as a lasting ordinance," emphasizing that this too is to be practiced forever.

Christ fulfilled both Passover and the Unleavened Bread festival when He celebrated in the upper room with His disciples, which has since come to be known as the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Jn. 14; Cor. 11:23-29). Christ stated that He was the lamb—that the bread was his body and the wine His blood, broken and given for them.

**12:21-28** Moses communicated the requirements to the Israelites, that they go and obey the words of Yahweh. The *hyssop* was a small bush and aromatic herb that grew throughout the Sinai region. The plant also grew out of the walls in Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 4:33). Again Moses repeated that the festivals were to be celebrated forever.

Yahweh commanded that the Israelite children ask why these things were done. The result was that they would not unthinkingly practice a dead ritual, leaving their worship empty; their asking questions and the Israelite fathers' answering the questions began the spiritualizing of the Passover rite and included the children in the faith and community at an early age. The whole purpose of this ceremony was to perpetuate the memory of the recent deliverance and to fix it in the mind of a nation that tended to forget divine blessing so easily.

**12:29-34** The angel struck the Egyptians at midnight, the symbolic hour of judgment (Matt. 25:5-6), when they were asleep. Pharaoh had originally met Moses' demands with contemptuous insult (Ex. 5:4), and then he tried a series of compromises (Ex. 8:25, 28; 10:8-11, 24), all of which were unacceptable to Yahweh. Just as Pharaoh had taken the firstborn of the Israelites, Yahweh now brought justice by taking the firstborn of the Egyptians. It was this drastic measure that forced Pharaoh finally to release the Israelites.

**12:35-36** The Egyptians responded in fear and now wanted the Israelites to leave. They also gave Israel all their possessions, just as Yahweh had said they would (Gen. 15:14; Ex. 3:21-22).

**12:37** The narrator lists the number of men who left Israel that day as 600,000. This would only have included men over the age of twenty-one and not the men who were too old. Thus, considering that most of them would have had a wife and at least two children, and then including the older people, the total number of Israelites involved in the exodus would have surpassed two million. This is a very large number that is hard to make work in other parts of the

Scriptures. First, this means that Pharaoh's army would have had to be huge in comparison, which does not fit with the Egyptian records of that time nor the size of any army in modern times. Second, it is hard to imagine this many people with all their livestock and carts crossing the Red Sea in less than one night. Third, the Bible says there were seven nations in the land of Canaan mightier than Israel. Given what we know about Canaan during this time, it is not likely that seven Canaanite nations surpassed two million people. Fourth, two million people would not have been able to fit in the valley of Moab east of Jericho before they crossed into the Canaan. Fifth Yahweh said that He could not give them the land of Canaan immediately after the exodus because there were not enough of them to maintain the land and to prevent the wild animals too numerous for them to handle (Ex. 23:29).

However, we must take the text seriously and read it for what it says. The Hebrew word for "thousands" is *'elep* and can be translated as "thousand, tribe, clan, family, division, or cattle." Scholars have thus made many attempts to reduce the number by seeing it as six hundred *clans, families, or divisions*, instead of six hundred *thousand* men. The word translated "men" comes from the Hebrew word *ragli*, and Douglas Stuart argues that it is never used of men in the First Testament but always of soldiers, meaning that this should be seen as military divisions, as in Ex. 12:41. A division in the ancient Near East was twelve to fifteen men, putting the number of men around 7,200 instead of 600,000. Then, the total number of Israelites would be around 28,800 to 36,000 instead of two million. This is much more reasonable and still true to the authenticity of the text.<sup>45</sup> However, other scholars have pointed out difficulties with this understanding that may or may not be valid. All scholars struggle with this data, and the numbers of people in the ancient world are simply not clear. In the end, we do not really know the number of Israelites given the data that we have at this point.

**12:38-39** Moses referred to the "mixed multitude" often in the account of the wilderness wanderings that follows. This group probably included Egyptian pagans and God-fearers (Ex. 9:20) and an assortment of other people including other enslaved Semites. For one reason or another, these people took this opportunity to leave or escape from Egypt with the Israelites. This group proved to be a source of trouble in Israel and led the Israelites in complaining and in opposing Moses (Num. 11:4).

**12:40-42** The text is very clear that Israel was in Egypt 430 years "to the very day." This probably refers to the time between Jacob's entering Egypt with his family (1876 BC) and the day of the Exodus (1446 BC). Gal. 3:17 also refers to 430 years; however, this second reference is apparently the time from Yahweh's last reconfirmation of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob at Beer-sheba (1875 BC; Gen. 46:2-4) to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Sinai (1446 BC; Ex. 19).

**12:43-51** Before any male could eat the Passover, he had to undergo circumcision. Moses stressed this stipulation strongly in this section. The rationale behind this rule was that, before anyone could observe the memorial of redemption, he first had to exercise faith in the promises Yahweh had given to Abraham. Furthermore, he had to demonstrate that faith by submitting to the rite of circumcision, the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. This requirement should have reminded the Israelites and all other believers who partook of the Passover that the Passover rite did not make a person acceptable to Yahweh. Faith in the promises of Yahweh did that.

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<sup>45</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 297-302.

**13:1-16** This section is somewhat repetitive, but the emphasis is on Yahweh's right to the firstborn in Israel and how the Israelites were to acknowledge that right. The repetition stresses its importance. It was to be a memorial of Yahweh's redemption from Egyptian slavery, as were the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:14). The idea was that the firstborn of every family now belonged to Yahweh and would serve Him as priests since He had redeemed them from Egypt. Thus, every family would have a priest representing them in the house of Yahweh and to the other nations, making them a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). This is completely unique to all other nations, in which the priest came from a select and elite family or through initiation rites. After the Israelite nation sinned against Him with the golden calf, however, Yahweh took just the Levites for His special possession instead of all the firstborn (Ex. 32; Num. 3:12-13). Consequently, this dedication of firstborns never took place, but the Israelites did circumcise their sons and observe the Passover when they first entered the Promised Land (Josh. 5:4-7).

Yahweh called the Israelites to wear His deliverance as a sign on their foreheads and hands. The latter rabbis and Jews took this literally, writing scriptures like Deut. 6:4-9 on parchment and tying them to their foreheads in little boxes called "phylacteries" and nailing them to their doorframes (Ex. 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21). Though there is nothing wrong with this, the instruction was more likely a figure of speech meant to be so much more than just words bound to one's body.

"The line of thought referred to merely expresses the idea, that the Israelites were not only to retain the commands of God in their hearts, and to confess them with the mouth, but to fulfill them with the hand, or in act and deed, and thus to show themselves in their whole bearing as the guardians and observers of the law. As the hand is the medium of action, and carrying in the hand represents handling, so the space between the eyes, or the forehead, is that part of the body, which is generally visible, and what is worn there is worn to be seen. This figurative interpretation is confirmed and placed beyond doubt by such parallel passages as Prov. iii. 3, 'Bind them (the commandments) about thy neck; write them upon the tables of thine heart' (cf. verses. 21, 22, iv. 21, vi. 21, 22, vii. 3)."<sup>46</sup>

In this section, Yahweh is portrayed as a Judge who requires justice for sin and is satisfied by the blood of the innocent sin-bearer (the lamb) in place of His people, yet He executes judgment on those who reject Him and His peace offering. He is also the Deliverer of Israel who single-handedly and without opposition liberated the nation of Israel from its slavery.

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<sup>46</sup> Keil and Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 2:37.

## G. The Exodus from Egypt (13:17–15:21)

Israel's exodus out of Egypt was the most significant and greatest event of its history because it was here that Yahweh demonstrated His uniqueness as a transcendentally sovereign and intimately involved God who lovingly saved them and made them into a new people. This was the beginning of Israel as a people group, an event that the Biblical authors will recount more than any other event in their history. Without Yahweh's intervention, Israel would be nothing but slaves who would eventually die off. Like the Passover, the exodus would become the second most important theological concept that would form their identity as a people who were loved by a God who would do anything to save and redeem them. It is also here that they would see one of the greatest manifestations of Yahweh's presence: in the pillar of fire and smoke, known as the Shekinah glory of Yahweh.



**13:17-18** “The way to the land of the Philistines” refers to the most northern of three routes travelers took from Egypt to Canaan, called “the way of the sea” (*Via Maris*). The Egyptians had heavily fortified this caravan route, and taking it would have caused Israel to engage them in battle. The term *Philistines* has been viewed by modern scholarship as an anachronism, since the Philistines are not believed to have settled in the region until the reign of Rameses III, which would have been after both the early and late datings of the exodus. The Philistines after the exodus came across the Mediterranean Sea from Greece and settled along the coast of Canaan. However, some recent evidence shows there may have been small settlements of Philistines

before the exodus and that it was not until the 1200 BC that they came in greater numbers and became a political and military might.<sup>47</sup>

Yahweh did not take His people along this road so that they would not engage in war with the enemy and become afraid. After the plagues, it is obvious that Yahweh could have defeated the Philistines easily. But this was not His will. First, the Philistines had not harmed Israel yet, and they were not one of the nations of the Canaanites and Amorites that Yahweh had marked for destruction. Second, Yahweh knew the people's lack of faith and that they were not ready to handle this yet. This is seen by the fear they demonstrate later when facing the Red Sea, let alone multiple armies. Third, the defeat of Egypt was to demonstrate His glory and free His people. But the people were not ready for personal warfare yet. Yahweh needed to take them to Mount Sinai first, make them into His nation, and give them the Mosaic Covenant, which would become their identity. It was not until they knew who Yahweh was and what their new identity was that they would be able to face another in battle. Finally, He had one last blow to deliver to Egypt, which would come in the form of the sea.

**13:19** A note is made of the fact that the “bones of Joseph” were taken along. This reflected the faith of Joseph and the execution of his instructions that his remains be preserved and carried from Egypt to Canaan (Gen. 49:26; 50:24-26). The fulfillment of Joseph's request is recorded in Josh. 24:32.

**13:20-22** The Shekaniyah glory of Yahweh that appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) now appeared before the nation of Israel as a large pillar of fire by night and as a cloud by day. Through it, Yahweh not only made His presence visibly known to His people, but it would guide and protect them as well. Yahweh Himself was in the pillar (Ex. 13:21; 14:24) and often spoke to the people from it (Ex. 19:20; Num. 12:5-6; Deut. 31:15-16; Ps. 99:6-7). Later, the Psalmist remembered it (Ps. 78:14; 105:39), and the pillar of cloud came to represent the glory of Yahweh in the sanctuary throughout much of Israel's history (Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kgs. 8:10-11; Isa. 4:5; 6:3-4). It later left Israel, before the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem (Ezek. 10).

This pillar of cloud would have acted as an umbrella of shade from the sun. The pillar of fire would have lighted their way in the dark wilderness, provided them warmth during the cold desert nights, and kept predatory animals away from their camp.

**14:1-7** Yahweh had Moses switch directions to give the appearance that Israel was lost, and sending them to the Red Sea gave the appearance that they were trapped. Crossing the Red Sea was not necessary for leaving Egypt since all the trade routes to Syria and Mesopotamia traveled along dry land. Yahweh sent them to the sea so that He could use it to destroy the Egyptian army as well as to symbolically baptize the Israelites. Archeologists have not been able to locate the cities mentioned in Ex. 13:20 and 14:2, but it is most likely they were located around the Bitter Lakes.

“Yahweh's first intention was to give the appearance that Israel, fearful of the main road, then fearful of the wilderness, was starting first one way and then another, not knowing where to turn and so a ready prey for recapture or destruction. Yahweh's second intention was to lure the Egyptians into a trap, first by making Pharaoh's mind obstinate once again,

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<sup>47</sup> See K. A. Kitchen, “The Philistines,” *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, 53-54; J. M. Grintz, “The Immigration of the First Philistines in the Inscriptions,” *Tarbiz* 17 (1945): 32-42, and *Tarbiz* 19 (1947): 64; and E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 39-59.

and then by defeating Pharaoh and his forces, who were certain to come down in vengeance upon an apparently helpless and muddled Israel.”<sup>48</sup>

The details about the size and the efficient organization of Pharaoh’s force are a further means of adding to both the despair of Israel’s defenseless plight and the greatness of the victory that Yahweh was going to win for them.

**14:8-12** Despite the awesome power of Yahweh displayed in the plagues and His protection during the plagues, the Israelites still responded with fear and complaining and blamed Moses and Yahweh for their troubles. They even accused Moses of bringing them into the desert just to kill and bury them.

**14:13-18** Moses told them first, “do not fear,” and second, “stand firm,” which together reflect a mature faith and confidence in the sovereignty and delivering power of Yahweh. The third imperative was to “seek the salvation of Yahweh.” He did not command them to fight but to see Yahweh fight for them. In this potentially disastrous situation, Moses’ faith and obedience are both remarkable and exemplary.

“Whatever reluctance and anxiety Moses may have possessed prior to the exercise of God’s power in the ten plagues was surely removed when he saw the hand of God at work. Moses became a very articulate statesman and a great leader who exercised unwavering faith. If God was able to take an eighty-year-old man and accomplish such significant victories, what must the potential be for the dedicated young man of twenty years? The spiritual insight and maturity of Moses will long be an example for believers in every age in every land.”<sup>49</sup>

Yahweh revealed that everything He had planned has led up to this moment where He was truly going to defeat the Egyptians and redeem Israel.

**14:19-20** The same angel of Yahweh that was at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2) now stood here with the pillar of fire and cloud. Yahweh used His angel to represent Him and stand with Israel. This angel stayed with Israel all through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. (Ex. 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2; Num. 20:16; 22:22, Josh. 5:14; Jud. 2:1).

The pillar of fire and cloud moved to the rear of Israel to cut the enemy off from them. The fact that the pillar was simultaneously cloud and fire suggests that the pillar would have been a dark cloud on the side that faced Egypt, shrouding them in darkness, and fire on the side that faced Israel, lighting their path. The Egyptians who had made themselves an enemy of Yahweh were shrouded in darkness, but the Israelites who had followed in faith saw the light of Yahweh. This is the way it was portrayed at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19; Deut. 4:11; 5:22) and other places along Israel’s journey (Ex. 13:21; Num. 14:14; Deut. 1:33; Neh. 9:12, 19; Josh. 24:7; Ps. 78:14; 105:39).

**14:21-22** Once again, Yahweh subdued the sea in order to bring redemption as He had done in creation (Gen. 1:1-2) and through the flood waters for Noah (Gen. 8:1) The wind that came from the east was the same means by which He subdued the sea in the previous two events. The power of Yahweh was evident as He drove back the waters to form a wall of water on either side of Israel’s passage.

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<sup>48</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 187.

<sup>49</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, p. 159.

**14:23-29** Yahweh used the chaos of the sea to judge the Egyptians (Isa. 51: 9-10)—much like He had done in Noah’s day (Gen. 6:11-21; 7:17-24)—and then subdued the chaos in order to establish His new people—much like He had done in the creation of the universe for Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2; Ps. 74:12-17; 89). Yahweh also jammed the wheels of the Egyptians’ chariots to stop them in their tracks. The text does not state that Pharaoh personally perished in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:8, 10, 28; Ps. 106:7-12; 136:13-15).

**14:30-31** Finally, after the final defeat of the Egyptians, the Israelites developed a fear for Yahweh and placed their belief in Him. However, this would not last. Throughout the story of Yahweh’s rescue of His people, we see foreshadowing symbols of His future salvation through Christ. First, in Ex. 13:3 Moses called Egypt the “house of slavery,” which is what Egypt represents in the Scriptures. Egypt as the “house of slavery” is a picture of this world, and this is the place into which all of humanity is born. Second, while Israel was in the “house of slavery,” Yahweh told them to sacrifice a lamb and place its blood on the doorpost, which would save them from the wrath that He would bring on the “house of slavery.” They were to eat the lamb and enjoy with thankfulness the blessings of the salvation they had just experienced. Throughout this time, Yahweh kept reminding Israel that He was preparing another land for them, one flowing with milk and honey. Third, He manifested Himself in a pillar of fire and cloud and told them to keep their eyes on Him and follow. This pillar was the glory of Yahweh that would later indwell the temple and guide and protect the people of Israel. It was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who now indwells believers, who are the new temple of Yahweh (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). Fourth, when Yahweh brought Israel through the Red Sea, this experience was their water baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-2). The pillar of fire then moved behind Israel, separating them from the “house of slavery” and consecrating them. Thus, the fire was the wrath of Yahweh on the “house of slavery” and the purification of Israel (Matt. 3:9-12; Lk. 3:16-17).

“The Lord finished the Israelites’ liberation when He destroyed the Egyptian army. The Israelites’ slavery ended when they left Egypt, but they began to experience true freedom after they crossed the Red Sea. The ten plagues had broken Pharaoh’s hold on the Israelites, but the Red Sea deliverance removed them from his reach forever. God redeemed Israel on the Passover night, but He liberated Israel from slavery finally at the Red Sea. In Christian experience these two works of God, redemption and liberation, occur at the same time; they are two aspects of salvation.”<sup>50</sup>

**15:1-6** The song is composed of three strophes.<sup>51</sup> Each one commences with the praise of Yahweh and ends with a description of the defeat of the Egyptian army (Ex. 15:1-6, 7-11, 12-16), with Ex. 15:17-18 as the epilogue. The first two strophes focus on Yahweh’s power to defeat the Egyptians, and the third focuses on the fruit of His victory.

“The poem of Ex. 15 celebrates Yahweh present with his people and doing for them as no other god anywhere and at any time can be present to do. As such, it is a kind of summary of the theological base of the whole of the Book of Exodus.”<sup>52</sup>

Moses began by praising Yahweh for destroying the Egyptian horses and chariots of the army of Pharaoh. Since Egyptians at this time did not ride horses, the phrase “horse and rider” is mostly

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> A strophe is a structural division of a poem containing stanzas of varying line-length, especially an ode or free verse poem.

<sup>52</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 210.

likely an anachronism for charioteers. The word “to ride” can mean on a horse or in a chariot. It is fitting that the chariots were thrown into the sea since the sea is the symbol of chaos, over which Pharaoh was supposed to maintain order.

Thus Yahweh, not the inept gods of Egypt, proved to be Israel’s strength and their salvation. This is the praise and the song that will be sung of Yahweh throughout all the years of Israel’s existence. In fact, Rev. 15:3 says that in Yahweh’s final judgments on creation, they will sing the song of Moses. Moses described the Egyptian charioteers as being thrown into the sea and sinking like a stone and, later, like lead. This was the same imagery used to describe Pharaoh’s command to throw the Hebrew babies into the Nile River (Ex. 1:22).

**15:7-11** In his majesty, Yahweh overthrows all those who think they can rise above Him. He also consumed Egypt like fire consumes stubble. This is the same stubble that Pharaoh made Israel gather to make bricks for his own glory (Ex. 5:6-9). “The blast of your nostrils” and “you blew with your breath” are anthropomorphic expressions for the wind that came in and dried up the water. The same imagery that breathed life into Adam and Eve at creation (Gen. 2:7) now is used to snuff out life in judgment.

**15:12-16** The fruit of Yahweh’s victory is the salvation of His people. The whole purpose of judgment of wickedness and evil was to save and redeem His people who humbled themselves and trusted in Him as their sovereign God. It is Yahweh’s loyalty to His covenant promises and people that brought about salvation not their faithfulness or worthiness. Thus the fear of God will fall upon all the other nations who have lifted themselves up against Yahweh in the same way that Egypt did. Thus they will soon fall as Egypt did. And Yahweh will protect His people from evil as they pass by the pagan nations

**15:17-18** In contrast Yahweh will plant His own redeemed people in the cleft of the mountain of His power and security. And they will reside with Him, like in the garden, forever because His reign is forever. For the house of slavery, sin, and death were swallowed up in the seas of chaos but the people of Yahweh walked on dry land of blessing.

“The Exodus was one of the foundational events of Israel’s religion. It marked the liberation from Egyptian slavery, which in turn made possible the formation of a relationship of covenant between Israel and God. And nowhere is the Exodus given more powerful expression than in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18), a great victory hymn celebrating God’s triumph over Egypt at the sea. To this day, the ancient hymn continues to be employed in the synagogue worship of Judaism. Its continued use reflects the centrality of its theme, that of God’s control over the forces of both nature and history in the redemption of his people.”

“The poet has applied some of the most central motifs of the myth of Baal. These motifs may be summarized in certain key terms: conflict, order, kingship, and palace-construction. Taking the cycle of Baal texts as a whole (see further Chapter IV), the narrative begins with conflict between Baal and Yamm (‘Sea’); Baal, representing order, is threatened by the chaotic Yamm. Baal’s conquest of Yamm marks one of the steps in the process of creation; order is established, and chaos is subdued. Baal’s victory over Yamm is also the key to his kingship, and to symbolize the order and consolidate the kingship, Baal initiates the construction of his palace. And then, in the course of the myth, conflict breaks out again, this time between Baal and Mot. Baal is eventually victorious in this conflict, establishing once again his kingship and the rule of order. It is important to note not only the centrality of these

motifs in the Baal myth, but also their significance; the motifs as a whole establish a cosmological framework within which to interpret the Baal myth. It is, above all, a cosmology, developing the origins and permanent establishment of order in the world, as understood and believed by the Canaanites. Its central celebration is that of creation.

“In the Song of the Sea, the poet has developed the same central motifs in the structure of his song. The song begins with conflict between God and Egypt (Exodus 15:1-12), but the way in which the poet has transformed the ancient motifs is instructive. ‘Sea’ is no longer the adversary of order, but God uses the sea (Hebrew *yam*) as an instrument in the conquest of chaos. After the conquest, God is victorious and establishes order; his kingship is proclaimed in a statement of his incomparability (verse 11). But then the theme of conflict is resumed again, as future enemies are anticipated (verses 14-16). They, too, would be conquered, and eventually God’s palace and throne would be established as a symbol of the order achieved in his victory (verse 17). Finally, God’s kingship would be openly declared, as a consequence of his victories: ‘the Lord shall reign for ever and ever’ (verse 18). The Hebrew expression for this statement of kingship is *yhwh ymlk*, directly analogous to the celebration of Baal’s kingship in the Ugaritic texts: *b’l ymlk*.”

“It is one thing to trace the motifs of the Baal myth in the Song of the Sea; it is another to grasp their significance. The primary significance lies in the cosmological meaning of the motifs; the Hebrew poet has taken the symbolic language of creation and adapted it to give expression to his understanding of the meaning of the Exodus. At one level, the Exodus was simply the escape of Hebrews from Egyptian slavery; at another level, it marked a new act of divine creation. Just as Genesis 1 celebrates the creation of the world, so too Exodus 15 celebrates the creation of a new people, Israel. And when one perceives this underlying significance of the poetic language employed in the Song of the Sea, one is then in a position to understand better another portion of the biblical text, namely the reasons given for the observation of the Sabbath day.”<sup>53</sup>

**15:20-21** Miriam was the first woman recorded to have been given the title of prophetess, as she claimed to possess the prophetic gift since Yahweh had spoken to her (Num. 12:2). Micah reports that Yahweh delivered Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Micah 6:4); she played an important role despite the fact that she is not mentioned specifically in the previous chapters.

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<sup>53</sup> Peter Craigie. *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, pp. 88-89. See also Frank M. Cross, Jr., “The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth,” in *God and Christ: Existence and Province*, pp. 1-25.

## H. Yahweh's Provision in the Wilderness (15:22–18:27)

Even though Israel had been saved from their life of slavery to Egypt and its gods, they had not yet been given their new identity and purpose in Yahweh. In other words, even though they had been taken out of Egypt, Egypt had not yet been taken out of them. Israel's fifty-day journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai was a time to test their character, to reveal their need for Yahweh, and to teach them to trust in Him for their needs and guidance in life.

If one reads this story in one sitting, two things stand out that the narrator wants the reader to get. First, in the repetition of the people's complaining and lack of trust you see their pettiness and ungratefulness. The narrator is intentionally highlighting this point to serve as a mirror to the reader. It is easy to think that we are more mature than the Israelites, but if we read this section honestly, we cannot help but see ourselves. In the day-to-day moments, we think that we have it all under control. But when we look at our life from a bird's eye view, like we see Israel's life in the wilderness, we realize that our memories of Yahweh's faithfulness are short lived and that we tend to resort to complaining and lack of trust.

Second, in the midst of this continual complaining is the incredible patience of Yahweh. Yahweh never gives up on them, never loses His temper, never strikes them down, even though He had every right. He continually responded with patience as He provided for their needs. No matter how many times they kept failing the test, He loved them so much as their Father that He kept teaching them who He was and what He was willing to do for them so that they could pass the test the next time.

“The whole history of the wandering in the wilderness is a good example of the longsuffering of God with people who constantly tempted and provoked Him (Ps. 78:56; 106:7, 14, 25, 29).”<sup>54</sup>

As Israel made their way to Mount Sinai to enter into a covenant with Yahweh, this section reveals their great need for this covenant and how great a covenant would be with such an awesome and loving God.

**15:22** The wilderness of Shur was a vast, rocky plain and a sparsely populated region in the northern part of Sinai. It was just past the Egyptian border fortifications and so represented freedom from Egypt's pursuit. Israel's demand to Pharaoh to go into the wilderness had finally come to a reality. Much remained for them to arrive at the point where they would serve Yahweh.

**15:23-25** After three days of finding no water, they finally came to Marah, but they were not able to drink the water there because it was bitter, the meaning of the name *Marah*. Waters like this are often clear and so look drinkable but contain a large amount of dissolved minerals and salts, which makes it undrinkable. After three days, Israel's water supplies they had brought out of Egypt were probably running out. This would be a huge threat to the survival of their families and animals while traveling in a wilderness territory. They had become desperate. Their immediate response was to grumble and complain against Moses. Since Moses was Yahweh's representative, they expected him to answer their complaint.

The narrator makes it clear that Yahweh was testing the Israelites to see if they would apply what they had learned about Him in Egypt and at the Red Sea crossing to the difficult circumstances

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<sup>54</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, p. 195.

that now faced them (Ex. 15:25). Had they come to know Yahweh well enough by now that they knew that He loved them, wanted the best for them, and was powerful enough to give it to them? Did they believe that He could cleanse these bitter waters before them now? Yet only three days after the awesome Red Sea crossing, they had forgotten Yahweh's miraculous provision and protection. They had seen Yahweh at work through His mighty deeds, but they had not come to know Him. This shows that miracles do not automatically result in faith. Rather, faith is the result of a deep conviction that Yahweh is trustworthy.

In contrast, Moses' immediate response to their circumstances and complaints was to go to Yahweh in trusting prayer. Moses interceded on their behalf, which will be a recurring theme in this book and in Numbers. Yahweh responded not with impatience or anger, but He instructed Moses on how to purify the water for the people He loved. There is no specific property of the tree branch that purified the water. Rather, it was the fact that Yahweh made it happen. Symbolically, trees and branches are a symbol of life, people groups, and hope.

**15:26** After their lack of faith and His merciful provision, Yahweh both encouraged and warned Israel. He encouraged them to obey Him and that if they did, they would not receive the same judgment He had poured out on Egypt. Yahweh's promise was not that Israel would never get sick but that Yahweh would protect and heal them and that they would never have to worry about being devastated by natural disasters or sickness. Three things are emphasized here. First that Yahweh is their protector and healer. Second is that although His love is unconditional, His blessings come only when they demonstrate trust and obedience. And third is that Yahweh does not play favorites. If they failed to trust and obey Him in the same way that Egypt had, then they could expect the same judgment as Egypt. This is exactly what would happen to them in the book of Kings because of their constant lack of faith and their disobedience to Yahweh.

**15:27** Yahweh continued to bless them despite their lack of faith by bringing them to a second source of water that was abundant with life. The twelve wells are related to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the seventy date palm trees refer to completeness. The idea is that there was enough water for everyone and their animals.

“A method of God's dealing with the Israelites as His people that He frequently employed stands out clearly in these incidents. God did not lead the Israelites around every difficulty. Instead He led them into many difficulties, but He also provided deliverance for them in their difficulties. This caused the Israelites to learn to look to Him for the supply of their needs. He still deals with His children the same way.”<sup>55</sup>

**16:1-3** The wilderness of Sin evidently lay in the southwestern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Its name relates to Sinai, the name of the mountain located on its eastern edge. A month later, the Israelites began to run out of food. Once again, this would be a threat to them and their animals who would need to graze every day to remain healthy. And once again, Israel responded with complaining. Seven times the word “murmurings” or “grumbings” is repeated in this chapter (Ex. 16:2, 7, 8, 9, 12). Between the repetition of this word and Moses' stating that it was against Yahweh, the severity of their complaints and lack of faith is emphasized. One would think that if Yahweh could provide water, then He could provide food as well. One difference was that in the previous setting there was water but it was not safe; now there is no food at all. The people's complaints had now become overdramatic. They were not saying that they literally wished they

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, pp. 82-83. See also Allen P. Ross, “When God Gives His People Bitter Water (Exodus 15:22-27),” *Exegesis and Exposition* 1:1 (Fall 1986):55-66.

had died but rather that they felt like they were dying. They claimed that their situation and diet in Egypt was better than it was now. The irony of their words is that the nature of their diet while in slavery was not as luxurious as they were claiming. Even though they would have had more food in Egypt than they did at this moment, it still was not that good. The newness of Israel's freedom had worn off, and the hardship of the wilderness life had set in and become routine.

This is not much different from us. We can continually be provided for by Yahweh, while at the next trial we wonder where Yahweh is or do not even think to go to Him in prayer. It is interesting that even if Yahweh had provided for us just a couple of days ago, it can seem like it happened years ago when we are in our current need. We are a hundred times more likely to remember the bad things than the good, and so our memories become distorted, and we tend to focus on the negative. The main point that the book of Deuteronomy makes is that the constant remembering of the deeds of Yahweh in our lives is the key to a deep faith and trust in Yahweh and thus a life of contentment and satisfaction.

**16:4-12** Yahweh responded to the people's complaining by miraculously providing bread from the sky. The Israelites were to collect only enough for each day and enough on the sixth day for that day and the seventh. Yahweh said that He was giving instructions on how they should collect the bread in the morning in order to test them and see if they feared, respected, and loved Him enough in order to obey Him. Did they trust Him enough to believe His word, that there would be food the next day if they collected only enough for the present day? This would make them dependent upon Him on a day-by-day basis.

Moses and Aaron announced to the Israelites that despite their complaining, Yahweh was going to provide food for them. But He was going to do it in a miraculous way so they would truly know that He was God and that He cared for them enough to provide for them. When Moses announced this to the Israelites, he also told them that Yahweh would provide them with meat in the evenings and bread in the mornings.

The narrator keeps repeating with emphasis that Yahweh was doing this for the people because of their complaining. This emphasizes their improper response to Yahweh and thus how gracious Yahweh was to them despite their complaining. Yahweh also appeared to them in the cloud and fire so that they might see that it was Him providing for them.

The evening and morning pattern followed by the Sabbath recalls Yahweh's ordering of creation in Genesis 1. Now He establishes the same pattern here as He orders their gathering, which would provide them with life.

**16:13-15** As Yahweh had promised, quail came in the evening, and bread came in the morning. The quail was a small Arabian bird that flew in large masses. Arab boys often killed two or three at a time by merely striking at them with a stick as they flew by. In spring, the quail came northwards in immense masses from the interior of Africa and returned in autumn. Because they had flown such distances, they often were so exhausted that they could be caught with the hand.<sup>56</sup>

In the morning, after the dew evaporated, the bread appeared on the ground as a white, thin wafer. Because the bread did not look like what they were used to, they said, "What is it?" Thus, it was given the name *manna* (Ex. 16:31), an abbreviated form of the Hebrew word for "what." Notice that it is not that no one knows what it is, for Yahweh and Moses continually called it

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<sup>56</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* p. 2:66-67.

bread (Ex. 16: 4, 8, 12, 15, 29, 31, 32). It is more that they were not familiar with the kind of bread it was.

**16:16-31** The narrator made the point that those who gathered the bread and meat in obedience to Yahweh's instructions had just what they needed for the day—not too much and not too little. Moses told them that they were not to keep any into the following day. But some did not listen, disobeying Yahweh in this instruction, and the next day the bread was rotting with maggots. What Yahweh provided as life for them became death as a result of their disobedience. When the purification laws would come in Leviticus, this rotting bread with maggots would render them unclean for seven days, precluding their access to Yahweh for that period. However, when they collected twice as much on the sixth day and saved it, the bread was not rotted the next morning, allowing them to both rest and eat on the Sabbath.

The Israelites would have known about the Sabbath rest from Yahweh's resting after creation but would not have observed it until now. As slaves in Egypt, they would have worked seven days out of the week. However, Yahweh, in His care for them, was blessing them with a day of rest and preparing them for the giving of the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). Thus, this command would have been a relief rather than a burden.

The narrator adds that the bread tasted like honey wafers. The ancient Near East did not have sugar, but they did have honey. Raw honey is incredibly sweet and tastes better than processed honey from the grocery store. In a culture where they were not used to sweet, sugary foods and where honey required a lot more effort to obtain than in modern times, this would have been a very delightful bread to eat. It is the narrator's way of saying this was the best bread that they had ever had.<sup>57</sup>

**16:32-34** Yahweh then commanded Moses to gather an omer (about 3.5 liters) of the bread in a jar that would be kept by the priests for generations to come as a reminder of how Yahweh graciously provided for Israel despite their ungrateful complaining against Him (Deut. 8:3). Later, when the Ark of the Covenant was built, Aaron placed the jar of bread in the ark (Num. 17:10-11). The "Testimony" is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:10-22).

The narrator states that Yahweh provided for their physical needs every single day for the entire forty years that the people were in the wilderness. What is amazing about this is that while 38 years of these years in the wilderness were a judgment against them for their lack of faith in Him, He still cared and provided for them during this time.

**17:1-3** Yahweh brought Israel to Rephidim to see if they had learned from their experience at Marah. The location of Rephidim is unknown. Ex. 19:1-2 suggests that it is near Sinai. At Marah, the water was contaminated, and Yahweh demonstrated to them that He could purify the water. At Rephidim, there was no water at all, and He wanted to see if they believed that He could provide water out of nothing like He had provided the bread out of nothing. He was attempting to grow their faith and push them further into trusting Him.

Here the people's complaining escalated to quarreling and accusing Yahweh of bringing them out into the wilderness to kill them. This is a messed-up accusation, considering all that He had done for them. They were accusing Him of being so twisted that He would save them just so that He could kill them. The Hebrew word *vayyarev*, translated as "quarreling or contended," carries a legal connotation of bringing litigation against someone. The people wanted to put Yahweh on

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<sup>57</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 384.

trial for trying to kill them, but since they could not, they brought charges against Moses. They had gone from a complaining and lack of trust in Yahweh to an unbelief in Him and an assassination of His character.

**17:4-6** When Moses stood before the crowd, he feared that they would stone him. Once again, he went to Yahweh for protection and guidance. The character of Yahweh stands out here, for He acted in a way contrary to how they were accusing Him of being. With great patience and care, He sent Moses back out to the people in order to provide for their needs. Yet He also wanted to make it clear who was the authority among the people. By sending Moses out with the staff of Yahweh and the elders surrounding them, he made it clear that the people had no authority and no right to put Moses on trial. Yet in passing them by, He showed that they were not to be put on trial for their actions either.

Instead, Yahweh stood before the people on the rock as if He were on trial and commanded Moses to strike the rock in judgment with the staff of Yahweh in the same way that he had struck the Nile in judgment. To stand before someone in the ancient Near East was the language of an inferior in the presence of a superior. Nowhere else in the Bible does Yahweh stand before someone else. Yahweh was allowing the rock to be struck while He stood on it. This meant He was allowing something else to bear their judgment instead of them. When the rock was struck, it miraculously provided a stream of water for all the Israelites. They all drank as much as they desired and were satisfied.

From this point on, the rock would be used throughout the First Testament as a metaphor of Yahweh's power, protection, provision, and care for His people. Yahweh is continuously called the Rock (Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:4, 18, 30-31; 2 Sam. 2:2; 22:32, 47; 23:3; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14; 27:5; 28:1; 31:2, 3; 40:2, 9; 62:2, 6, 7; 71:3; 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1; Isa. 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8; Hab. 1:12). There are also several places where the authors of the Bible remind Israel of what Yahweh had done for them in Ex. 17:5-6, making this a significant act of Yahweh's provision in Israel's history (Deut. 8:15; 32:51; Ps. 78:15, 16, 20; 105:41; 114:8; Isa. 32:2; 48:21). In the First Testament, Yahweh also referred to Himself as a "spring of living water" (Isa. 44:3-4), and He stated that His Spirit was like water that He would pour out on His people (Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28, 29; Zech. 12:10-13:1).

In the Second Testament, Christ alluded to himself as being the rock—in the parable of the two builders (Matt. 7:24-27 [Lk. 6:46-49])—and told Peter that He would build the church on Himself as the rock (Matt. 16:18). Finally, Paul and Peter both explicitly state that Christ is not only the Rock but the very rock of Ex. 17:5-6 (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8). He was deliberately connecting Christ to this event in Israel's history and the theological concept of Yahweh as the Rock of Israel. The Second Testament also refers to water as symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and it was Christ who brought this. (Matt. 3:16 [Mk. 1:10]; Jn. 3:5; 4:10, 13-14; 7:37-39; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 10:22; 1 Jn. 5:6). The Bible also makes clear that water baptism is a symbol of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11 [Mk. 1:8; Jn. 1:26]; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 3:21).

The passage that stands out the most in the Second Testament is when Paul specifically states that this rock in Ex. 17:5-6 was Christ. In the same way that Yahweh allowed the rock, instead of Israel, to be struck, Yahweh allowed Christ, instead of humanity, to be struck on the cross. And just as the rock provided water in the wilderness of Israel, so water came from Christ's side (Jn.

19:34; 1 Jn. 5:6), a metaphor for the Holy Spirit (the water of life) being poured out on humanity (Acts 2) as a result of Christ's dying for our sins so that we could have life.

**17:7** This place in the wilderness became known as Massah, which means "testing" or "proof." Meribah means "murmuring," "dissatisfaction," or "contention." Massah refers to the Israelites' action toward Yahweh, and Meribah refers to their action toward Moses. They failed to believe that Yahweh was among them as He had promised He would be.

**17:8-9** Amalek, or the Amalekites, were a vicious, military, fighting people who roamed the deserts of northern Sinai and southern Negev (south of Canaan). They were descendants of Esau's grandson, after whom they had been named (Gen. 36:12). The reason for Amalek's attack is not mentioned. All that is important here is that they did attack the people of Yahweh.

Moses instructed Joshua to choose some men and go out and fight Amalek. This is the first time Joshua is mentioned in the Scriptures. Evidently, he was a trusted assistant to Moses, who would eventually become his successor (Ex. 33:11). Joshua's name is actually Hoshea, meaning "savior," but was later changed to Yehoshua, meaning "Yahweh is savior." Joshua was about 45 years old at this time. At this point, no one in Israel had military training, and the majority did not have any military weapons, for just a couple months ago they were slaves. Yet it was not their skill that would gain them victory over Amalek; instead, Yahweh demonstrated his power through Moses holding up the staff of Yahweh on a hill that overlooked the battlefield.

**17:10-13** Moses raised the staff above his head with a hand on each end of the staff. This was a visual reminder to the people that their victory would not come from their own strength but from Yahweh. This is emphasized when Moses lowered his hands and the enemy prevailed against Israel. Because no one can hold their hands up all day, Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur to hold up his hands. So, Joshua and the Israelite army were able to defeat Amalek by the power of Yahweh. Whereas the previous incidents involved an internal conflict, Israel's complaining, this was the first external threat faced since they had left Egypt.

**17:14-16** Yahweh pronounced the extermination of Amalek, adding them to the list of the other nations of Canaan because they had attacked Israel. Though Israel failed to eliminate Amalek for most of their time in the Promised Land, the Amalekites were finally eliminated in Hezekiah's time (1 Chr. 4:34-43).

The significance of the altar was that Moses had recognized that Yahweh, not themselves or the staff, was the source of their victory, and so they worshiped Yahweh. The banner was a flag that the victor could raise over his defeated enemy; Yahweh had become their banner.

"In all the crises the Israelites had faced since they left Egypt, God was teaching them to look to Him. They should do so for deliverance from their enemies (at the Red Sea), for health and healing (at Marah), and for food and guidance (in the wilderness of Sin). They should also do so for water and refreshment (at Massah-Meribah) and for victory over their enemies (at Rephidim). He was teaching them how dependent they were on Him and that they should turn to Him in any and every need (cf. John 15:5)."<sup>58</sup>

**18:1-7** Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit Moses, bringing Moses' wife and sons. The name of Moses' second son, Eliezer ("my God is help"), shows how Moses had changed since the birth of his first son, Gershom ("stranger"). Some have argued that the phrase "sent her

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 91.

away” (Ex. 18:2) communicates that Moses had divorced his wife Zipporah when she departed from him after the circumcision of their son on the way to Egypt (Ex. 4:24-26), especially since he later married a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1). Yet this is not the best way to understand their marriage. First, this Hebrew word *silluh* (“sent away”) is also used in a neutral way in the Bible (1 Kgs. 9:16; Mic. 1:14). Second, the standard term for divorce is the Hebrew word *keritut*. Third, Moses’ marriage to the Cushite woman could have been after the death of Zipporah or a polygamous marriage. Though the Bible makes it clear that polygamy is not His ideal, it is never specifically forbidden or divinely punished (Abraham and Jacob were both polygamous). Fourth, the text here mentions Zipporah as Moses’ wife several times and refers to the boys as his and her sons. This suggests a happy reuniting. And there is no mention of discord between them. Fifth, she is not mentioned as going back with her father at the end of his visit. For whatever reason, the narrator gives very little detail about Moses’ family.<sup>59</sup>

Jethro had heard of what Yahweh had done to Egypt, and Moses confirmed the stories. Jethro blessed Moses and declared that Yahweh was the highest and one true God. Jethro then went out with Moses and sacrificed a burnt offering to Yahweh. Burnt offerings to Yahweh are used in the Bible to refer to conversion. This suggests that Jethro’s declaration of Yahweh as the one true God was a true conversion.

**18:13-27** Moses seemed to be overworked as the only judge over Israel. Moses as the prophet may have felt responsible for hearing the court cases of all the people. Upon seeing this, Jethro gave him advice on how to delegate the load to others. Jethro ended by telling Moses to take this advice to Yahweh and to see if He agreed and would command him to follow Jethro’s advice.

The fact that the narrator says that Moses did *everything* that Jethro had said, communicates that Moses sought Yahweh’s approval of Jethro’s advice. The fact that Moses delegated his responsibilities shows that Yahweh had approved of the advice. Eleven months later, Yahweh came to Moses and commanded him to do the same thing by gathering 70 elders that He would ordain with His spirit to help lead Israel (Num. 11:16-25).

“In times of great crises God always provided men to lead the way to deliverance. Moses is an eloquent example of this very fact. The hand of God providentially prepared this man for this very moment. He was cognizant of Egyptian manners and was therefore able to articulate demands before the King of Egypt. Moses had been trained in military matters and was therefore capable of organizing this large mass of people for movement across the deserts. His training in Egypt had given him the ability to write and therefore provided a means by which these accounts would be recorded for eternity. Forty years of desert experience had given Moses the know-how of travel in these areas as well as the kind of preparation that would be needed to survive the desert heat. All of this a mere accident of history? No indeed. The history before us is a supreme example of God’s sovereign ability to accomplish His purposes for His people. Those who belong to Him have every reason to be confident that that which God has promised He will perform.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 405-408.

<sup>60</sup> John J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, pp. 189-90.

## II. Yahweh Gives His Covenant Law and Tabernacle (19:1–40:38)

This division of Exodus records the events associated with Yahweh's making Israel into His chosen nation. Having redeemed Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He now appeared to them at Mount Sinai and officially adopted Israel as His firstborn son. No one in all of history or in any sacred writings of the ancient world had ever been brought into the presence of a god in the way that Yahweh brought Israel into His awesome presence. They saw Yahweh's awesome power yet did not die but were instead invited into a covenantal relationship with him. It is here that the transcendence and intimate love of Yahweh can both be seen together in one event that is found with no other being in the universe. In the first part of this division (Ex. 19–25) Yahweh clearly laid out the covenant requirements in the Ten Commandments and the Covenant Code. Israel responded with enthusiastic agreement and willingly entered into the Mosaic Covenant with Yahweh.

The giving and building of the tabernacle is then the central focus of the remainder of the book of Exodus (Ex. 25–40). The tabernacle became Yahweh's first step to restoring the Garden of Eden. Whereas Adam and Eve originally had total access to Yahweh, humanity no longer had that due to their sin. However, Yahweh had chosen Israel in order to begin restoring that relationship. In building the tabernacle, Yahweh created a model of heaven on earth that would give Israel access to Him (Heb. 8:1-5; 9:11, 24). However, that access was limited due to sin, and the only way to gain access was through strict obedience to the Law and through the continual atonement of sin through the sacrificial system. The word *tabernacle* means, "to dwell with." Thus, this was how Yahweh would dwell with Israel.

Yet in the middle of Yahweh giving instructions for building a place that Israel could dwell with Him they violated their covenant with Yahweh by worshiping the golden calf. Israel had not even entered the house of Yahweh yet and they were already going after another god. Despite this broken covenant, and through the intercession of Moses Yahweh would restore His covenant with Israel and allow them to build the tabernacle. Exodus 19-40 forms a concentric parallel where, in the midst of Yahweh giving Israel the instructions for the tabernacle, Israel rebelled against Yahweh and violated the very heart of His Law.

**A** Covenant delivered (19:1-24:11)

**B** Tabernacle planned (24:12-27:21)

**C** Priestly instructions (28:1-30:38)

**D** Craftsmen's direction (31:1-11)

**E** Sabbath instructions (31:12-18)

**F** Covenant broken (32:1-35)

**F'** Covenant renewed (33:1-34:35)

**E'** Sabbath reminded (35:1-3)

**D'** Craftsmen and construction (35:4-38:31)

**C'** Priests prepared (39:1-43)

**B'** Tabernacle completed (40:1-33)

**A'** Covenant sealed (40:34-38)

## A. The Preparations for the Covenant (19:1-25)

While the pagan gods of the ancient Near East were thought to dwell on mountains, Yahweh actually *revealed* himself to Israel from a mountain. In this way, He demonstrated His deity and sovereignty over the pagan gods. Whereas the gods stayed upon their mountains, Yahweh would come down to the people and dwell among them through the Law and the tabernacle. Later, Yahweh would dwell in the land of Israel on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, showing that He is not limited to just one region as were the pagan gods.

**19:1-2** It had been fifty days since Israel had left Egypt, and they were now at Mount Sinai to receive His Law. They spent eleven months at the mountain receiving instructions before going to the Promised Land. Ultimately, scholars do not know where Mount Sinai is located, nor many of the named deserts and regions surrounding the mountain. Traditionally, Christians have believed Mount Sinai to be at the southern point of the Sinai Peninsula, based on a comment in Josephus's writings that it was the highest mountain in the region.<sup>61</sup>

**19:3-6** Just as Yahweh had promised Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:12), He had now brought Moses back to Mount Sinai with Israel in order to worship Him there. Now all of Israel was gathered around Mount Sinai, and Yahweh called Moses up the mountain to tell him what to say to the people and to prepare them for receiving the Law and entering into the Mosaic Covenant. Yahweh's declaration in Ex. 19:3-6 is the most significant and foundational passage in the Torah and the Bible. These words reveal Yahweh's character and relationship with Israel, form Israel's identity, and summarize the Mosaic Covenant.

“Without doubt Exodus 19:4-6 is the most theologically significant text in the book of Exodus, for it is the linchpin between the patriarchal promises of the sonship of Israel and the Sinaitic Covenant whereby Israel became the servant nation of Yahweh.”<sup>62</sup>

Yahweh began by reminding Israel that it was He who had delivered them from Egypt, lifted them on eagle's wings, and brought them to Himself. There was no other god who had done this for them. The imagery of the eagle paints a beautiful picture of a mother eagle carrying her young on her wings, and when they fall as they are learning to fly, she catches them on her wings (Isa. 40:31). Yahweh made it clear that Israel had done nothing in their own strength to save themselves from Egypt, and they had nothing to deserve His rescue. He had carried them out of Egypt; He had done all the work for them. Notice that He had already saved them before He gave them the Law and before they ever had obeyed Him. He had already accepted and adopted them as His own before they received or obeyed the Law. Now, in light of that, they were to obey His Law out of a love and gratefulness for who He is and what He has done. Obedience to the Law is the result of salvation. Therefore, the purpose of the Law was not to gain acceptance or salvation from Yahweh, for He had already done that. And as the story of Israel continues to develop, they will fail miserably over and over, and yet He will continue to love, accept, and save them.

Next, Yahweh called them to obey the requirements of the covenant that He was about to make with them. The if-then statement in these verses reveals that the Mosaic Covenant that Yahweh was making with the people was conditional, based on their obedience to His requirements in

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<sup>61</sup> Flavius Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*, p. 2:12.

<sup>62</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 32. See also William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, pp. 80-81.

order to receive the blessings. This is the same expectation that a father would have for his children. However, as already mentioned, this obedience will gain them not salvation but rather covenant blessings and a full life. Nowhere does He mention salvation as one of the blessings. If they were obedient, then He promised them three blessings.

First, they would be a “special possession/treasure” belonging to Yahweh. The Hebrew word for “treasure” equates to the private wealth of a king. When one became king, he owned everything, the lands, the armies, and the people’s lives. This treasure was his most valued and private treasure for himself and only his closest friends to enjoy. It was the treasure he kept closest to himself. Yahweh states as King over all creation that all the nations belong to Him but that Israel would be His special treasure (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). This means Israel would enjoy a unique relationship with Yahweh compared with all other nations, due to the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel was to be His firstborn. In the ancient Near East, this idea of “special possession” was used only of objects or when the gods chose a king to be their special possession. Only Yahweh uses it to refer to an entire people group.

Second, they would be a “kingdom of priests,” which means three things. First, Israel would have special access to Yahweh that others did not have. The priests were the only ones allowed to enter the temple of the gods and commune with them. This priesthood was restricted to a certain family line. Yet Yahweh was making them a *kingdom* of priests. They would all have access to Him. Second, a priest was responsible for representing Yahweh to the people by their character conforming to His and by teaching the people. And they were responsible for atoning for the people’s sins and bringing them into the presence of Yahweh. Israel was to be the priests of Yahweh to all the nations, representing Yahweh, teaching them about Him, and bringing them into the covenant community of Yahweh and Israel (Deut. 33:9, 10). Third, they could only do this as a unified kingdom and community. As a kingdom of priests, Israel was to mediate revelation from Yahweh and the presence of Yahweh. The nations were to come to the light to gain access to the presence of Yahweh, manifested in Israel, and to learn of Yahweh’s revelation of Himself (Isa. 42; 49). Only when Israel loved Yahweh and each other in a radical, unified way would the world see who Yahweh was in them.

Third, they would be a “holy nation,” separate and unique from all the other nations. But what does *holiness* mean? The Bible often communicates holiness as a communicable attribute of Yahweh (that is, characteristics of God that we as His image bearers can share—love, gentleness, etc.). Yet the Bible also seems to communicate different concentric circles of meanings of holiness in that it is one of Yahweh’s non-communicable attributes (that is, characteristics of Yahweh that we as His image bearers *cannot* share—omnipotent, omniscient, etc.). The question is, what does the holiness of Yahweh mean at its most concentrated center?

Some have understood holiness by its etymology, or what it means. Holiness is then defined as being separate, as in Yahweh is separate from all things. But this is very lacking in its meaning when you get to the throne room of Yahweh in Isa. 6 and the angels are declaring Yahweh as separate, separate, separate. This sounds very lacking and unimpressive if this is all they are saying. Others define it in terms of morality. But once again are the angels really declaring Yahweh as moral, moral, moral?

In its most concentrated meaning, holiness is an adjective reserved for Yahweh alone. The angels are declaring that Yahweh is holy, holy, holy. Only He is truly God, and He is God in a way unlike anything in all of creation. He is utterly unique and supreme in His holiness.

As you then move out from the core of its meaning, that which peculiarly belongs to Yahweh is declared to be holy. It may or may not be moral; the shovel that was used to remove the ashes from the altar was declared holy (Ex. 27:23; 29:37), not because it is moral but because it is reserved peculiarly for Yahweh's service and nothing else. Anything else is common.

So, if Yahweh's people are declared to be holy because they were reserved peculiarly for Yahweh's service, then it is going to affect how they think, which bears on how they behave and speak and relate to others in their relationships. This is because as His image bearers they can reflect the holy character of Yahweh in ways that the articles of the temple could not. Thus, a moral element is introduced to the way they think about themselves as their lives align with the character of Yahweh and they reflect the Master's holiness to the world.

The idea of holiness is then defined in two ways. Israel was definitionally and positionally holy, for they had been set aside for Yahweh's use. If they do not live like they belong to Yahweh, then they are contradicting the very nature of what Yahweh has called them to be as His redeemed kingdom of priests. If they are positionally His, then the work and character of Yahweh flows out of them, and they are functionally holy in the way that they behave and relate to others.

Thus, holiness is at its core a non-communicable attribute. Only Yahweh is God. But they are declared to be holy because they are associated with Him and are used by Him. The minute they step away from Him and His will, they become common and profane. To be holy is not to achieve a status but to live a life worthy of that status.

Inevitably, as Israel found their identity in Him more and more, this would set up conflicts with the other nations, religions, and beliefs with which they could associate themselves. There would be overlaps covered by common grace, but ultimately there would be conflicts. One cannot be completely holy in Yahweh and find any identity in another nation, religion, hobbies, or values of the world; all these things are passing away (1 Peter 1:22-25). Israel's reconciling these earthly identities with their identity in Yahweh all depended on how much they understood Yahweh and drew close to Him. Ultimately, to truly be holy as Yahweh is holy is to be weird and peculiar in the world's eyes, and thus a foreigner.

Yahweh wanted to mold Israel into a unique and radically different community from anything else the world had created or seen. The pagan nations built cities around a hill or ziggurat on which the gods lived, separate from the people. Only a few privileged people had access to these temples, and even then they had no real relationship with the gods. They fed the immoral and disinterested gods with sacrifices in hope of gaining some kind of blessing. The gods blessed the people so that the people would continue to feed them. Yahweh, on the other hand, stepped into the lives of His undeserving and disobedient people in order to deliver them from their bondage because He had heard their cries of misery. He then chose to enter into a relational covenant with His people, giving them all access to His presence as He dwelt in the midst of their camp in the tabernacle. He then gave them a Law that valued the lives and rights of all classes and people, unlike the law codes of the nations around them. This Law called them to love the foreigners, the oppressed, and those who had not achieved. They did not have to earn Yahweh's approval. If Israel truly lived holy lives, they would look weird to the nations, but they also would be attractive to the religiously and socially oppressed people of the nations. Then they could truly be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:4) as priests who served and brought people out of the nations and into this covenant community of Yahweh called Israel, just like Yahweh had done with

Abraham (Gen. 11:27-12:4). Then these people would be Israelites too, a special treasure of Yahweh.

Yahweh had given them a unique and high status as His people with a lofty mission and purpose. It was up to them to adopt this status as their identity. If they did, they would receive tremendous and abundant blessings. If they chose autonomy and a different identity, then they would lose their blessings. The status was forever theirs, but they had to choose whether to own it as their identity and live it out.

Given the character of Yahweh—a relational, covenantal, and unconditionally loving God—that had been revealed already in the garden of Eden, the lives of the patriarchs, and Israel’s exodus out of Egypt, one can easily say that Yahweh wanted Israel to enter this covenant with Him and obey Him not out of fear or an attempt to manipulate Him but as an expression of their love for this radically unique God. When you are truly attracted to or in love with someone, you find out what pleases them; you are trying to find their desire and will, and then you just give it. You give it to them and love them, not because you feel obligated but because them being happy is what makes you happy. The Law begins with Yahweh saying He loved them, He heard their cries, and He responded by saving them. Now He was asking them to reciprocate. In the Law He will clearly communicate that He desires love, relationships, justice, and deliverance—these are what make Him happy. So how could Israel not love this God, who desired these things and demonstrated so in their lives? Now He asked them to put their happiness in Him and obey because they desired nothing else than to please this good God. This is what humanity had in the garden, this is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, and this meets the basic needs and desires of humanity—acceptance, safety, and purpose.

**19:7-8a** Moses then came down to the people of Israel and told them everything that Yahweh had said. After seeing Yahweh at work in their lives and hearing what He offered, they unanimously agreed to the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant and to obeying all the requirements of the Law.

“The reaction of the Israelites to God’s promises was understandably positive. They wanted what God offered them. However, they overestimated their own ability to keep the covenant, and they underestimated God’s standards for them. This twin error is traceable to a failure to appreciate their own sinfulness and God’s holiness. The Mosaic Law would teach them to appreciate both.”<sup>63</sup>

**19:8b-15** Moses then went back up to Yahweh a second time to communicate the words of the people to Him. Now that Israel had agreed to the Mosaic Covenant, Yahweh was going to come down to them on the mountain in a dense cloud. When he does come down in Ex. 19:16-19, it will also be in fire, thunder, lightning, and the shaking of the mountain. This is an amplified version of the pillar of fire and cloud that led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness. And as He establishes the Mosaic Covenant, He uses the imagery of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:17-18). In the ancient Near East, only the gods dwelt within the clouds and rode on them. Yahweh not only revealed Himself to Israel through imagery they would understand, but He also validated Moses as His chosen representative before them.

“Sanctify” or “consecrate” means to make holy, to make oneself acceptable in order to be close to Yahweh. The washing of Israel’s clothes would prepare them mentally and spiritually for

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 97.

coming into the presence of a righteous and holy God. Likewise, there were boundaries of how close they were permitted to get to Yahweh because of their sin. The penalty was death for the one who disrespected the boundaries that Yahweh had placed on them for their protection. The penalty of death emphasized not only how serious Yahweh was about their obeying Him, but also how holy He is. Sin cannot survive in the presence of pure righteousness.

Moses then went down and commanded the people to do all that Yahweh had commanded and also told them not to engage in sexual activities. The abstinence from sex during this time communicated how important this event was and that it was to be their sole focus.

**19:16-19** The fire, lightning, and cloud of smoke were symbols of divine sovereignty. Lightning was seen as so supernatural in the ancient Near East that many of the people referred to it as the fire of the gods. This is particularly significant after Yahweh's defeat of the Egyptian gods, for when they later entered the land of the Canaanites, He would defeat the Canaanite *storm* god Ba'al. The fire and earthquake were symbols of judgment and portrayed Yahweh as sovereign judge over Israel. The text makes it clear that He did not descend in the fire but in the form of the fire.

When the people saw Yahweh descend in this form, they trembled. This would have been an awesome sight to see in a natural event, let alone as the form of the most holy and powerful divine being in the universe. Moses brought the people up to the base of the mountain to stand before and under the awesome presence of Yahweh. As Moses stood with the people, he and Yahweh spoke with each other before all the people. Israel was standing before Yahweh and hearing Him speak. This was an event no one had ever experienced and appears in no other histories.

**19:20-25** Moses went back up the mountain a third time, and Yahweh told Moses to reemphasize the boundaries to the people. The necessity to go up the mountain and then back down to tell the people the same thing shows the great significance of Yahweh's righteous and holy presence, how serious it is for sin to come into the presence of righteousness. There is no way that the sinner can survive this encounter (Isa. 6:5-6). This not only emphasizes the glory of Yahweh but also His love for Israel, that no harm would come to them, and that He might redeem them one day through His Son and bring them into His full presence without any danger.

Only the priests, those who had dedicated themselves to holiness, could come closer than the people. The priests at this point were not the tribe of Levi. The only official priests were Moses, Aaron, and his sons. This may have also included some of the firstborn who were redeemed in the Passover in Egypt.

## Excursus: The Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant was the fourth covenant Yahweh made with humanity. The Jewish people of the Second Testament also referred to it as the Mosaic Law or just the Law. Unlike the previous covenants that were simple with only a few requirements for both parties, the Mosaic Covenant was a much more complex and expansive covenant that governed every aspect of the lives of Yahweh's covenant people. Here, we will discuss the nature, the purpose, and Jesus Christ's fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant.

### The Nature of the Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant was an outgrowth of the Abrahamic Covenant, which Yahweh had made with Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12; 15; 17). The Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant into which one entered merely by placing their faith and trust in Yahweh. Faith in Yahweh through the Abrahamic Covenant brought one into an unconditional salvific relationship with Yahweh. The Mosaic Covenant, on the other hand, was a conditional covenant that governed the lives and conduct of the people of the Abrahamic Covenant. Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant determined the blessings and quality of life one would receive from Yahweh. One could not enter the Mosaic Covenant without first entering the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was never meant to, nor had the power to, grant salvation or transform the hearts of the people. It was intended to teach the people what it meant to live a righteous life and maintain order in their families and nation so Yahweh could dwell with them and so they could know Him and receive His rest and blessings.

### *The Structure of the Mosaic Covenant*

The Mosaic Covenant had five parts—the tabernacle, the law, the sacrificial system, the sabbath festivals, and the priesthood. These parts of the covenant are detailed in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The parts of the Mosaic Covenant brought order and life to Israel by governing the way Yahweh's covenant people lived and the means, space, and time whereby they were able to come into His presence.

**The tabernacle** was the heart and focus of the Mosaic Covenant, for the tabernacle was the sacred space where Yahweh and the people came to dwell with each other in a covenant relationship. Tabernacles and temples in the ancient world were places for divine residence, not just worship. From the very beginning of creation in the Garden of Eden, Yahweh had joined heaven and earth together so that He could dwell with His creation on earth and they could experience an intimate relationship with Him. But this was lost due to humanity's sin. One cannot have a vulnerable and connected relationship with someone where there is offense and broken trust.

So Yahweh created a good and sacred place in the tabernacle, where He could dwell with His people and they could enter His presence. This space allowed Him to dwell among the people in the land of Israel and to protect and bless them with a full life in the land. The way He made His "physical" presence known to the people was as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, as it hovered above and reached down into the tabernacle. The tabernacle also let the people enter His presence so they could experience His holiness (unparallel uniqueness and splendor). This, not the Law, was the heart and focus of the Mosaic Covenant. All the other parts created the means by which the people could enter the tabernacle and experience Yahweh's presence and blessings.

The ultimate goal of the covenant was to establish the presence of Yahweh on earth to maintain order in the land and to create a space where they could have a relationship with Him.

**The Law** taught how one was to live righteously so that Yahweh could dwell in the land and the people could enter His holy and righteous presence in the tabernacle. The Law had three different levels to it.

The first level was the *essence* of the Law: to love Yahweh with all of one's heart, life, and energy (Deut. 6:4-5) and to love one's neighbor as themselves (Lev. 19:18). These two commands are the entirety of the Law; every other commandment is just an extrapolation of these two. Jesus said all the other commands hang on these two (Matt. 22:36-40). The only way to have a healthy relationship of vulnerability and trust is to subordinate one's selfish desire to the good of others and the community by loving them in a way that benefits them and not oneself. The commands to love Yahweh and others were the essence of the Law, while all the other commands of the next two levels were examples of what it looked like to love.

The second level was the *Ten Commandments* (Ex. 20:1-17), which were general examples of how one was to love Yahweh and love others. The first four were how one was to love Yahweh, and the last six were how one was to love others. And in loving others, one is loving Yahweh. These laws helped one understand better what Yahweh's definition of righteous love was—in contrast to their own autonomous and worldly definition of love. Humans have the tendency to define words in any way they choose, making “love” into whatever they want it to be, even serving their own desire. The Ten Commandments define love and thwart one's definitions of love.

The third level was the *Law Code*, also known as the civil law, which were many specific case-like examples of how one was to live out the Ten Commandments. This included laws like what work looks like on the sabbath or what one ought to do when a neighbor's donkey falls into a hole on your property and gets hurt. These laws were not exhaustive and did not cover every scenario one could face in life, but they taught the people how to die to themselves and think and act in a righteous and loving way toward others. The idea was to take these scenarios and extrapolate the principles into the various scenarios they would encounter as they lived their lives. This is what Jesus meant when He said, in essence, “You have heard ‘do not murder,’ but I say do not be angry with your brother” (Matt. 5:21-22).

It is important to understand that the Law is not about morality or ethics but about reflecting Yahweh's identity and participating with Him in maintaining order in the cosmos. This means obedience is not about being a good person but about knowing and experiencing as much of Yahweh as one can and then joining Him in what He is doing. One's desire to obey Yahweh's commands—to think, speak, and act with righteous love as defined by Yahweh, not ourselves—meant one could live rightly with Yahweh and others. Then He could dwell with them in the land, and they could enter His presence and experience His blessings. Yahweh made it clear in Deuteronomy that He did not want His people to obey out of fear of being punished or desire for a reward but because they loved Him for who He was and that He first loved and redeemed them. He desired that their obedience would be motivated by their love and thankfulness and a desire to know and dwell with Him. If one thinks in this way, then the knowledge that you have wronged Yahweh and are now missing out on what He is doing because of your fractured relationship is a far greater punishment than the physical penalties of the Law.

**The sacrificial system** was the foundation of the Mosaic Covenant, for the sacrifices were how the Mosaic Covenant was inaugurated, the tabernacle was sanctified, and the sins of the people were atoned for when they violated the Law. Because the penalty for sin is death, the only way a person could enter the tabernacle and the presence of a righteous and holy God was by sacrificial atonement, through an animal dying in their place. The death of an animal could never take away their sins completely, but continual sacrifices could temporarily cover their sins so they could dwell with Yahweh.

First, humanity's sin had polluted the whole world, so the only way Yahweh could create a sacred space to dwell in this polluted world was by making sacrifices for each part of the tabernacle. The sacrifices created a sacred space where Yahweh could come down into and dwell in the land of Israel and with His people. Second, the people themselves had to make continual sacrifices for their continual sin so that they could live in the land and enter the tabernacle.

Just as one must make amends for damaging a relationship through repentance, forgiveness, and rebuilding of trust, so the people's costly animal sacrifice demonstrated their repentance and a desire to rebuild trust with Yahweh. Through the sacrifice, they could receive His forgiveness, restore the relationship, and continue to dwell with Him. The sacrificial system is what restored order to the relationship as it facilitated one's repentance.

The sacrifices did not really purify or atone for sin. Rather, the willingness to sacrifice something truly important and valuable to you in order to restore your relationship with Yahweh shows that He is more important to you than that material thing. This act of devotion and sacrifice is a physical demonstration of one's faith. This faith is what restores the relationship. Later, when Jesus comes as the true sacrifice, one finds true and full atonement in their faith in Yahweh that has been demonstrated by their ritual works (Jam. 2:14-26).

**The sabbath festivals** were when the people were to cease from their daily work and enter the presence of Yahweh, either by traveling to the tabernacle to worship Him or by being intentionally aware of His presence in their own communities. Breaking away from the demands of work, from the anxieties and disorder of life, and from their false and failed attempts to bring order without Yahweh, allowed the people to spend time in His presence. On sabbaths, they could rest in Him as the true source of order, rest in His sovereignty and love, celebrate His character and acts of deliverance, and refocus on Him. In returning to their routines, Yahweh was at the center of their life, and they were energized to go back into the world and bring order in alignment with Yahweh's sense of order.

The sabbaths included the weekly sabbath day (every Saturday), the sabbatical year (every seventh year), the year of Jubilee (every fiftieth year, and the seven high sabbath festivals (every year), which were Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, the Festival of Weeks, the Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. Passover, Festival of Weeks, and Tabernacles required the people to journey to the tabernacle/temple every year.

**The priesthood** maintained order within in the parts of the covenant. They were to dedicate themselves to a much higher standard of righteousness in order to serve Yahweh and the people in the tabernacle and in the local communities. They were in charge of maintaining the sacredness of the tabernacle, officiating the animal sacrifices, and ministering to the people.

In summary, each part of the Mosaic Covenant was about maintaining a relationship with Yahweh and order within their communities. Its heart and the focus were the tabernacle, where Yahweh and the people could dwell together. The Law instructed one how to live righteously so they could enter the tabernacle. The sacrificial system atoned for the people's sins so they could re-enter the tabernacle. The sabbaths created a time for the people to rest in Yahweh. And the priesthood mediated between Yahweh and the people so they could have an intimate relationship.

### ***The Blessings and Requirements of the Mosaic Covenant***

The Mosaic Covenant was like the suzerain-vassal treaties of the ancient Near East, where a more powerful king (suzerain) entered into a relationship with a lesser king (vassal). The suzerain owned everything that belonged to the vassal and had authority over the land and people of the vassal. The suzerain would offer protection to the vassal and sometimes began the treaty by gifting land to the vassal. The vassal then aided the suzerain in battles and paid taxes. The suzerain could have different treaties with different vassals, but the vassal could not make a treaty with any other suzerain. Absolute loyalty was demanded of the vassal. This type of treaty laid out laws that the sovereign king imposed on the vassal as well as blessings and curses for the vassal for keeping or breaking the covenant laws. The covenant relationship with Yahweh as sovereign king demanded obedience from Israel, His vassal, in order to maintain and receive the blessings of a relationship with Him. Because He had redeemed them and bought them, they were now indebted to Him.

The blessings for the Mosaic Covenant are found in Ex. 19:3-6. The if-then statement in these verses reveals that the Mosaic Covenant Yahweh was making with Israel was conditional: receiving His blessings was based on their obedience to His requirements. If Israel was obedient, Yahweh promised them three blessings.

First, they would be a “special possession/treasure” belonging to Yahweh (Ex. 19:5). This means Israel would enjoy a unique relationship with Yahweh compared with all other nations, due to the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Second, they would be a “kingdom of priests,” representing Yahweh before the nations (Ex. 19:6). A priest mediates between Yahweh and humankind. Israel would be a holy people who enjoyed access to Yahweh, and they would go to the nations, revealing Yahweh to them and bringing them into the nation of Israel (Deut. 33:9, 10). Israel would not be a kingdom known for its politicians, government, and military but for its faith, righteousness, witness, and God.

Third, they would be a “holy nation,” unique and separate from all the other nations (Ex. 19:6). The word *holy* means unique—unlike anything else in creation. Only Yahweh is unique to all other things in His creation. The only way Israel could be holy is if they lived in a righteous way that was unlike everyone else in the world and allowed themselves to be used by Yahweh in a way that was unique to what the world pursued (Lev. 19:2). Therefore, they would not be like the other nations and thus would be blessed by Yahweh to a far greater level wholistically as a nation. This was meant to attract the people of other nations to leave their culture and join the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.

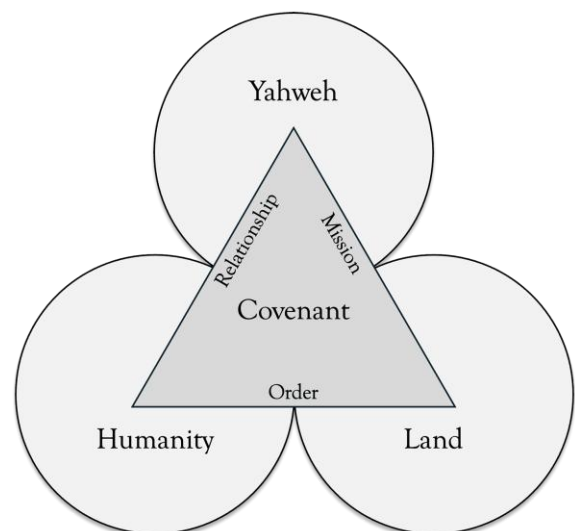
After Yahweh stated the blessings (Ex. 19:3-6), He went on to list the requirements in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). In Deut. 28:1-14 Yahweh stated that if Israel maintained the covenant, then He would give them life to the fullest and that they would have a life of blessings of

protection, prosperity, and joy in the land. But there were also consequences for disobedience. Deut. 28 goes on and states that pretty much the opposite would happen to them if they disobeyed, resulting in being removed from the land and the presence of Yahweh, just as Adam and Eve had been removed from the garden (Gen. 3). The violation of the covenant would bring death to their prosperity, death to their relationship with Yahweh and others, and maybe even physical death.

The Israelites entered into the Mosaic Covenant acknowledging all of this (Ex. 24), and so Yahweh expected obedience and had every right to bring judgments for failure to obey. The first reason Yahweh gave Israel for why they were to obey Him was because He is the only God who cared so much for them and was able to redeem them from their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 19:3-4). Lev. 18:1-5 gives three more reasons for why Israel must obey Yahweh's commands: because He was their God, because it would keep them from becoming like the surrounding cultures, and because by it they may live. The idea of "live" in Lev. 18:5 means to have physical life, as well as Yahweh's covenant blessings of eternal life as defined in Ezek. 20:11. Ezekiel describes the rebellion of the Israelites in the wilderness, after which Yahweh judged them and destroyed them. Because they failed to obey Yahweh, they did not receive His covenant blessings of life. Faithfulness to Yahweh's Mosaic Covenant would result in a full and prosperous life in the Promised Land, along with the ever-abundant blessings of Yahweh. However, a disobedient life would result in suffering, death, and exile from the land.

The tangible sign of the Mosaic Covenant was their keeping of the sabbaths. Every time they ceased from their work and made an intentional effort to enter Yahweh's presence, they would be reminded of who Yahweh was, who they were in relation to Him, and how they were to be holy like He was holy (Lev. 19:2). Circumcision was the sign the Abrahamic Covenant, and the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 31:12-18). Because the Abrahamic Covenant is built into the Mosaic Covenant, circumcision became an individual sign of participation in the Mosaic Covenant, while keeping the Sabbath was the corporate sign.

The three most important things in Bible are Yahweh, humanity, and the land. Yahweh created land and then created humanity out of the land, placing humanity in the land to rule and maintain the order of the land. Only in the land can humans live, and it is in the land that Yahweh and humanity have a relationship with each other. Yahweh's covenant relationship with humanity was the only thing that bound the three and brought blessings to humanity and the land. Only the covenant could teach one how to function and how to obey according to how Yahweh had designed the universe, resulting in a thriving and flourishing life. Just as pouring water into the oil pan of a car will cause the engine to experience extreme friction and heat, seize up, and die, so it is when one chooses to function—think, speak, and act—in a way that is contrary to Yahweh's will and design for creation. That person's life and relationships will experience extreme friction and anxiety, brokenness, and death.



Thus, obedience to the covenant brought order within humanity and in the land so that they would function according to design. This then allowed for humanity to have a healthy and intimate relationship with Yahweh. When one is functioning according to their design and in right alignment with Yahweh, then they can truly adopt their God-given status and identity and can know and fulfill Yahweh's mission for them—bringing and maintaining order, goodness, and life in the land. The Mosaic Covenant was meant to give instructions to Israel on how to restore the relationship that was lost in the garden. Only when Israel was adhering to the covenant could they experience the blessings of the covenant. Being Yahweh's holy people would bring order to their lives, being His special possession would restore the relationship, and being His kingdom of priests would be their mission.

## **The Purpose of the Mosaic Covenant**

As noted above, the purpose of the Law was not to grant salvation, for one can never earn salvation through their own works (Gal. 2:16; 3:2). The primary purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was to bring and maintain order to the nation of Israel in the midst of a chaotic and sinful world so that the people could dwell with Yahweh and have life to the fullest. Genesis reveals that in the beginning Yahweh had created a good and orderly creation in which He could dwell with humanity. Yahweh then made Adam and Eve vice regents over His creation to join Him relationally in maintaining the order of creation. However, they chose instead to exercise autonomy (self-law) and define for themselves what was good and right. This led to their sin, which brought chaos to the world because their laws—their definitions of what was right and good—were flawed and self-seeking. As a result, Yahweh removed His presence from creation and humanity, and humanity lost the right to rule over creation. The rest of Genesis shows that, due to humanity's sin, they were unable to maintain order in creation. So Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham to prepare him and his descendants for when He would come and redeem them, dwell with them, and bring the Mosaic Covenant, which, through its righteous laws, would bring order to their nation and lives. The Mosaic Covenant was meant to teach Israel how to think, speak, and act in a righteous way so they could maintain order in their nation and thus experience life to the fullest with Yahweh. This was accomplished in three ways.

First, the Law was given to reveal the righteousness and holiness of Yahweh (Ex. 19:23; Rom. 7:12; 1 Pet. 1:15) and His standard of righteousness for His people to live by (Ex. 19:6; 22:31; 31:13; Ps. 24:3-5). As sinners surrounded by sinners, humanity had no real idea what righteousness looked like. For the first time ever, humanity was officially given the requirements of what Yahweh expected of them. As they studied and submitted to the Law, they would see the righteousness of Yahweh, but they would also learn what it meant for themselves to be righteous. As Israel pursued Yahweh's laws and became righteous, it would make them a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6), and they would be visibly different from the pagan nations surrounding them. As a result of their obedience, they would not only be avoiding the ways of the pagans, but their lives would be a lot more righteous, thus bringing greater blessings into their lives. The pagans might then see their lives and the blessings, be attracted to them, and want to know the God the Israelites knew and followed, who was greater in power and love than their gods. But this was the problem; Israel was not able to do this, for no one can meet the requirements of the Law.

Second, this righteous standard of Yahweh would reveal the sinfulness of man (Matt. 5:20; Rom. 7:7-13; Gal. 3:19). As one tried to meet the requirements of the Law, they would find, time after time, that they could not meet the expectations of the Law. Not only this, but one would find

that, now that they knew what was expected of them, they would want to do the opposite, even if there had been no desire to oppose the Law before they knew what was right. This instinct to rebel is like the desire one might suddenly feel to ride their bike through someone's grass after seeing a sign telling them not to; they would have not even thought about it if the sign had not been there. As one continually falls short of the expectations of the Law (Rom. 3:23) and even rebels against it, they are forced to face their own sinfulness. Thus they bring judgment upon themselves, for they know the Law but do not obey the Law (Gal. 3:9-10). This failure would reveal their need for Yahweh and, eventually, for the savior He would send one day (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 8:2-4). The point is that Yahweh's standard would keep driving one back into His presence for atonement and dependence upon Him to maintain righteousness, order, and goodness in their lives. When one was faced with the reality that they could not live out the requirements of the Law, they realized they needed help to do so and a savior from their sins and from the judgment of the Law. So, Jesus Himself was hidden within the Law, the sacrificial system, and the tabernacle, ready to be revealed in His coming (Luke 24:26-27). Those who were willing to study and see the Law for what it truly was would see Jesus, and when He came, they would recognize Him and run to Him as their Savior.

## **The Fulfillment of the Mosaic Covenant**

The Second Testament makes it clear that the Mosaic Law is good and beneficial for teaching and correcting today but, at the same time, that Jesus fulfilled it, and the believers are no longer under the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. Romans 6–7, Galatians 3–5, and Hebrews 5–10 are the best passages in the Second Testament that unpack how the believers are no longer under the Law but are in Jesus Christ. Reading through these chapters before reading further in this document will give you necessary and helpful context for what will be discussed.

It is important to understand that the Mosaic Covenant cannot and was never intended to bring salvation. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that if the priests and sacrificial system of the Mosaic Covenant could have brought perfection to Yahweh's people, then there would have been no need for Jesus to come and die for the sins of humanity (Heb. 7:11). Instead, Jesus is able to save completely—in a way that the Mosaic Covenant could not (Heb. 7:25; 9:9, 15; 10:1-4) because the blood of animals cannot take away sin and cannot save anyone. That is why they had to make the animal sacrifices over and over again (Heb. 10:4, 11). Paul also makes the point that the Law cannot justify anyone; one can be saved only by faith (Gal. 3:11). Nowhere does the Bible even hint that the Mosaic Covenant could save anyone. It is clear throughout the Bible that only by faith in Jesus Christ and in His death and resurrection can one be saved (Gal. 3:7-11; 5:6, 26; Eph. 2:8-9).

The whole point of the Mosaic Covenant was to show Israel how to live righteously through the Law and atone for their sins through the sacrificial system so that Yahweh could dwell with them in tabernacle. Yet no one could meet the requirements of the Law (Rom. 3:20, 23; Gal. 3:10; Jam. 2:10); the animal sacrifices could never really atone for sin (Heb. 7:26-28; 9:9-14; 10:1-4, 11-14); and the pillar of fire in a tent was not a true dwelling with Yahweh in an intimate relationship (Heb. 4:14-16; 8:1-6; 9:6-14). This is why Jesus came and said He had not come to abolish the Mosaic Covenant but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). Jesus did not want to abolish and do away with the Mosaic Covenant as if there was something wrong with the way that Yahweh deigned it. The Law was good and useful because it had come from Yahweh (Rom. 7:7). There was nothing wrong with or lacking in the Mosaic Covenant in what it was created to do and

accomplish. But because the Mosaic Covenant did not save anyone and no one could fulfill its requirements, Jesus came to do what no one else could.

Jesus came to meet the requirements of the Mosaic Law and thus fulfill its requirements. Only Jesus as the perfect God-man could live the righteous life that the Law required (Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 3:13-14), so becoming the perfect sacrifice (Heb. 7:26-28; 9:12-14, 25-28; 10:1-4), thus being allowed to enter into and dwell in the full presence of Yahweh, thus becoming the superior tabernacle and Sabbaths (Heb. 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 8:1-6; 9:6-14, 23-24). He could also be the perfect and eternal high priest (Heb. 5:1-10; 7:11-12) and sacrifice because He gave Himself willingly as a sinless sacrifice, once and for all, to atone for the sins of all of humanity (Heb. 7:23-28; 9:11-14; 10:1-4, 11-14). In becoming the true incarnation of Israel, what Israel could never be, He met and fulfilled every requirement of the Mosaic Covenant.

The author of Hebrews states that because the sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant failed to atone or perfect any human, a better and more perfect sacrifice had to be offered up. And because the Mosaic Covenant had been built on the sacrificial system (as mentioned above), then when there was a change in the sacrifice—from the animals required by the Mosaic Covenant to the life of Jesus in the New Covenant—there must also be a change in the Law, tabernacle, and priesthood built on that sacrificial system (Heb. 7:11-22). For if there is a different foundation—the sacrifice of Jesus—then what is built on it will also be different—the Law, tabernacle, Sabbaths, and priesthood. There is therefore no more need for the Mosaic Covenant (Rom. 7:1-6).

This is why the believers are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant. The author of Hebrews quotes Jer. 31:31-34, making the point that even the Mosaic Covenant itself spoke of a day when it would be done away with and replaced by the New Covenant, because Israel could not obey the Mosaic Covenant and needed something that would give them the desire and ability to actually obey Yahweh. The New Covenant is superior because the people of the New Covenant will have the Law and righteousness written on their hearts. Everyone will know Yahweh intimately because He will be living in their hearts. Jeremiah and the other prophets are referring to the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 11:18-21; Joel 2:28-32). This is the Law and glory of Yahweh now dwelling in the covenant people's hearts as the new tabernacle, for they are in Christ (Act. 2:1-12).

The Law of the Mosaic Covenant was only words written on stone tablets and gave humans neither the desire nor power to obey, nor did they speak to every scenario a human could face. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit not only gives the believers the desire and power to obey by transforming them (Rom. 12:1-4), but He also can speak to every scenario they will ever face, for He is a living being who is always with us. Jesus and the Holy Spirit also provide a better sabbath, for the believers no longer have to go to a tent on certain days to be with Yahweh. Instead, now all three members of the Trinity are dwelling in them (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 2:22; Col. 1:27), so at any moment they can rest in Yahweh and talk to Him, making any moment a Sabbath. All these make Jesus a far superior priest, as He brings a far superior atonement and connection to Yahweh. The Law of Yahweh and obedience to the Law are still important, but they are now found in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, not in the Mosaic Covenant.

This means, since the believers are in Jesus and He is in them, they meet all the requirements of the Mosaic Covenant in Him. The believers no longer have to go to the Mosaic Covenant to learn righteousness, atone for sins, and dwell with Yahweh, for Jesus has become all that for them and is transforming them into all of it through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4). Why would one want to

go back to the Mosaic Covenant? Though it is good, it is inferior to Jesus and His New Covenant.

This is why the author of Hebrews says the Mosaic Covenant has been set aside (Heb. 7:18), Jesus brings a better covenant (Heb. 7:22), it is inferior to the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6), it was wrongly made into something it was not (Heb. 8:7), it is obsolete (Heb. 8:13), it is a shadow of the New Covenant to come (Heb. 10:10), and it has been set aside to establish the New Covenant (Heb. 10:9-10). Paul says that the believers who are led by the Holy Spirit are no longer under the Law (Rom. 6:15; Gal. 5:18), while those who rely on the Law are cursed because they cannot meet the requirements of the Law (Gal. 3:10).

Once again, none of this means the Mosaic Covenant was flawed. Rather, one just has to understand its purpose, what Yahweh designed it to do, as discussed above (Gal. 3:21-22). The Mosaic Covenant was never intended to save or transform, nor could it completely govern one's life. It was meant to reveal one's sin and need for a savior and then guide one to that savior (Rom. 7:7-25). This is why Paul said that the Mosaic Covenant was a guardian or tutor pointing the people of Yahweh to Jesus (Jer. 31:31-34; Rom. 6:14; 10:4; Gal. 3:19-25; Heb. 8:6-13). Paul states that without the Law, his true sin nature would have never been fully revealed, he would have never felt total helplessness in trying to overcome it, and he would have never thrown himself at the feet and the cross of Christ (Heb. 4:14-16). The Law was much like the rocket boosters of a space shuttle. The rocket boosters are necessary for getting the space shuttle into space, but once they have fulfilled their purpose, they are jettisoned into space, never to be used again. Even so, they were very necessary for the flight plan of the space shuttle, and the space shuttle could not have gotten into space without them. So the Law was necessary to carry Israel to the coming of Jesus Christ, and Israel would not have been ready for Jesus Christ without the Law. Once Jesus Christ came, the Law had fulfilled its purpose and was no longer necessary.

The believers are now in Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4). The righteous God who gave the Mosaic Covenant is the same God who sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the New Covenant. That means the believers are still expected to be obedient and pursue righteousness and love for Yahweh and others (Rom. 6:11-23; Gal. 5:13-26). The difference is that they are not obligated by the Law, which exposes their sin and leads to death, but are empowered by the Holy Spirit, which enables obedience, transformation, and righteousness and thus brings freedom and life.

Today the Mosaic Law is still extremely valuable. First, for believers, studying it and understanding it can help them understand the character and heart of Yahweh (the spirit of the Law) and thus better understand the will and commands of Jesus Christ in their lives today. Then the believers will be more able to understand and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Second, it is beneficial for exposing the sin and the need for Jesus in the lives of the unbelievers that believers witness to. The believers can use the Law, as Yahweh did with Israel, to reveal what sin really is, how hopeless it is for them to try to overcome it on their own, and how Jesus is the only one who provides a way to be redeemed and transformed. Not in a Bible-thumping way, but as loving tutors, the believers reflect to them the character of Jesus. The Law without the character of the Trinity is merely a bludgeoning tool.

The Mosaic Law is still good and beneficial, but if the believers put themselves under the Law, as if Jesus had not come and fulfilled the Law, or add it to the New Covenant that Jesus has inaugurated, then the believers make it their slave master, which they can never please, and they

are called foolish and cursed (Gal. 3:1-14; 4:8-11, 21-31; 5:2-6). This is why Paul said that the Law only brings death (Rom. 7:5-12; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6). A tutor (Mosaic Covenant) that does not lead you to the Right Answer and Savior only brings frustration, hopelessness, and death. But if one allows it to lead them to Jesus Christ, then it is good, for this was its purpose as designed by Yahweh. Only the New Covenant in Jesus Christ can truly link Yahweh, humanity, and the land together to restore humanity and creations order, relationship, and mission.

## **B. The Ten Commandments of Yahweh (20:1-26)**

After coming down onto Mount Sinai, Yahweh spoke His commands verbally, directly to the people of Israel from the top of the mountain (Ex. 20:18-20). It was not until later that He wrote them on stone tablets with Moses on top of the mountain. The Law of Yahweh is broken into two parts. First is the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). The text never calls them the “ten” or “commandments.” It merely refers to them as the words of Yahweh (Ex. 20:1). Yet most scholars agree that there are ten words, and they read as requirements of the covenant. These words are the general expectations of the covenant in the sense that they do not address specific issues or life scenarios but paint a picture of how a covenant member should look and act. Israel was commanded to act in ways that were basic to Yahweh’s covenant, but the significance of these commandments goes way beyond routine laws. It is more like the content of a national constitution than merely a regulatory list of laws.

Yahweh never meant for these commandments/words to become simplistic, legalistic, behavioral commands for people to follow and check off or to be used to condemn others. Yahweh meant for these words to paint a picture of the thoughts and character of Yahweh lived out in the minds and lives of the people. Israel was to meditate on the significance and deeper meaning of these words/commandments and to unpack their meaning in their lives. Doing so would allow His words to transform them into a people who thought and lived in a way that was different from the world. They were to be the character, the image of Yahweh on earth. Deuteronomy would unpack this thought about the Law when emphasizing that the heart of the Law could be summarized into loving Yahweh with all your heart, soul, and mind (Deut. 6:4-6) and loving your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18). The ten commandments were ten general examples of what these two commands looked like lived out in one’s life. The first four commandments are how to love Yahweh, and the last six are how to love one’s neighbor.

In the ancient Near East, there was no standard of ethics passed down from the gods. Each god had its own sense of ethics, which sometimes overlapped with that of other gods and sometimes contradicted. Their sense of ethics was not based on morals but on their cultic ritual expectations or preferences of conduct, and oftentimes these preferences were not communicated to the humans. There was no standard punishment that went along with each offense; punishments were often based on the mood of the god at the time of the offense. As a result, kings who understood the need for order as the foundation to a successful, efficient, and peaceful kingdom needed to have a law code with punishments to maintain that order and life. Many of these laws tended to be morally oriented, based on evidence of how people preferred to be treated and what prevented chaos. Yet there was no universal standard from king to king. Typically, the law codes were said to have come from the gods to endow them with authority, but the laws were understood to be a human creation. Thus the punishments were established by the king and not the gods. What made this even more frustrating is that the people believed they were bound by the fate of the gods but would be punished for their violation of the gods’ preferences.

This is what makes the Mosaic Law code so unique. Now, Yahweh Himself—who declared Himself to be sovereign creator over all things—was directly and verbally speaking His moral, civil, and ritual law to His people. By Yahweh’s speaking both the law and its punishment clearly to the people, they knew exactly what was expected of them and what would happen to them for each violation. These laws were rooted in His relational covenant with His people to allow them to have a relationship with Him and thrive in His creation. Yahweh then gave His people the choice of whether they wanted to enter into this covenant and adhere to its

requirements. No longer would the people of Israel do what they did because society required it, but they would make their own decisions on the basis of their exclusive relationship with the one true God.

**20:1-2** The narrator makes it clear that Yahweh was the one who spoke all the words to the people, not Moses repeating them to the people. The people heard the very voice and words of Yahweh boom down to them. They heard the essence of the Law straight from Yahweh Himself. Yahweh made it clear that the reason for obeying Him in the commands He was about to give them was that He was their God, the only one powerful and loving enough to save them from the bondage of Egypt (Ex. 19:4-6). Nothing would come close to what Yahweh had done for Israel in the exodus. Yahweh declared that by freeing them from slavery, they were now free to serve Him. He had a claim on them for gratitude and obedience. Loyalty shown required loyalty in response. One could not just ignore the good that had been done. The good done for someone required a loving loyalty in response. Yet this would not be a covenant of cruel slavery and oppression; rather, it would be a covenant of love.

### **The First Commandment**

**20:3** This command implies that there are other gods/divine beings/unearthly beings that could be worshiped (Ps. 82). Yet it demands that Yahweh is the sole and unique deity that is worthy of their devotion and worship. The command to worship Yahweh alone is clearly stated all throughout the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 2:5; Acts 14:15; Jam. 2:19; 1 Jn. 5:20-21). Although the English translation may seem to imply it, the command does not allow for the worship of other gods in addition to Yahweh as long as He takes priority. The phrase “before me” has more of the idea of Deut. 6:4, where Yahweh states “Yahweh is one.” This statement does not deny the existence of other gods, nor does it deny the nature of the trinity, but, rather, it states that He is the only one to whom Israel is to be devoted. It is similar to the way there are many women in the world, yet a husband is to be devoted to only one woman, his wife. This grammatical structure is used in Song of Solomon 6:8-9, in which the groom states: “There may be sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young women without number. But she is one.” Yahweh neither denies the existence of the other gods nor allows for their presence in the lives of His people. The issue is not how many gods there are but how Yahweh is to be understood in relation to everything else. The main message of the Bible is the uniqueness and superiority of Yahweh to all the other gods and that the gods are inept, inferior, and impostors. Thus only Yahweh can offer order, life, and fulfillment. He is the only one worthy of devotion.

Two places where the exclusivity of Yahweh is most clearly seen and becomes the foundation to worshiping Him alone are in the creation of the world and in the exodus. Gen. 1-2 clearly demonstrates that Yahweh was the only God responsible for each aspect of the creation—unlike in other creation accounts. Thus, Yahweh is the only one worthy of worship because He, as Creator of all things, is the only one who is thus sovereign over all things. Likewise, He is the only one who could defeat all the gods of Egypt without contest and the only one who loved Israel enough to step into creation, rescue them, and now bless them with a land, based not on their character and faithfulness but on His.

Thus, Yahweh demands covenant loyalty from Israel and their exclusive love for Him and no other in the same way that He first loved them. What Yahweh demands of them is no different than what most people would demand of their spouse. Except this is far greater because He is the sovereign creator and king of the universe. This is not the command of an egotistical, suffocating

God who wants to rob them of their freedom but of one who loves Israel so much that He asks that they return the same relational love that He has shown them.

The exclusivity of a love for Yahweh alone becomes the basis of all the other words and commands in Yahweh's covenant Law. If one is not solely devoted to Yahweh, then one cannot love his neighbor like he should. There is no other god or religion that has such a high standard and desire for love within community like Yahweh's covenant. The reason is that this covenant is based on His character, which is so unique to the all other gods and beings. To worship anything other than Yahweh is to become less than human, less than what one was intended to be. You will become what you worship. If one worships the pagan gods who are self-absorbed and immoral, then that is all one can hope to be. If one worships an impersonal force in the universe, then one will struggle with connections to creation and people. If one worships the science and nature of atheism, then one will have no value or purpose because according to atheist our lives are random and without meaning. If one worships Allah of Islam, then one cannot have a true value for his own life or have hope because Allah does not value your life and offers no hope. Only when one gives worship to Yahweh can he truly find true value and meaning in life. Only then can one truly find proper and true connection with God, people, and creation. Only in Him is our potential great because there is no limit to who He is. This is the command of a God who wants the best for us and so demands that we worship the greatest being in the universe.

This is not just a command against deities but also anything in creation we can make a god out of—money, sex, power, family, etc. There is nothing wrong with loving or enjoying the things of Yahweh's creation, for that is why He created them and gave them to us. The problem is when we place these things above Yahweh in our lives. Augustine called this disordered love.

### **The Second Commandment**

**20:4-6** The command against idols does not refer just to the idolatry of other gods, as that was already forbidden in the first command; rather, it is also against the making of images that represent Yahweh. Yahweh forbade the making of an image of anything in creation that would be used in worship. The first reason is that He is the transcendent creator of all things and not a part of creation. Yahweh is so beyond anything in creation that nothing in creation can come anywhere close to expressing a tiny fraction of who He is, let alone His totality. Thus, there is nothing in creation that could aid a person in loving and worshipping Yahweh in His totality. And even though humans can never fully know Him in His totality, an image does not allow one to grow in understanding and devotion of Yahweh past the limitedness of what that image can express. Therefore, when you worship the image, you end up worshipping something other than Yahweh because the image is so much less and inferior to who Yahweh is.

Second is that creating an image makes us creator of it, and if we assign this image to Yahweh, then we begin, ever so slowly, to worship it and even think we can control Yahweh through the image, because in our minds we are the creator. If one doubts that humans, in our modern, civilized times would do this, then look at the Catholic Church and the way that they revere the statues of Mary. They pray to the statue for a miracle, and through their creation of the statue they begin trying to manipulate it into giving them what they want.

“By making an image of a god people put themselves in a position of sovereignty over the deity. God wanted His people to accept their place as the creatures of the Creator. The Israelite who made an image of Yahweh would put himself or herself in the position of

creator and Yahweh in the place of created thing. Furthermore he or she would face temptation to confuse the image with God and worship it rather than Him.”<sup>64</sup>

Third, idols cannot do anything; they are just material objects. No power is there, nor relationship. Psalm 115 states that an image cannot make an image because it has no being, will, or power to do so. Therefore, what you end up worshiping and serving is nothing and thus reduces you to nothing.

Fourth is that Yahweh has already created humans as His images to represent Him, not to be Him or to be worshiped (Gen. 1:26-28). The image of God that Yahweh created humans to be is functional, not constitutional, in that it is not what we *are* but what we *do*. Humans were not to be who Yahweh is but to make Yahweh known and to execute His will on earth as it is in heaven.

Now this does not mean one cannot own or create images at all, such as photographs of your families, pets, or sunsets or self-created artwork, etc. The point was not to forbid human creativity but rather to forbid idolatry. It is not the image that is necessarily forbidden, for He has placed these images of angels, humans, and animals all throughout creation. We could just as easily worship the real animal image He created as the one we create. The point is that we not create something that we have control over for the purpose of worship. But at the same time, there is a caution here because, with these first two commands, we can make a god or idol out of anything. One can look to an image that started off as just an image but begins to become a fascination and then an obsession that turns into worship. For example, consider the Jesus paintings in churches. Is that image accurate? Does it make Jesus to be something that He is not? Does it limit Him? And does that image alone become your focus? Do you need it to pray, so that slowly, over time, that inaccurate, limited image is what you are praying to? Do you have difficulty seeing Jesus as something different or more because your focus has become so limited? This also goes for how Jesus is portrayed in movies. Many people’s perspective of Jesus is based solely on how He was portrayed in a movie or cartoon. As with all the commands, the point is not to become legalistic but to call us to examine our hearts and motives. To be thoughtful about what we do and how we conduct ourselves in Yahweh’s creation. To drive us toward a deeper and greater love for Yahweh and others.

The consequences of disobedience to this command, and one could assume for the first one as well, would continue for three to four generations. Here it seems that Yahweh is saying He will punish children for the sins of their parents. However, this contradicts Deut. 24:16 and Ezek. 18:4, which say that fathers should not be put to death for their children’s sins and that children should not be put to death for their father’s sins. It is very difficult to work out what exactly is meant here, but given the character of Yahweh, it seems that this is not saying that Yahweh punishes the children for the sins of the parents.

The Hebrew word *paqad*, translated as “visiting or responding,” is a difficult word to translate. It does not seem to say simply that Yahweh punishes the next generations. Rather, it might be understood as “dealing with” in a negative sense or as “punishing,” but it describes positive attention in Ex. 13:19. When used of Yahweh, it means that Yahweh intervenes in the lives of people for blessing or for cursing. Some have suggested understanding this to mean that those who hate Yahweh and do not keep His commandments will repeat the sins their fathers

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 103.

committed and thus suffer for the patterns of sin repeated from generation to generation. However, Yahweh seems to have more of a direct involvement here than this view states.

An alternate suggestion is that Yahweh would respond to the sin of the fathers by dealing with the children to the third and fourth generations of Israel *corporately*, not on individual children for individual sins. Deut. 24:16 and Ezek. 18:4 refer specifically to individual crimes punishable by death. And the punishment goes both ways, emphasizing the individual nature of the crime. Here the intent seems less intensive. It communicates more that the degree to which Israel obeys the commandments will affect the blessings and life of the community. Therefore, Yahweh would corporately deal with Israel for four generations to come. Even in the modern world, this makes sense as we look at the sins of nations.<sup>65</sup> However, Yahweh promised to bless Israel with covenantal faithfulness for thousands of generations. The point is that He would bless to a further extent than He would bring negative consequences.

### **The Third Commandment**

**20:7** The command to not misuse Yahweh's name in the Hebrew is literally "raise up Yahweh's name for no good." This is ambiguous and can cover many different applications. Names in the ancient Near East were one's identity and communicated something about the individual's character. Yahweh's choosing Israel to represent Him meant they were to display His name, character, and will to the world by being His image bearers. Yahweh said He would put His name on Israel and, later, on Jerusalem (Num. 6:27; 1 Kgs. 8:16; 9:6; 11:36).

Therefore, one should not speak of Yahweh's character in a disrespectful, false, or flippant way. He is God and savior and should be spoken of and represented in this way. To treat Yahweh and His character lightly reveals a lack of love, respect, and a relationship with Him. No one would want a spouse, child, or friend to speak of them in these ways.

"The third commandment is directed not toward Yahweh's protection, but toward Israel's. Yahweh's name, specifically the tetragrammaton but in principle *all* Yahweh's names and titles, must be honored, blessed, praised, celebrated, invoked, pronounced, and so shared. To treat Yahweh's name with disrespect is to treat his gift lightly, to underestimate his power, to scorn his Presence, and to misrepresent to the family of humankind his very nature as 'The One Who Always Is.'"<sup>66</sup>

But as the rest of the covenant regulations and Christ's teachings demonstrate, one can expand this to even how one lives his life. If Israel and the Church are the image bearers of Yahweh's name and character, and if our lives are supposed to tell the truth about Yahweh, then one could misuse Yahweh's name by misrepresenting His character and will in any way through one's life and deeds. This presents a false image of Him. Honoring His name properly means coming into His presence and using His name with reverence toward His being and character. Unfortunately, the Jews went to an extreme, in which they refused to even say the name of Yahweh. By doing this, they missed the whole point of Yahweh revealing His name to them.

### **The Fourth Commandment**

**20:8-11** The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word *shavat*, which means "to cease, desist, rest." The command should not be translated as "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy,"

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<sup>65</sup> See Peter Enns. *Exodus*, pp. 415-416.

<sup>66</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 288.

as the NIV does. Instead, it should be translated “remember the Sabbath day *and* keep it holy” or “*in order* to keep it holy.” The NIV communicates the idea that the means of remembering the Sabbath is by keeping it holy. In other words, you put your effort into protecting that day from anything unholy or through the prevention of all work, and then you have remembered the Sabbath. This makes the Sabbath day the focus. The former and correct translation communicates the idea that remembering to rest results in the day becoming holy. The focus then is on remembering Yahweh on the seventh day by dwelling with and resting in Him, which then makes this day holy. When this day becomes about Yahweh, then it becomes holy because it now belongs to Yahweh and is no longer a common day. The NIV’s understanding is, unfortunately, more pharisaical, where the *day* without work becomes more important than anything else. Yahweh then states that for six days you should work and on the seventh (Saturday) you will do no work. The model for this Sabbath is that for six days Yahweh created the world, and on the seventh He rested and blessed that day.

What this looks like in a practical way is not totally clear. First, Yahweh clearly states that they were to cease from working. This would have been a blessing to Israel, who just came out of slavery, wherein they did not get days off. But it would also have been an act of trust in Yahweh to take care of them, for taking a day off from the fields or livestock could threaten the lives of your family and animals. But how far do you take this ceasing of work? What is work? All actions are technically work. So how many actions or how strenuous does the action have to be to become a violation of the Sabbath? The priest had to work on the Sabbath in order to lead Israel in worship and perform the animal sacrifices. In a society wherein one did not do some kind of work—to cook meals or take care of the animals—people would starve. These are the questions with which the Pharisees struggled. They determined that walking a mile was fine, but two miles was a violation; yet both are work. Today in Israel, some elevators are dedicated to the Sabbath, stopping on each floor so the rider does not have to push buttons because this is work and a violation of the Sabbath. (Yet is not carrying your luggage onto the elevator work?) Regulating what is and is not work is impossible and fruitless. It is this kind of thinking that Jesus condemned. It cannot be just about physical rest because Yahweh rested on the seventh day even though He did not need physical rest. Making it merely about the absence of work is too basic, narrow, and, ultimately, legalistic. And making it merely about people getting physical rest is too shallow.

How this works out practically in one’s life is not totally clear. Here, Yahweh connected the Sabbath to creation and to the Garden of Eden, which served as a tabernacle for Yahweh, and later He connected it to Israel going to the tabernacle. In the greater context of how the Sabbath is used in Scripture, the focus is on Israel’s remembering of who Yahweh is, the work that He accomplished for them, and their dwelling with Him. Then they were to rest their identity in His character and His redemptive work, which is seen in the previous commands. The point is to not legalistically abstain from physical work but to relationally rest in Yahweh’s covenantal love. The point is to remember to rest with and in Yahweh on the seventh day, which makes it holy because you are intentionally thinking about, dwelling with, and connected to Him on that day. Yes, there are some things you may have to do to stay alive or to get places, but these are not to be the focus. Communing with Yahweh and His people should be the focus.

Jesus made it clear that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). This meant that the Sabbath was to improve humanity’s relationship with Yahweh, not beat them down with rules and fear of punishment. Jesus used the example that helping people by healing

them was not a violation of the Sabbath, for this brought glory to Yahweh. Yet any doctor can tell you that healing people is exhausting.

Yahweh knew that humanity's biggest problem was their desire to control their own lives and try to find their satisfaction and meaning in something other than Him. Usually this "something" is our accomplishments. Whether it's an Israelite in the fields trying to keep his family from starving or a westerner in a corporation trying to build a bank account and a solid retirement fund, our significance is found in our ability to provide, create, build, or amass wealth. We need rest from trying to prove ourselves to gain satisfaction and significance. True rest is not a physical rest but a spiritual rest. It is the ability to look at our work and accomplishments and with satisfaction call them good in the same way that Yahweh did with His creation when He rested. But the only way one can do this is to live one's life for Yahweh and know that He is working through our lives and accomplishments; so whatever we do, whether it is complete or not, is good because it is done for Him and by Him in our lives.

People need a deep soul rest, in which they come spiritually to the living God of the universe and rest in His acceptance of them. If you do not get spiritual rest, then you will always be tired. Mere physical rest, days off work, vacations, and attendance at church cannot provide this. Many people do this but are not rested afterward because they are constantly thinking about what they must accomplish; they are stressed and are discontent with where they are and what they have done. They are trying to know who they are and trying to show everyone that they are someone important. This is all about trying to live up to standards one has created for oneself.

True Sabbath rest is when you leave all this behind and enter into Yahweh's presence through the tabernacle or Christ and rest in His accomplished work for us. Remembering who He is, how much He loves us, and how He has saved us. It is an act of trusting Yahweh that if we step away from our unfinished work, find our identity in Him, and give up our goals for His that we will be all right because we have acknowledged that we are not in control, and that His acceptance and work are all that matters. It means you have to be content with not being successful or getting ahead because you chose to rest in Yahweh rather than pursue your goals. You may not be as successful as you hoped, but you also will not be stressed and broken. And if you find your rest in Yahweh, He will give you new desires in which you will be successful because they come from Him. It is this that allows us to re-enter our daily work with satisfaction and contentment and to not make our work an idol. Jesus did not come to do away with the Sabbath but to fulfill it and make it greater.

This can be seen in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, which is about two British track athletes who competed in the 1924 Olympics for the gold medal. Eric Liddell was a Christian who refused to compete on the Sabbath, knowing he would miss out on winning the gold medal. Yet he was at peace with this because his rest was in Yahweh, and he ran for his glory. The other runner, British athlete Harold Abrahams, had neglected everything in life including his girlfriend and won the gold, but he still felt incomplete because it was not enough; he wanted more.

Now we no longer are restricted to just one day (Saturday) and one place (the tabernacle), but through Christ our rest is in every moment, and every place is a Sabbath rest. As sinful, idolatrous humans, we need to enter this Sabbath rest frequently in our personal time with Yahweh and as a community with other believers. Only by the constant remembering of Yahweh can we make every moment and every action holy.

## The Fifth Commandment

**20:12** The previous four commands were concerned with honoring Yahweh as a means of keeping the covenant. This command logically follows with concern to honoring one's parents, who have the responsibility of representing Yahweh in the family. Yahweh has placed the parents over the child, so obedience to them is obedience to Yahweh as well. The word *honor* communicates the idea of giving the parents the weight of authority they deserve. If honoring Yahweh involves a covenant of love and relationship, then it follows that one should interact with parents in the same way Yahweh has called us to interact with Him. In the ancient Near East, this also involved your taking care of your own parents in their old age, since they had taken care of you in your childhood.

It is also the key to the health and stability of a society. If one cannot obey the authority from which they have come biologically, who cares for them the most, then they are not likely to obey any other authority in their lives. This means they will not respect or obey any authority in society. They then will do whatever they want with no regard to anyone, and this makes them a threat to their society. Society cannot function with children who grow up without respect and obedience to authorities. The child is to obey Yahweh *and* his parents because they gave him life; Yahweh promises a long life in the land if they obey this command.

## The Sixth Commandment

**20:13** The commandment in the Hebrew simply and literally says “never murder.” This does not forbid killing, for this would contradict Yahweh's command to eliminate the Canaanites from the land, as well as the capital punishment that Yahweh required for many violations of the Law. However, He prohibited taking a human life without divine authorization, as an act of selfishness. This is a repeat of the command to Noah to not murder because man is made as the image of God (Gen. 9:6). To take the life of another person without authorization from Yahweh is to declare oneself the ultimate authority and judge over human life. One then sees himself as greater than Yahweh in this issue. Only Yahweh, as the author and creator of life, has the right to give life and take it away. Likewise, murder is ultimately a self-centered act, with a total disregard to the other person's life and the lives of those who love them, as well as Yahweh's purpose for them in His kingdom.

This also carries over into war and self-defense, for the motive behind the action is just as important as the action. One person, for example, kills in war or self-defense because he felt he had no choice and did everything in his power to not take the life before doing so. Another person in war kills and then brags about the number of the enemy he killed. Or someone loses control in self-defense and continues to harm the other person even when they have ceased to be a threat. This is murder, for your heart has not sought to honor all life, even that of the enemy (Matt. 5:43-48).

Jesus taught that the extrapolation of this command forbids even hatred and anger toward another person (Matt. 5:21-26). First, hatred and anger hinder one's relationship with Yahweh. If you tell someone you love them but you hate their children, or you have anger toward their children and constantly mistreat them, they are not going to be your friend. Their children are an extension of them. In the same way, it is conflicting to say you love Yahweh while you harbor anger against one of His children. Second, hatred and anger ruin your relationship with that person and all those who care for you and for that person. Furthermore, you can murder someone's identity, reputation, self-confidence, and self-esteem with your anger and words. The old saying “sticks

and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me” is a lie. People heal from physical injuries and never remember the pain, but people live with the words that were said to them, in often crippling ways, for years or their entire lives. The leading cause of suicide among children and teens is name calling and bullying. Even if you think the anger is only in your mind, remember that thoughts eventually become actions. If you dwell on a thought long enough, you will eventually bring that thought to life in word or deed. Third, hatred and anger hinder your own health. Any psychologist or counselor can tell you that harboring such anger for another will eat away at your soul and eventually harden and dehumanize you. Yahweh loves His children and wants them to have life to the fullest and be united in community.

### **The Seventh Commandment**

**20:14** Adultery in the ancient world was known as the “great sin.” The marriage covenant is the second most important covenant that you will ever make, and it reflects one’s covenant with Yahweh. Sexual relations are the seal of the marriage covenant, and adultery betrays the emotional and psychological intimacy that specifically connects the couple within marriage. A couple can hardly function as one flesh if there is no trust between them.<sup>67</sup> And if one cannot be loyal to one’s spouse, then it is hard to trust them to be loyal to any other person. Reasonable extrapolation of this command would also forbid sex outside of marriage before, during, or instead of a legal marriage before a community of family and friends. All these actions bring baggage in the marriage covenant in one way or another and affects those who are close to the couple. Likewise, other probations of sexual immorality appear later in the Law (Lev. 18; 20; Deut. 27:21). One would have to be blind to deny the devastation that adultery brings when the modern world is full of broken marriages and wounded children as a result of this sin (1 Cor. 6:9-20).

Jesus also extrapolated this further when He said that lust for a man or woman was the same as adultery (Matt. 5:27-28). The same application can be made here as the points made above with the commandment to never murder.

### **The Eighth Commandment**

**20:15** Stealing is taking something without permission that does not belong to you. The implication of this command is that Yahweh acknowledges and protects personal ownership of belongings, for stealing in a communal society would be disruptive. Taking what belongs to another destroys trust and love between two people and erodes the safety and trust needed in society.

One can extrapolate this command to also forbid theft of non-material objects. One can steal other people’s time by wasting it or by not showing up on time and causing others to wait. One can also steal the emotional or mental well-being of others by constantly and selfishly draining them with their own problems, without consideration to them or interest in their lives. Yes, we will all go through hard times and be more of a drain on a family member or friend than we usually are, but this is for only a season. There are people who never are supportive of others and only take from friends or family. This is theft. This command would also forbid the taking of a person physically against their will into slavery in order to serve one’s own will.

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<sup>67</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 463-464.

## The Ninth Commandment

**20:16** The command to not bear false testimony is a legal term. In a court of law, one must not bear false testimony against another or lie about them (Lev. 5:1). This includes not only giving a false impression about who someone is but also withholding pertinent information (Deut. 19:18). Also, this command deals not only with lying to someone directly but with lying about someone to another. This is the first command that uses the word “neighbor,” which in this context is anyone you would happen to encounter.

One can extrapolate this command within the community of everyday life. Thus, one should not gossip about others, bearing false testimony about who they are. Gossip is meant only to destroy someone’s reputation and is not loving to them. Even if it is true, whatever they have done is likely not the entirety of who they are. If you continually spread that incident, you give the false impression to everyone that the person is always like that. Not only is this not edifying to them, but it does not encourage their redemption and sanctification within the community.

## The Tenth Commandment

**20:17** To covet means to desire, want, or crave something. The command is not just “do not covet,” for there is nothing wrong with desiring things that are permissible—as long as the person or thing does not already belong to someone else (Ps. 19:10; 68:16; Isa. 1:29; 53:2). Therefore, the verb *covet* is followed by objects that should not be coveted because they belong to others. The word *house* could easily be translated “family” and “property,” thus excluding the people and their relationships. The Hebrew word *khamad* (“covet”) focuses on the internal mental activity behind the act, the motivation for it. This command encompasses the motive behind all the previous commands and is aimed at preventing the greedy desire for something that belongs to a neighbor and which might lead to the taking of that thing. It deals with where selfishness first manifests, in the heart and mind.

“Although it may seem to be belaboring the obvious to say so, the final commandment insists that God’s covenant people realize that wishing to have good and proper things is good but that wishing to have the wrong things is bad. What people wish for has a major role to play in what kind of society they will create. People able to curtail their wishing, so that it is limited to things they *should* desire, are people who contribute good to a society; those who want what they cannot properly have undermine a society’s moral fiber.”<sup>68</sup>

As you read through, meditate on, process, and work out these words in your life, you realize these are so much more than commands or rules that must be followed. These are the loving words of our Father who wants to make Himself known to us and wants us to know Him in return. We then demonstrate our love and desire to know Him by obeying Him. This is His love language. We implement these words into our lives and live by them because this is how we love Him—by becoming like our Father in heaven. If you think that these are mere rules you have to obey, then you have missed the whole heart of Yahweh, and this becomes just another behaviorist religion where you are trying to be a good person to escape judgment and earn blessings.

**20:18-21** After personally and verbally hearing the words and voice of Yahweh, the people trembled in fear and kept their distance from Him. The people then turned to Moses and appointed him as their mediator to speak to Yahweh for them. They feared that they would die in

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<sup>68</sup> Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, pp. 467-468.

the presence of Yahweh. Though the sight of the fire and smoke was scary and the sound of thunder and the voice of Yahweh was loud, it was not the sight and sound they could not handle. Moses, Aaron, and Joshua had no problems. It was the metaphysical and incomprehensible righteousness of Yahweh in the sound of His voice and words that they could not handle or stand before because it pierced them to their core and exposed them in their sin.

The fact that Moses could draw near to Yahweh, go up the mountain to Him, and speak to Him face to face (Ex. 20:21; 24:15-18; 33:11; Num. 12:8) shows that it had less to do with being human and physically not surviving the presence of Yahweh and more to do with their lack of righteousness and relationship with Yahweh, which left them unworthy of coming into the presence of Yahweh. The presence of Yahweh is so threatening to less than entirely holy people that His presence before even His own people must be limited so that they do not become overwhelmed and never desire to come to Him. Yahweh cannot be in the presence of sin, so the closer He is to the sinner, the harder it is for the sinner to survive. This is the point of the tabernacle, and it is the tabernacle that will gradually bring them into His presence through the sanctification that they will find through their ritual obedience to the sacrificial system. The people had the chance to continue to see and hear the voice of Yahweh, but they gave up out of fear.

Moses spoke to them and told them not to be *afraid* of Yahweh but to *fear* Yahweh. Yahweh had come to them to test them and put the fear of Himself in them so that they would not sin. There are two types of fear indicated here when Moses tells them not to fear but to fear Yahweh. The fear that they are *not* to have is one outside of a relational covenant with Yahweh. To view Him as an unloving, distant, and capricious god that demands their obedience lest He crush them. Rather, they are to fear Yahweh within the relational covenant that they have with Him. This fear is the fear one has for a loving but authoritative father who has their best interest and growth in mind, a father who lovingly embraces, teaches, and disciplines them. The fear of Yahweh means to have an awe and respect for Yahweh as the creator and king of the universe. He is our judge before whom we stand guilty as sinners who have violated Him and the order He wove into creation. Therefore, we are to fear what He can justly do to us and should be motivated by a fear to obey Him. But not because we are afraid of Him but because we are afraid what we will lose in our relationship with Him if we disobey because He is such a good, redeeming, and covenantal God. A motivation by fear is not a bad thing. Many of us are motivated to do things because of a healthy fear. We fear burning ourselves, so we do not put our hand in the fire. We fear loss of intimacy with a friend, so we invest in them. This is the incomprehensible fear of Yahweh as our judge and redeemer. Yahweh revealed Himself to them so that they would fear the life of sin that would lead to a loss of covenant relationship with and blessings from Yahweh.

“This verse [v. 20] contrasts two types of ‘fear:’ tormenting fear (which comes from conscious guilt or unwarranted alarm and leads to bondage) or salutary fear (which promotes and demonstrates the presence of an attitude of complete trust and belief in God; cf. the ‘fear of the LORD God’ beginning in Gen 22:12). This second type of fear will keep us from sinning and is at the heart of the OT’s wisdom books (cf. Prov. 1:7; Eccl. 12:13 et al.).”<sup>69</sup>

“Whereas 19:16-24 looks at the people’s fear from a divine perspective, 20:18-21 approaches it from the viewpoint of the people themselves. What we learn from both narratives, therefore, is that there was a growing need for a mediator and a priesthood in the Sinai

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<sup>69</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “Exodus.” In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. p. 427.

covenant. Because of the people's fear of God's presence, they are now standing 'afar off' (20:21). Already, then, we can see the basis being laid within the narrative for the need of the tabernacle (Ex 25–31). The people who are 'afar off' must be brought near to God. This is the purpose of the instructions for the tabernacle which follow this narrative."<sup>70</sup>

Moses then went back up the mountain a fourth time as the people kept their distance.

**20:22-23** The repeating of the first two commands becomes an incipit, using them as a title as a way to refer to the whole of the ten commandments. In this reminder to the Israelites of the things that they had just seen and heard, four things become noteworthy.<sup>71</sup> First, the people had made Moses their intermediary so that Yahweh now spoke to him instead of them. Second, the Israelites were a witness to their obligation, for they had agreed to the covenant and heard the requirements with their own ears. Third, Yahweh had revealed and spoken to them from out of heaven on the mountain. He had shown them that He was not some distant God; rather, He made Himself known to them. Fourth, they were now expected to keep the ten commandments.

**20:24-26** Yahweh commanded Israel to make an altar for sacrifice. It is through their sacrifices that He would come to them and bless them. They were to make the altar from only natural rocks from the earth, not carved and shaped with the hands and tools of man. They were only allowed to use what Yahweh had created, not what they had created. First, this would prevent the Israelites from thinking they had ownership of the altar because they shaped it and could therefore control it. Second, it would not be fancy and become like an idol to them. The altar is where they would acknowledge themselves as sinners who were unworthy of entering Yahweh's righteous presence because they had violated His commands. So the substitutionary sacrifice of an innocent animal bore the punishment for their sin and allowed them to remain in the covenant with Yahweh who loved them. This altar also gave them a means to sacrificially thank Yahweh for His provision and commit themselves in trust to Him that He would continue to provide for them. The altar and the sacrificial system are explained in detail in the book of Leviticus.

What is interesting is that Yahweh gave instructions for the altar for sacrifice after the ten commandments and before the other laws that He would give in Ex. 21-24; the altar will be discussed in more detail in Ex. 27:1-8 in the section about the building of the tabernacle, where it belongs. Yahweh mentioned the altar here because He was making it clear that Israel would not be able to obey the commands He had just given them. He was already making provision for their sins by mentioning the altar for sacrifices, which removes humanity's legal guilt. This is the heart of the Mosaic Covenant and the purpose of the Law. The majority of the Law is not commandments but instructions for the sacrificial system. Humanity cannot not obey the righteous commandments of Yahweh. Thus, the Law reveals His expectations for them but also that they are sinners who will fail. Therefore, they will continually need to come to Him with sacrifices to find atonement. This point will become the major theme through the rest of the Torah and into the prophets. This will build the foundation for the coming of Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross for all humanity who could not keep the Law. It was not the knowledge and teachings of Christ that redeemed all of humanity but the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

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<sup>70</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>71</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 471.

### C. The Covenant Code (21:1–23:33)

Although Yahweh had left off speaking directly to the Israelites, at their request, after giving the ten commandments, He had not finished giving His Law. The second part of the covenant was the Covenant Code (Ex. 21-23), which included more specific scenarios of how to make decisions or judgments on people's violations of loving Yahweh and one's neighbor. These laws here can seem very random and unrelated to the surrounding laws. But it must be understood that these laws were not meant to be exhaustive or a complete law code but rather to reform the law codes that were already in existence in the ancient Near East.

“It is very important to note that various law codes already existed in the ancient Near East before the giving of the Mosaic Covenant. These included laws in the Akkadian civilization located in Mesopotamia in the twentieth century B.C. (e.g., the Laws of Eshnunna). There were also the laws in the Sumerian civilization, which replaced that of Akkad in the nineteenth century (e.g., the Code of Lipit-Istar). Moreover laws in the Babylonian civilization that followed the Sumerian in the eighteenth century (e.g., the Code of Hammurabi) existed, as did others. People living in the Near East at the time of the Exodus (fifteenth century) knew these laws and lived by them. The Mosaic Covenant presupposes this body of legal literature. It was not given as a comprehensive legal system to a people living without any laws. Rather it was a series of instructions God gave as Israel's king for His people to govern their behavior in certain specific matters. This fact explains why the Torah (Law of Moses) does not contain fundamental instruction in many basic areas of law such as monogamy, for example. The instructions in the Law of Moses confirmed certain existing laws, cancelled other laws, and changed still others for the Israelites as the will of God for them.”<sup>72</sup>

One must see these less as legalistic laws and more as a means of protecting the people by loving one's neighbor. The point was to guide the judges in making decisions that protect the rights of all parties involved. When the laws were properly followed, there was protection, justice, and life for all those in the covenant community. When the laws were abused and the community became corrupt, it was the fault of the people as sinners, not of the Law of a righteous and perfect God.

Many of these laws are grouped chiastically, which served as a convenient way of ordering material so that the laws could be memorized and remembered more easily. Those laws that are sandwiched between two other laws are not an awkwardly mindless insertion, rather their insertion was intended to help judges remember how to handle cases that involved similar crimes or injuries.<sup>73</sup>

**21:1** The Hebrew word *mispatim* could be translated as “laws, regulations, statutes, or decisions.” Once again, these are not just laws but also guidance on how to handle difficult situations that come with living in a broken world in a loving and wise way. They are laws in the sense that this is what one must do in order to maintain a covenant community that obeys the laws of loving Yahweh and one's neighbor. But they are not legalistic laws that exhaustively deal with every situation in life. They are general applications of the Law in that their spirit and

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 110. For further explanation, see Umberto Cassuto. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, pp. 257-64.

<sup>73</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 495.

principles were meant to be extrapolated into other areas of life based on the foundational law of loving Yahweh and others.

### Hebrew Servants

**21:2-11** It must be understood that servanthood or slavery in the ancient Near East and especially that pictured in the Law of Israel has nothing in common with the moral degradation of the slavery of America's history. In fact, what existed in Israel was closer to servanthood than slavery. The Hebrew word *'ebed* can mean "worker, employee, servant, or slave" communicating a much broader understanding of a servant than the limited meaning of America's word "slave." Though the laws here primarily address those of the six-year contract slave—because they were the most common—any one of these categories came under the protection of Yahweh's Covenant Code.<sup>74</sup>

There were three different ways by which one became a slave or servant in Israel. The least common was the foreign slave, whose life was spared in war and who was allowed to live indefinitely on the condition he became a slave. Other than the Canaanites, Israel was not allowed to initiate conflicts or wars with other nations. So, if they fought and won a war, it was due to the initiation by another nation. Rather than killing everyone or sending some back home where there was no longer a family waiting, an Israelite could take the survivor as a slave. It would not be wise just to free them, give them rights, and assimilate them into the culture, lest they influence the Israelites into idolatry. Yet in service to the Israelite family, they would be treated with great respect and care and would hopefully be won over into becoming a part of the covenant community of Yahweh. These foreigners could be slaves for life (Lev. 25:44-46) or be freed by their master at a time of their choosing. The second way, and most common, that one became a servant was the Israelite who sold himself into servanthood and was paid for his servanthood. The ancient Near East did not have welfare, government funding, or bankruptcy laws. In an agrarian culture, not being able to afford to pay the "bills" or going bankrupt meant the family starving to death. One could instead sell himself into servanthood to a wealthier family where housing, food, and clothing would be provided for him and/or his family. These slaves were also paid wages for their servanthood, though not much since their basic needs were also being provided. The Covenant Code limited these master-servant contracts to a six-year term, after which the servant would be free if he chose. The fact that some servants would choose to stay with their masters or even took servants of their own shows how this "slavery" was viewed. The third way were children born to parents who were already servants.

It is important to note that Yahweh's Covenant Code established laws that protected the human rights of the servants—and did so better than the other law codes of the time, including allowing the servant to go free in the seventh year. When the laws were properly followed, then the person who was a worker/servant/slave held his position by formal contract and was protected, not forced into servanthood for more than the six years he had signed up for (much like enlisting in the military). The Bible makes it clear that it does not tolerate slavery in the modern sense of the word. This is especially seen in Yahweh's condemnation of the Egyptian forced slavery of Israel. Egypt worked Israel hard and without proper wages as a means of keeping them weak. Biblical Law allowed slavery out of love rather than out of necessity, profit, or domination. If the

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<sup>74</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 474.

Covenant Code were practiced obediently, then the service of the Israelite would be so beneficial to the worker that he would choose to enlist for a lifetime with the master (Ex. 21:5-6).<sup>75</sup>

There were no corporations or large industrial plantations in the ancient world. All industry was small households or cottage industry. There would have been no one who would or could afford to have a large number of slaves as merely bodies to work the land, like in the plantations of American slavery. The slavery of the ancient Near East was not about a cheap workforce, large profits, capitalistic competition, or racial Darwinian philosophies.

The purpose of this servanthood was for the community, not the government, to provide a means of keeping people from starving to death because they could not, for whatever reason, take care of themselves. The six-year limitation allowed for the eventual financial and self-sustaining restitution of the individual. In contrast to American slavery, the servant in Israel was more of a worker holding positions in the master's home that matched their skills. The servants often did for the master what they had done when they were free, from working the farm to being an accountant. In fact, one could have a greater status and life as a servant of a wealthy and respected master than they ever could as a self-sustaining free person. Joseph as a slave was running the house of Potiphar and had more power and influence as a slave in Egypt than he ever did or could have as a free person in the nomadic shepherding community of his father Jacob's house (Gen. 39). Not that this is what life is about, but it shows how different slavery in the ancient world was. Yes, some masters mistreated and degraded their slaves, but this happens in America with bosses mistreating and degrading their employees as well. Thus, Yahweh's Covenant Code protected the rights of the servant and allowed for prosecution of masters who violated the Covenant Code.

**21:2-6** This law begins by stating that the servant was allowed to go free after six years and did not have to pay anything in order to be free after six years. And whoever was in his family when he became a slave was also allowed to leave with him at the end of six years. If he went in with a wife and three kids, then he leaves with a wife and three kids. However, if he went in single and after two years his master gave him a wife, and after three years he had a child, then after six years he may go free, but the wife and the child must remain. The wife and children did not stay as slaves for the rest of their lives; they merely had to finish their six-year term as well. So, in this example, the wife would serve for two more years, and the child three more years. When this husband becomes free, he has three options. First, the husband could simply wait for them all to finish their six-year contract of servanthood. Second, the husband could find a job that paid him enough that he could buy their early freedom, although it would have been difficult in the ancient world to find a job that paid so well that he could afford to do this. Third, he could agree to work for the master permanently so that could be with his family. The master's keeping the wife and children was not unrealistic since the master would have had to pay the bridal price for the husband when they married. And it would have cost the master for the birth of the child. It also cost the master to take care of the wife and child since the husband could not do it as a servant in the master's home. The purpose of this complex law is to ensure that neither the master or servant lose what was rightfully theirs at the time of the termination of the contract.

But if the servant decided that his life with his master was so good that he wanted to remain with him, he could become his servant for life. The servant could not enter this lifetime commitment informally or impulsively. This law protects the servant from a rash decision or from being

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<sup>75</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 475.

pressured by the master. The piercing of the ear would be the sign of this lifetime commitment to the master. The NIV and other translations have chosen to translate this Hebrew word *'elohim* as “judges” instead of the normal translation of “God.” The context may seem to lend better to human judges rather than to Yahweh, but this is not the meaning of the Hebrew word. It seems that this would be a covenant between master and servant that was made before Yahweh. This was much like what Yahweh did with Israel in the exodus.

**21:7-11** This law is not about just the servanthood of a woman, and it does not say that women had no way to get out of servanthood. The Hebrew word *'amah*, translated as “daughter,” refers to a female servant who would eventually become a concubine or wife. This is about a father who wants a better life for his daughter and sells her into servanthood to a more prominent family that can give her a better life. It may be easy for the modern westerner to say this is wrong, but they do not know what it is like to struggle to stay alive daily and want to give a child a better life where they will no longer struggle this way. The master is paying the father a sale price that included the service as well as the bride price. The daughter then could become the wife of the master or be given to the master’s son. It must also be understood that in the ancient Near East, almost all marriages were arranged marriages.

The reason she was not allowed to leave after six years like other servants is that this was also a marriage arrangement. She had no automatic right to get out of marriage like they did in servanthood. Basically, marriage was not term limited but a lifetime agreement. This assumes a combined contract labor and bride price.

This law protected the daughter from being treated as property and ensured that she would be protected and honored as a potential wife. If the master became unhappy with her, he was not allowed to waste her life by never marrying her off. He was to allow her to be redeemed back to the father. And he had no authority to sell her to a foreign nation that would put her outside Yahweh’s covenant community. If he were to take another wife, then he was not allowed to favor or treat one better than the other. If she were not provided food, clothing, or her marital sexual rights, then she could go free. The reason is that he is not treating her as a wife but as a servant, so she may live her life as other servants were allowed to do.

### **Personal Injuries**

**21:12-36** These laws taught Israel how to respond in a just and loving way to people who had inflicted injury on others, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This applied not only to one’s own behavior but also to the behavior of one’s animals. The point was to make sure that the perpetrator was justly held accountable and the victim was adequately provided for.

**21:12-14** The law begins by upholding the Torah’s requirement for capital punishment for murder (Gen. 9:6). The subject here is indefinite, so no exemption is possible by reason of class, status, gender, or age. In the ancient Near East, murder was punished by death only if someone murdered another of an equal or higher status. All other cases were punished through a financial fine or putting to death someone else in the house who was an equal or lesser class than the one who was murdered. This was not allowed in the biblical Covenant Code.

The ancient Near East made no distinction between premeditated murder and manslaughter—both were punishable by death. The next of kin of the murder victim was expected to hunt down the perpetrator and kill him regardless of whether it was premeditated or unintentional. Yahweh responded to this way of thinking by declaring, “Vengeance is mine” (Deut. 32:35).

However, if the killing of another man was accidental manslaughter, then the Bible allowed for one to flee to a city of refuge, cities designated later in the Torah (Num. 35:6-34; Deut. 19:41-43; Josh. 20). There, a judge would hear all the evidence and determine if he was truly innocent or not. But for premeditated murder, there was no refuge; even the horns of the altar could not save him. In the ancient Near East, there was a practice that a perpetrator could go to the altar and throw himself upon it. If God did not strike him dead, then he was spared the death penalty (1 Kgs. 1:50-51; 2:28). However, Yahweh made it clear that this is not how His Covenant Code worked and that the murderer was still guilty and under the death penalty.

**21:15** This law emphasizes the importance of the fifth commandment of honoring one's father and mother. The format of this law is much like that of Ex. 21:12 except that it lacks "so that he dies," which means merely attacking one's parents is grounds for the death penalty whether they die or not. This does not apply to minor incidents like tantrums, hitting, or slapping, rather the kind of attack meant to severely disable the parent or leave them unconscious on the floor.

"Turning now to non-criminal acts, civil or status offenses, we review the salient points of the modern definition of a juvenile delinquent as one who is incorrigible, ungovernable, or habitually disobedient. The operative word in most modern definitions is 'habitual.' An isolated occurrence does not make a child delinquent. Note that the New York State definition speaks of the child as being 'habitually disobedient,' and the California one terms the delinquent as one who 'habitually refuses to obey.' We shall see that a number of ancient Near Eastern legal texts make this distinction as well. This is important because it enables us to distinguish what is clearly delinquency from what is only what we call 'generation gap' disagreements. The ancients were well aware of this generation gap between parents and children."<sup>76</sup>

**21:16** Even the stealing of a person from his home and family was punishable by death. Even if the person who was caught was not the person who did the kidnapping or the selling, the person was put to death. This means they could not escape punishment by arguing that they were merely the middleman.

**21:17** In addition to striking one's parents, even cursing one's parents was punishable by death. This does not apply to a child who in a moment of rage unthinkingly says, "I wish you were dead." Rather, this is a child who publicly makes it known by oath to disown their parents and wishes only harm to them.

These crimes (Ex. 21:15-17) were worthy of death and were serious in Yahweh's eyes. They either violated a basic right of a human being created in God's image or were expressions of rebellion against Yahweh's revealed authority in the home, the basic unit of society.

**21:18-19** If two men were fighting and one injured the other, but he would eventually heal, then the first was innocent. However, he had to pay for the time that the man lost while he was healing. The logic of this law appears to be the assumption that people who choose to fight choose to take the risk of injury and cannot expect compensation beyond their actual out-of-pocket expenses for injuries they incurred during fighting.

**21:20-21** If a master physically disciplined his servant and killed him, then it was murder, and he was to be punished accordingly. This law makes it clear that there was no distinction between

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<sup>76</sup> David Marcus. "Juvenile Delinquency in the Bible and the Ancient Near East." *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*, pp. 35-36.

free and servant. However, if the servant was injured but recovered, then there was no penalty. The idea is that the master has already paid the financial penalty, as in the previous law, with the lack of a man to work his farm.

**21:22-25** If a man struck a pregnant woman but she was able to give birth to the child without harm, then the man was innocent of any injury. It is debated which translation is better: “and she gives birth prematurely” or “she is able to have children and there is no harm.” Either way, the point is that the child is all right at birth. However, he had to pay whatever the husband and the courts decided for any emotional damage that the woman would have gone through for the fear of her child’s well-being.

But if there was serious injury to the mother or child, then he must give a life for a life. These eight “eye for eye” statements are the Bible’s first *talion* law. Talion laws, applied after physical injury, were penalties imposed appropriate to the nature of the injury. In other words, a mere monetary fine could not be considered adequate justice. In the ancient Near East, the laws allowed for fines to be paid as a means of justice in the case of a higher-class person permanently injuring a lower-class person. Talion law prevented a wealthy person from buying his way out of punishment for a serious physical injury that he had caused.

This phrase was not meant to be taken literally. Instead, the wording of these verses establishes a general principle for dealing with various permanent injuries. It uses the law of Ex. 21:22 as a jumping-off point for the promulgation of a general approach to permanent injury known as talion law. On the other end of the spectrum, talion laws prevented someone from going overboard in punishment. It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East for the next of kin of a murder victim to kill the murderer and then also members of the family (Gen. 34). This, then, was not justice but vengeance. Talion law said the punishment must not be greater than the crime. There is no evidence of any judge actually ruling for a literal application of a talion law. In fact, Ex. 21:26-27 makes this point by giving a non-literal application of a talion law.

**21:26-27** This is one of the Bible’s most striking rejections of the class-adjusted legal standards that prevailed in the ancient Near East. The servant was allowed to immediately go free, no matter where he was in his six-year service, as payment for the permanent physical injury his master had inflicted upon him. Human rights were more important. The servant’s master lost his ownership as soon as he physically abused his servant. This law is paradigmatic in nature rather than exhaustive in its description of crime and punishment. The principle illustrated here could be applied to a number of similar crimes committed.

Unlike the law codes of the ancient Near East, the Bible makes no distinction as to the aggressor’s intent, only the result of his actions. Nor are there different punishments in the Bible according to one’s social status. One is punished based on whether there is injury or a life is taken.

**21:28-32** Even if an animal kills a human, that animal must be put to death. Not only that, but the owner must suffer the complete loss of the animal, not being allowed even to use the meat of the animal upon its death. Yet the owner should not be put to death for what his animal has done, for animals act of their own will. However, if the owner knew the animal had a violent history and did nothing to contain the animal, then both the animal and the owner were to be put to death.

The court could set a redemption price for his life so that he did not have to die. This seems to undermine the whole point of the preceding laws that required the death penalty rather than

class-adjusted penalties. On the contrary, this allowed the judge leeway in complicated cases. Suppose a bull had tried only once many years ago to gore someone. And now someone borrowed the bull against the owner's advice, and he abused it, and the bull responded by goring him to death. The judge could then decide that in this case the owner did not deserve the death penalty but would be given a fine.

Ex. 21:31-32 takes the paradigm further, to children and servants. Children's lives are as valuable as adults', so the law applied to them without further comment. The servant was in a different category within the law. This does not mean that the servant was less valuable or unequal or that his life was worth less than the free person; it is just that their position required to the law to be applied differently. Normally, the servants were included in laws about people in general. But compensation for the life of a servant who was working was not the same because of what they were doing while under the command of the master. The owner was not held as responsible for the death of the servant, whose job was to work with the bull every day and who had knowledge of the bull, as opposed to someone who was just walking next to the master's farm and was gored to death. This would be like a boss ordering an employee to work with heavy machinery that ends up killing him, or an officer in the military who orders a soldier to the front lines and ends up dying. The boss and the officer would not be put to death for murder. If they were found to be acting improperly, they would be fined, and the family might sue them, but no court would prosecute them for murder and put them to death. This means that the owner of the bull was not as guilty as if the bull had gored a random person. And it says nothing about the life of the servant being worth less, only that the circumstances were different. Naturally, the judges would have the freedom to put the owner to death if it were found that he intentionally let a goring bull loose against his or another's servant.<sup>77</sup> From the penalties imposed related to the behavior of bulls, a judge could reason down the scale to various situations involving injuries by or to other animals lower in size and lethality. The point of this law was that people were responsible for the animals they owned or for the danger or harm they created.

**21:33-36** Just as people were responsible for their own animals, they were also responsible for their land. If a man allowed his land to become dangerous to his neighbor's animals, then he must pay for the harm that he caused his neighbor due to his neglect.

### **Laws about Property**

**22:1-17** It is clear that Yahweh not only allowed for private property, but He established laws that protected one's property from thieves or neighbors. In all cases, the guilty party was responsible not only for paying back what was stolen or damaged but paying additional for loss or damage.

“Behind all the laws in this section is the simple principle that the person who causes someone else to lose something (whether personal property or real estate or money) by whatever means (from theft to mere neglect to bypassing the normal betrothal process) owes compensation to the person who has suffered the loss. The more intentional the means of deprivation (e.g., outright stealing), the higher the required restitution, normally calculated in multiples of the value of the loss suffered. Simple neglect was to be compensated on whatever level the judge in the case required. If no culpability was evident, however, no compensation was required. Some of these laws were intended to remind the Israelites that in

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<sup>77</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 495.

God's providence, some things "just happened" and were no one's fault and therefore did not require restitution."<sup>78</sup>

There were no jail or prison systems for punishing crimes in Israel. The Israelites were also more communal, meaning everyone knew everyone else, depended on each other, and held each other accountable. In this sense, the accountability of the community was a much better judgment and restitution than any residential prison system could have been, for the following reasons. To be an unrepentant offender would be more devastating to the offender than in the modern world. They would not be able to survive without the help of people who did not trust them. And they could not disappear into the faceless crowd of the city and find a new community who did not know their history. They would have to move to a different nation, where, as a foreigner, they would not be accepted. This put more pressure on the person to truly repent and change, or they risked death by nature. The advantages of restitution over residency are the following.<sup>79</sup> First, it compensates the victims of a crime more generously and more immediately than in the modern world. Second, it requires the offender to deal directly with his victim and face the effects of his crime on that person. Third, it permits a repentant offender to continue a productive life immediately upon making restoration. Fourth, it would not require a society to provide housing, food, clothing, and guards for the duration of the offender's imprisonment.

**22:1** If a man steals another man's animal and then sells or kills it, then not only does he owe the man for the life of the animal but also additional animals as payment. From this example, the judge would extrapolate appropriate penalties for all sorts of animal thefts. A slightly less serious crime merits a slightly less serious restitution. Through this penalty structure, Yahweh reveals His desire that punishments should be precisely and carefully thought out rather than just a standard punishment for all related crimes regardless of the details.

**22:2-3** This law allowed for a homeowner to use lethal force to protect his home and family at night but not during the day. He was still allowed to protect himself but not with lethal force. There are several reasons for this.<sup>80</sup> First, it is more likely that a person has legitimate business to do on a person's property during the day than at night. Second, defending one's property at night, when it is difficult to see, means they cannot be as careful in the application of force. For if they hesitate to figure out the intention of the person in the dark, it may be too late. Especially if the person has difficulty seeing whether the trespasser has a weapon. Third, a homeowner who has been suddenly awakened from sleep cannot be expected to act as calmly, rationally, or readily as during the daytime. Fourth, it is not as easy to call for help to neighbors during the night as it would be during the daytime when everyone is awake and working outside.

The point is that the law did not allow unlimited freedom to the victim of a crime to defend or retaliate. Even the criminal caught in the act of a crime had protections. If the thief was caught, then he was to pay back what he had stolen. If he could not, then he was sold into slavery for six years to pay it off.

**22:5-6** If a man allowed his animals to steal food from another man's fields, then he was to make restitution. If he started a fire, then he was to make restitution. The point is that one was held responsible for destroying the property of another person.

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<sup>78</sup> Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 501.

<sup>79</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 500.

<sup>80</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 503.

**22:7-9** There are two sceneries here. A man has borrowed another person's money, garment, or other material items and now claims that the item has been stolen. If the thief has been caught, then the thief is prosecuted and repays double. If the thief is not caught, then the judge must determine whether the man is lying. If there is no evidence of theft, then the man who did the borrowing must pay double.

If he has borrowed an animal and it was hurt or died, then he must swear before Yahweh that he did not harm the animal and that he is innocent. But if he cannot swear before Yahweh, then he must pay for the life of the animal. In the ancient Near East, people were much more aware and afraid of the judgments of the gods, especially in swearing. It is very unlikely that one would have risked swearing his innocence before God if he were guilty.

**22:14-15** The responsibilities are clarified into two factors. First, if one borrowed or rented an animal and the owner was present while the animal was in use, it was the owner's job, not the borrower's, to look after the animal. Second, if one rented an animal, the rental fee was expected to include insurance. The owner was expected to absorb the cost of the death or injuries of the animal while under the rental contract.

**22:16-17** First, it is important that this law is not interpreted as a man raping a woman but as a man wooing a woman to fall in love with him simply so they can have sex. In the end, he had no desire to marry her. This law is grouped with the laws about property not because women were regarded as property but because the institution of the bride price was an unwavering financial responsibility that a man could not get out of paying by circumventing marriage vows and having premarital sex with a woman. The bride price served two purposes. First, when a father gave his daughter in marriage, he lost a worker on the farm who was necessary for keeping the family alive. The bride price compensated the father for the loss for enough time that he could hire someone or bring someone else into the family to work the farm. This did not apply to a son getting married since usually the son stayed on the farm and brought his new wife into his life.

Second, and most important, was that the bride price ensured a proper start of a marriage. The bride price did not degrade the woman but rather honored her because it made marriage harder to come by than just marrying on a whim. If a man knew that sleeping with a woman would require him to pay the bride price, whether he intended to marry or not, or if the father did not approve of him, then he was far less likely to dishonor her by taking her virginity but not offering her a life. Thus, this elevated marriage and prevented the marring of marriage because of emotional whims that carried heavy social and emotional costs. Marriage was understood to be a proper and the most important human covenant. The sign of that covenant was sexual intercourse because it makes the couple one flesh (1 Cor. 6:16). It does not mean that premarital sex automatically makes one married, but sex does bind two people together in a metaphysical way. To engage in premarital sex and not pursue marriage leaves a person with emotional baggage they have to deal with when they eventually get married.

### **Social and Ceremonial Laws**

**22:18-23:9** This is a new section of the Covenant Code, signaled by the change in the legal style. This entire section is written in apodictic legal wording. In apodictic law, the commands are given mostly in the second person, and the individual laws represent generally applicable legal instruction rather than citation of cases designed to give a feel for a specific situation and how to

deal with them.<sup>81</sup> These apodictic laws pay special attention to crimes that warrant the death penalty.

**22:18** The other law codes of the ancient Near East made a distinction between those who practiced white magic (magic that blesses oneself or others) and black magic (magic that harms or curses). These other nations' law codes only forbade the latter, whereas the Bible forbids all magic. Sorcery is condemned all through the Bible (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:9-14; 2 Kgs. 9:21-26; 17:17; Jer. 27:8-11; Mic. 5:10-15; Nah. 3:1-4; Mal. 3:5; Acts 8:9-25; 13:6-8; 19:19).

**22:19** The practice of sleeping with animals was common among the gods of the Canaanites and so was practiced as an act of worship among the Canaanites themselves. The Canaanite law code only forbade sex with certain animals rather than all animals. It was associated with various Canaanite fertility practices that were thought to bring the blessing of the gods upon the fertility of their fields and livestock. Gen. 2:19-20 made it clear that humanity and animals were not to cohabitate.

**22:20** Once again Yahweh emphasized His exclusivity to all other gods. This is by far the most important principle to incorporate into one's thinking and practices because the God you worship will affect everything else, as discussed in the First Commandment.

The problem with these practices (Ex. 22:18-20) is not merely the abhorrent departure from decency but the greater offense of attempting to substitute something for the saving practices of Yahweh's covenant. These punishments protected people from losing their salvation. Also, it must be remembered that Israel would willingly enter this covenant with Yahweh knowing these laws (Ex. 24). So, by their agreement, they were willing to throw off these practices and accept and enforce the penalty if they did not.

**22:21** While the Israelites were not to tolerate the practices of the foreigners around them, they were also not to mistreat them or take advantage of them. Through their separateness and devotion to Yahweh alone and their love for others, they were to attract the other nations to their way of life.

**22:21-24** The reference to the widow and orphan was intended to be evocative of the entire range of disadvantaged, unprotected, and easily mistreated individuals and groups in the ancient world. Yahweh wanted Israel to especially look out for these disadvantaged groups because they lacked the normal protections otherwise afforded in the society in which they lived. Because there were no government programs to take care of people, protection of one's rights and provision for people's survival was found in the large clan or tribe that they were a part of. There were many types of people, the widow and orphan, who had no clan or tribe to protect their rights. Therefore, the Israelites were called by Yahweh to step in and be the "family" to these people whom they encountered (Ps. 68:5-6). Yahweh never intended this to be the job of the government; it was the responsibility of the covenant community to contribute to and take care of the needs of these disadvantaged people.

Yahweh warned that ignoring these people and allowing social injustice could result in the unleashing of covenant curses, which would result in the general rejection of Israel and in its destruction as a political entity (Lev. 26; Deut. 28-33). The sword is symbolic of warfare (Ex. 17:13; Lev. 26:6; Deut. 32:24; 2 Sam. 1:12; 2:26). Yahweh took this so seriously that Israel's

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<sup>81</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 512.

idolatry and social injustice were the only two sins that the prophets cited for why Israel was taken into exile and why, as a nation, they lost the right to be the covenant people of Yahweh.

**22:25-27** Yahweh forbade the charging of interest to people who borrowed. The idea is if they needed to borrow, then they were already struggling, which meant charging interest created a greater hardship for them and less help. The whole point of lending was not to make a profit but to help someone in need. However, one could require collateral from the borrower to ensure payment. But you could not take as collateral something that they needed to survive or to make enough money to pay the lender back. The presumption of the law is that most people had property that did not represent their survival. If that type of property was pledged as collateral on a loan, then collateral was allowed. By contrast, people who had so little that collateral would threaten their survival were exempt from having to place collateral. The character of Yahweh is cited as a guarantee of this loan in that if you are showing love to someone by lending to them, then Yahweh will surely bless you even if they never repay you.

**22:28** Yahweh once again establishes that every ruler has been chosen by Him, but He also makes it clear that whether one is below you or above you, all are to be treated with dignity and respect. Modern people who are used to the unlimited freedom of speech have become blinded to the power of words and the damage that they can do to people, relationships, and nations.

**22:29-30** Yahweh required an offering of the first fruits of all things as a reminder that all things belonged to Him and to trust that He would provide for them. This included the firstborn sons, who were to serve Yahweh in a priestly way, and the animals, who were to serve in a sacrificial way.

**22:31** Animals found dead on the road were not to be eaten because no one knew how it had died, what diseases were in the flesh, or how long it had been there. And it still contained the blood of the animal, the consumption of which was forbidden by Yahweh in Gen. 9:4 because the pagan nations believed that this gave them a greater life force. This is made clear when Yahweh begins by citing not their health but their holiness, that they were different from the nations because they belonged to Yahweh.

**23:1-3** As already stated in the ninth commandment, the Israelites were not to give a false report, even under the pressure of what the majority was doing. The wording could apply to gossip as well. The word *rabbim* can be translated as “crowd or majority” and is also used sometimes to refer to the “mighty,” the people of importance in society (Lev 19:15; Job 35:9). If Israel was to be holy, belonging to Yahweh in the way that they loved Him and others, then that meant that what He required of them was more important than what the majority was doing. The majority is usually following their self-interest, and this is the way of the wicked. Israel was not only called to not show favoritism toward the rich but also to not show favoritism towards the poor. All people were to be loved, protected, and provided for.

**23:4-5** This law was not about the legal system or about animals. It is an expression of Yahweh’s expectations for His people that concentrate on general social attitudes, using situations of lost animals as practical examples. Loving your neighbor is the focus and point. Israel’s love for others was to be so radical that they would demonstrate the same love for their enemies that Yahweh was calling them to for their own people. The law required that one be not only civil to an enemy but cooperatively involved with one’s enemy in a complicated project.

**23:6-9** Not only was the pressure of the majority a temptation to ignore justice, but bribes or opportunity to make money was a huge temptation to ignore justice. People's morals and standards can change if the sum of money is large enough (1 Tim. 6:10). Yahweh especially would not tolerate this injustice and highlights this point often in the prophets, who condemned Israel for their social injustice. One of the motivations for looking out for the foreigner, the poor, and politically weak was in remembering that this was once them, and they knew what it felt like. Yahweh was using their past to enable to them in the future to have a heart for those who were what they once were.

### **Sabbaths and Feasts**

**23:10-19** The weekly and annual Sabbaths focused on worship, whereas the seventh-year and fiftieth-year Sabbaths focused on social and ecological order of Israel. Leviticus would give more detail and complete the list of Sabbath observances. The Sabbath festivals were intended by Yahweh to provide restoration of the well-being of Israel and its land, not merely a ceasing from all activity. Legalistic Sabbatarians miss this point (Matt. 12:10-14; Mark 2:23-28; John 7:21-23), stressing doing nothing rather than doing what allows one to rest in Yahweh and restoring people to Yahweh and each other in community.

“Till now the text dealt with positive and negative precepts that are valid at all times; now we have a series of precepts that are to be observed at given times, commandments that apply to seasons that are specifically dedicated to the service of the Lord, and are intended to remind the Israelites of the covenant that the Lord made with them, and of the duty resting upon them to be faithful to this covenant.”<sup>82</sup>

**23:10-11** Israel was allowed to sow the land for six years, but in the seventh they were to leave the land alone so that the poor and the animals could eat from the secondary crops that sprung up. The focus of the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:2-7; Deut. 15:1-3) was not for letting the land rest to improve the productivity of the land. The point was to provide another means of taking care of and feeding the poor. It would not be worth it to a farmer to harvest the secondary crops that were scattered. But it would be a gift to the poor to go into the fields and harvest what they found. This gave the poor dignity as they worked for their food and caused them to value it since it was not a free handout. Yahweh meant for all fields of all Israelites to cease in the seventh year all at the same time. This would require a huge amount of trust in Yahweh in the seventh year to take care of Israel.

**23:12** Yahweh repeats the weekly Sabbath law but emphasizes that this is for the rest of the people and animals. This does not mean that the resting for humanitarian purposes trumps the theological purpose of the fourth commandment; rather, it adds to it. The repetition, in slightly different language, of a law so easily misunderstood and broken has the benefit of reinforcing the importance of the law to the covenant.

**23:13** Notice how Yahweh repeats the command of having no other gods before Him. These are reminders of why they are to obey even when they don't understand or think it seems tedious.

**23:14-17** The high Sabbaths were seven yearly festival Sabbaths that were added to the weekly Sabbaths in the year. Some of them were one day, and some were a week long. Even though there were seven, only three of them required Israel to make a pilgrimage to the tabernacle. These were the feasts of Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Tabernacles. This requirement

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<sup>82</sup> Umberto Cassuto. *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, p. 300.

encouraged the national, social, and spiritual unity of the twelve tribes as they came to rest in and worship Yahweh. These festivals coincided with a downtime on the agricultural calendar. The reason was so that no one could claim that their job or responsibilities prevented them from participating in the festival. It also allowed them to truly enjoy the festival without the stress of unfinished work in the fields.

The people were to present to Yahweh a grain or cereal harvest offering with two loaves of bread, salted and leavened bread, as well as a variety of animal sacrifices and whatever other freewill offerings the people chose to give (Lev. 23:16-21; Num. 28:36). Various second-crop grains and tree and vine crops, such as dates, olives, and grapes, were also included. It celebrated Yahweh's gracious deliverance and covenant faithfulness. It also celebrated His provision of another year's grain harvest and the ability to continue to enjoy life.

**23:18-19** The point of these commandments was that Israel was not allowed to duplicate the religious rituals of the Canaanites and add a Yahweh-istic twist to them. Yahweh forbade the practices of winning divine favor or to magically strengthen or extend one's life (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26; Deut. 15:23).

Yeast was sometimes used to allow a person to consume blood in a palatable way. The Israelites were not allowed to keep leftovers overnight for another festival. This forced the Israelites to bring the proper portion or quantity.

No one is completely sure what to "cook a young goat in its mother's milk" means (it is repeated in Ex. 34:26 and Deut. 14:21). The most common view is that it is a command to Israel to be separate from the Canaanites. It was a common practice among the Canaanites to offer to their gods a lamb boiled in the milk of its mother. Some scholars say that they did this ritual because it would magically stimulate the powers of nature to procreate, producing more fertile crops (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9) since mother's milk is a symbol of fertility. J. Milgrom argues that it is a prohibition of commingling life and death and showed disrespect for the God-given relationship between parent and offspring.<sup>83</sup>

### **Obedience to Yahweh**

**23:20-33** Motive is what the present passage is about. It forms the conclusion to the Covenant Code, reminding the Israelites of who they were, where they were going, and how they were to get there.

"Following the text of the covenant code Yahweh assures His people of His ongoing commitment. He had not brought them out of Egypt and made covenant with them only to forget them in the wilderness. He had promised to give them land, so now He speaks of the process by which they would enter the land and the circumstances they would face there (Ex. 23:20-33)."<sup>84</sup>

**23:20-23** Yahweh promised Israel that He would send an angel that would be physically with them to guide them and protect them (Ex. 3:2; 14:19; Num. 20:16). Because the Israelites were sinners, they could not fully enter into the presence of Yahweh without His glory eradicating them, as discussed in the previous section. So, Yahweh gave them an angel that would not only speak on His behalf but would also act as a protective covering so that Yahweh's presence could

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<sup>83</sup> See J. Milgrom, "You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk," BRev 1 (1985): 48-55.

<sup>84</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. "A Theology of the Pentateuch." In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 47.

enter their camp. This angel went before Israel and led them into the Promised Land just as Yahweh had promised (Ex. 32:34; 33:2; Num. 22:22-35; 5:13-15).

**23:24-26** Once again Yahweh reminded the people that the heart of all these commands was their devotion to Yahweh. However, He made it clear that not only were they not to worship the other gods, but, furthermore, they were to destroy the idols in the land into which He would bring them. The first command was a prohibition of worshiping the gods that the Israelites would encounter once they reached Canaan, the Promised Land. The second command was that the people must destroy the idols and the sacred stones, which were the means of worshiping the pagan gods (Ex. 34:13; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 7:5; 12:3; 16:22; 1 Kgs. 14:23), as well as the presence and power of the gods to bless the fertility of the people. Yahweh knew that the Israelites would desire agricultural success and would be tempted to go to these sacred stones, which were visible and tangible manifestations of fertility gods. His prohibition was for the fullness of the Israelites' life and their salvation. Notice that the curses for disobedience are general, but the blessings for obedience are specific.

**23:27-31** Yahweh promised that if they obeyed Him and His commands, then taking the land of Canaan would be easy, for He would make the Canaanites fear them because of the mighty and awesome God they served. The reference to hornets is most likely a metaphor for the plagues of Egypt, in the same way that Isa. 7:18 uses the fly and the bee as symbols of Egypt and Assyria. However, despite the unlimited power of Yahweh, He would not complete the conquest in a year. If the Canaanites were all removed in a year, there would not be enough Israelites to maintain the land and keep the population of the wild animals down. Israel is mostly hills and requires terrace farming to maintain the land. It would have been an overwhelming amount of work to keep the land from becoming desolate. Yahweh promised Israel all the land from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. The actual boundaries of the land are detailed in Joshua 11-20.

**23:32-33** Israel was not to make any covenants with the Canaanites because Yahweh had called them to be separate from the people of the world in their philosophy and practices. More importantly, they had already made a covenant with Yahweh, so making another one with another nation would be unfaithfulness to Yahweh. This unfaithfulness of idolatry is considered adultery against Yahweh throughout Scriptures (Jer. 3:1-5; 9:2; Ezek. 16-8-22; Hos. 2:2-5; 3:1-5).

“It is very important to observe that God conditioned obtaining all that He promised the Israelites as an inheritance on their obedience. They could only enter into it by obeying God. Their inheritance was something different from their salvation, which came to them only by faith in God (Gen. 15:6; Exod. 12:13; 14:31). The New Testament likewise teaches that justification comes solely by faith in God, but only obedient Christians will obtain the full inheritance that God has promised us.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 124.

## **D. Ratification of the Covenant (24:1-18)**

This section is the climax of the book. Here, Yahweh bound the people to Him through the Mosaic Covenant. Though He had given the requirements for the covenant in the previous chapters and would continue to build upon it throughout the rest of Exodus and Leviticus, it is here that the people willingly entered into the covenant with Yahweh and so officially became His people.

The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant that required obedience in order to maintain the covenant. Israel was expected to obey all the commands of Yahweh, which totaled about 613. And if they violated these laws, then the covenant was broken, which can be seen in their sin of worshiping the golden calf (Ex. 32-34). If they obeyed the commands, then Yahweh would make them a treasured possession, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation. The sign of the covenant was the Sabbath (Ex. 31:12-18).

**24:1-2** By the fact that Yahweh called Moses back up the mountain for a fourth time, it is assumed that Moses had come down from the mountain after receiving the Covenant Code. Yahweh called Moses, Aaron, Aaron's two sons, and seventy elders to ascend the mountain to worship Him. However, only Moses was allowed to ascend to the top to be with Yahweh. Because of Yahweh's glory, humans were restricted on how close they could get to Him based on their righteousness and relationship to Him.

**24:3-4** As mentioned before, it is critical to understand that the people have already heard Yahweh speak the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20) to them and that Moses had spoken to them all the requirements of the Covenant Code (Ex. 21-23). They knew and fully understand all that was required of them, and they respond by willingly entering into an unbreakable covenant with Yahweh. The fact that they agreed to "do all the words of Yahweh" emphasizes that the Israelites knew that they were not free to keep only a part of the covenant. They also knew how Yahweh would bless them in response to their obedience (Ex. 19:1-6). Now ready to inaugurate the Mosaic Covenant, Moses built an altar that represented Yahweh, along with twelve standing stones around the altar of Yahweh representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the people. The "standing stones" could be a small piece about a foot high or a huge column higher than humans. These two structures that represented Yahweh and Israel bore witness to the covenant that was about to be made.

**24:5-8** Every covenant requires blood, as in the case of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15). The blood sacrifice of the animals sealed the two parties in the covenant. With the death of the animals, the two parties agreed that what had been done to the animals may be done to them if they violated their part of the covenant (Gen. 15). This covenant was thus a serious and totally binding covenant that brought great blessings when kept but had severe consequences for its violation. The young Israelite men who performed the sacrifices may have been the firstborn sons of every family that were spared at Passover (Ex. 13:1-16).

Moses took half of the blood from the sacrifices and threw it on the altar, which represented Yahweh. Then Moses read again from the Book of the Covenant, which was the laws of Ex. 20-23. And once again, the people willingly agreed to do all that Yahweh had commanded. Once they agreed again to the covenant, Moses took the other half of the blood and sprinkled it on the people. Thus, both parties were sprinkled with the blood of the same animals, binding them together into one covenant relationship (the same idea is portrayed in Gen. 2:24 between Adam and Eve). Some droplets of blood would have remained on their skin for days and on their

clothing as long as the clothes lasted (they wore these outfits every day). The ceremony was so vivid and extraordinary in order to make it memorable, a memory intended to keep in the minds of the people the fact that Yahweh had joined with the people of Israel in a formal, official covenant to which both He and they were bound by an oath. With the exodus and the Mosaic Covenant, the people were now birthed into an official nation with a national God.

“In the blood sprinkled on the altar [v. 6], the natural life of the people was given up to God, as a life that had passed through death, to be pervaded by His grace; and then through the sprinkling upon the people [v. 8] it was restored to them again, as a life renewed by the grace of God. In this way the blood not only became a bond of union between Yahweh and His people, but by the blood of the covenant, it became a vital power, holy and divine, uniting Israel and its God; and the sprinkling of the people with this blood was an actual renewal of life, a transposition of Israel into the kingdom of God, in which it was filled with the powers of God’s spirit of grace, and sanctified into a kingdom of priests, a holy nation of Yahweh (19:6).”<sup>86</sup>

**24:9-11** Now that the covenant had been cut, the leaders were allowed to see Yahweh. However, this seeing of Yahweh must be understood in the light of other passages (Ex. 33:20-23; Isa. 6:1; John 1:18). Perhaps they saw only His feet or, more exactly, some representation of part of Yahweh in human form (Isa. 6:1; Rev. 4:2, 6). The sapphire platform may have been an image of Him sitting upon the sky of the earth as total and absolute ruler of all creation (Isa. 40:22). Because of their sin, they were not able to truly see Yahweh; however, they were able to see Him in a much greater way than in the pillar of cloud and fire because they had moved closer to Him in their obedience through the covenant. Yahweh’s allowing them to come closer to Him let them know that they were dealing with a personal being rather than a thing, but one who was glorious and brilliant, relatively distinct atop a platform that was recognizable.

**24:12-18** Yahweh then called Moses up the mountain again in order to receive the stone tablets that would contain the Ten Commandments. Moses took only Joshua with him, part of the way, and left Aaron in charge of all the people while he was gone. Moses then went to the top of the mountain without Joshua to stand before the glory of Yahweh. For six days, the cloud covered the mountain. On the seventh day, Yahweh called to Moses, and he entered the cloud. These six days followed by the seventh day may recall the creation week (Gen. 1-2). Yahweh was recreating the imagery of the Garden of Eden, which was now on top of Mount Sinai, as the tabernacle which Moses was able to enter and rest with Yahweh on the seventh day, as Adam and Eve had. Though Moses, because of His righteous obedience, was able to get closer to Yahweh than any other, he still, because of sin, was not able to experience the intimacy that Adam and Eve would have experienced (Gen. 34). The number forty was used to communicate a long period of time (Deut. 9:9).

“From the ancient world outside of Israel, all surviving written evidence indicates that laws were understood to be given by a king to his people, not a god to his people. To be sure, the king could claim that a god or gods instructed him to promulgate the laws, but no claim close to the present one existed outside the biblical covenant—that God himself provided his laws directly to his covenant people and that he actually wrote the basic ones (the Ten Words/Commandments) personally on stone as a sign that all his laws came directly from him and are not the product of human invention. Israel’s teacher was thus God himself, who

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<sup>86</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 2:158.

gave them his covenant ‘for their instruction.’ It cannot be escaped that when Jesus issued laws—not merely as the one who wrote them down as dictated but as the actual author—he was staking a claim to divinity under the concept of Israelite covenant law, in which the author of the commands is also the divine Sovereign.”<sup>87</sup>

While Moses was being called to the mountain to receive the Mosaic Law (Mosaic Covenant), Yahweh was emphasizing His holiness in contrast to the sinfulness of the people—the reason they could not come into His full presence. This idea of Yahweh’s separation from humanity due to sin is developed throughout Scripture. It began in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were removed from the presence of Yahweh due to their sin (Gen. 3:22-24). Through the Law, sacrificial system, and tabernacle, Yahweh was going to make a way for the people to come into His presence. However, because they were still sinners, and because sin would not be dealt with until Christ’s death and resurrection, there was still a separation. Throughout Scriptures, Yahweh is portrayed as so holy and righteous that His mere presence (His glory) overwhelms and eradicates sin. And because humans are sinners, they would, in His presence, be eradicated as well (Isa. 6:5-6).

Thus, until the coming of Christ, the only way humans could enter the presence of Yahweh was if they were shielded or protected from His glory (and still, due to their sin, they were unable to see Him for who He truly is). This protection was provided by the presence of angels, who acted as a shield for humans entering the presence of Yahweh. When Yahweh visited Abraham, He brought two angels (Gen. 18:1-2, 22; 19:1), and when Isaiah (Isa. 6), Daniel (Dan. 7:15; 8:15-18), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:4-9) entered the presence of Yahweh, they, too, were surrounded by angels. Though Exodus does not reveal this aspect, Deut. 33:2, Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19, and Heb. 2:2 all make the point that angels surrounded Moses on Mount Sinai, and that the Law was given through them.

In contrast, believers today are able to enter the presence of Yahweh with boldness and confidence because they are covered by the blood of Christ, which provides a greater shield than that of the angels and, thus, greater access to Yahweh (Heb. 2; 4).

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<sup>87</sup> Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 559.

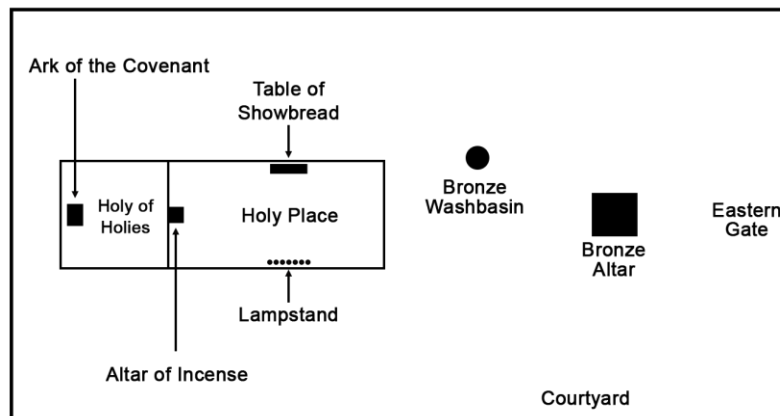
## E. Instructions for the Tabernacle (25:1–31:18)

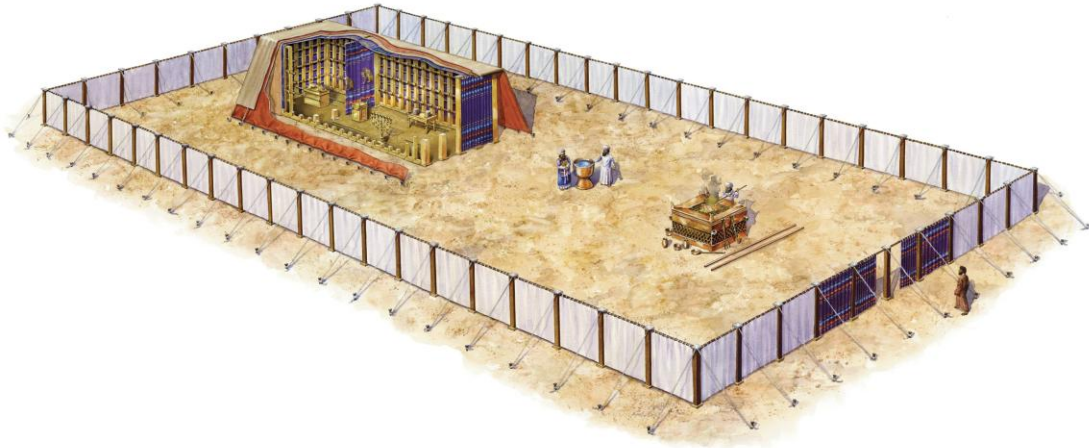
Yahweh gave very specific, detailed instructions on how to build the tabernacle, the items of the tabernacle, and the priestly garments and where to place everything. The reason was this was His house, and it was to reflect the attention to detail and orderliness that He had woven into His creation—before humanity brought chaos into the world through their rebellion. The tabernacle layout and articles of the tabernacle would teach Israel about the holiness of Yahweh and what it meant to come into His presence. The instructions for the tabernacle started from the innermost part—closest to His presence—and moved outward, toward the outside where the people were. This is the only time Yahweh placed His Holy Spirit on people, Bezalel and Oholiab, to build and artistically design the tabernacle, according to Yahweh’s specifications.

The tabernacle was meant to be a microcosm of the Garden of Eden, where once again Yahweh and humanity could come and dwell in a holy and good land. Like the garden, it was an enclosed space with a gate in the east guarded by cherubim. The lampstand represented the Tree of Life, and the table of showbread represented the bountiful fruit of the garden.

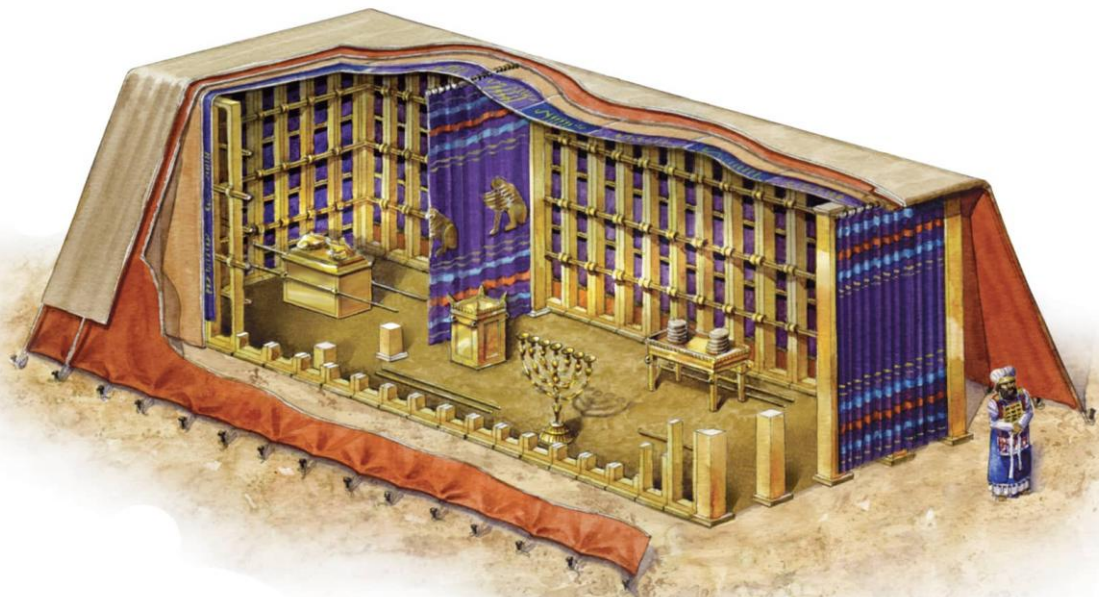
**25:1-9** In Gen. 15:14 and Ex. 3:21-22 Yahweh stated that He would give Israel the plunder of Egypt. In Ex. 12:29-36 Israel left Egypt with its plunder. Here, Yahweh told them they were to offer to Him as an offering the wealth they had received when they left Egypt. Yahweh gave them the wealth of Egypt not only as a recompense for their slavery but also so that they could give it to Him as an offering. However, Yahweh wanted them to give it out of their own free will and love for Him (2 Cor. 9:7) because that is what a true sacrifice is.

The tabernacle was a rectangular tent with only one entrance, in the east (45 ft. long by 15 ft. wide by 15 ft. high). It was divided into two rooms. The smaller room (15 ft. long by 15 ft. wide by 15 ft. high) was the Holy of Holies, which contained the Ark of the Covenant. Only the high priest was allowed to enter and only once a year. The larger room (30 ft. long by 15 ft. wide by 15 ft. high) was the Holy Place, and only the priests were allowed to enter it. A courtyard that all Jews were allowed to enter surrounded the tabernacle. It was here that the animal sacrifices happened in order to atone for sin.





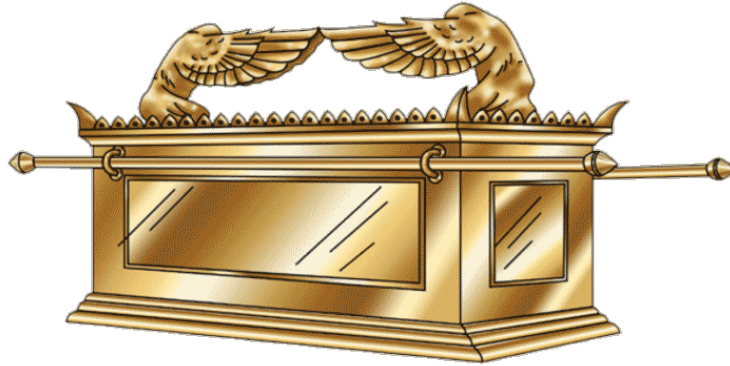
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**25:10-16** The Ark of the Covenant was located in the Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the tabernacle and also the most restricted room. Only the high priest, one time a year and only with the blood of a sacrifice, could enter the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Covenant represented Yahweh's presence with the people and was seen as His throne (2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chr. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Rev. 4:1-11), which is reflective of His true heavenly throne (Ezek. 10:1-22; Rev. 4:1-11). In fact, the Israelites often visualized Yahweh on His throne in heaven with the Ark of the Covenant as His footstool on earth. It was upon the Ark of the Covenant that the pillar of cloud and fire rested, connecting heaven and earth. Gold in the Scriptures represents Yahweh's glory because it was the brightest metal in the ancient world and reflects light, looking like the sun and its radiance (Job 22:25; 23:10; Ps. 21:3; 45:9, 13; Dan. 10:5; Rev. 1:12-13; 4:4; 9:7; 14:14; 15:6; 21:18-121). With the Ark of the Covenant being gold on the outside and inside and the pillar of cloud and fire on it, it would reflect light, symbolizing Yahweh's glory.

Later, Yahweh would have Moses place in the Ark the broken Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and the budded staff of Aaron (Ex. 25:15-16; Num. 17:10; Heb. 9:3-4). All of these items represented the sin and rebellion of the people, so the Ark of the Covenant symbolically contained the sin of the people.

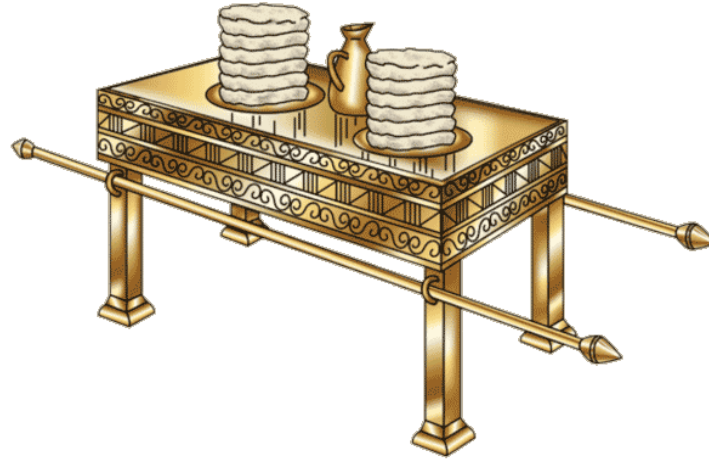


**25:17-22** The atonement lid was also called the Mercy Seat by the Israelites. It covered the Ark of the Covenant and the items in it. On top of the lid were two cherubim, which are often portrayed as the bodyguards of Yahweh (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 26:31; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chr. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16; Ezek. 10:1-22; Rev. 4:1-11). Note that Yahweh does not need the protection of bodyguards, but their presence as His attendants emphasizes His authority, as the attendants of kings on earth emphasize their authority. In fact, the cherubim serve more as protectors *from* Yahweh's glory for unholy humans who come into His holy presence. Their presence on top of the Ark's lid symbolically covers the sins of the people, creating a protective barrier between sinful humanity and Yahweh. Because of this barrier, Yahweh can come down and dwell, in a limited way, with the people. The cherubim are Yahweh's provided covering, but the people also need to provide a covering—their faith. Once a year, the High Priest is to carry the blood of a goat into the Holy of Holies (the innermost room containing the Ark of the Covenant, Ex. 26:31-35) and place the blood on the Mercy Seat, thus covering the sins of the people (Lev. 16:15-17). In this, the cherubim and the blood allow for Yahweh to dwell with the people.

Christ fulfilled the Ark of the Covenant when He came to earth as the glory of Yahweh (Matt. 17:1-3; Jn. 1:1-5, 14; 1 Jn. 1:5; Heb. 1:3) and dwelt with humanity, or “tabernacled” with us (Jn. 1:14; Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3; the word *dwelt* is *tabernacle* in the Greek). It is also through His blood that our sins are covered and that the Holy Spirit (the pillar of cloud and fire, Lk. 1:17; 3:16; 21:27; Acts 2:1-4) is now able to dwell within us. Since we are called the dwelling house of Yahweh (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5), and since Christ's glory is within us (Jn. 14:16-18; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col 1:27), we *are* the Ark of the Covenant.

The next two items, the table of showbread (Ex. 25:23-30) and the lampstand (Ex. 25:31-40)—and, later mentioned, the altar of incense (Ex. 30:1-10)—were located in the Holy Place, which was the main room that led to the Holy of Holies. Only the priests of Levi could enter this room. However, unlike with the Holy of Holies, they entered the Holy Place on a daily basis in order to maintain the tabernacle and all of its articles.

**25:23-30** On the table of showbread was twelve loaves of bread, which symbolized the provision Yahweh made for Israel in the wilderness when the bread (manna) appeared each morning. The twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel. These loaves were replaced at the end of each week, and only the priests were allowed to eat the old loaves of bread.



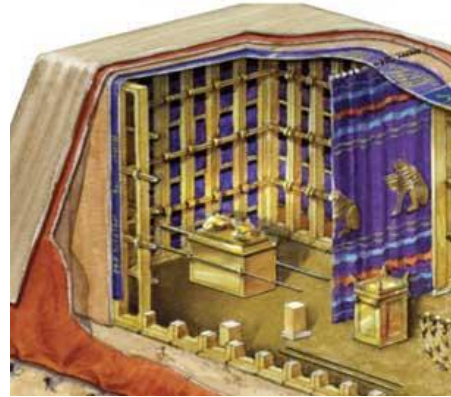
Christ fulfilled the table of showbread by miraculously providing bread for the Jews, by referring to Himself as the bread of life (Jn. 6), and by becoming the bread of Yahweh (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 10:16-17). Thus, the bread is the body of Christ, which was broken for us so that we may receive the blessings of Yahweh (Jn. 6:56-63).

**25:31-40** The lampstand was to have seven branches with lamps at the ends, symbolizing Yahweh's light shining during the seven days of His creation (seven also represents completion). Yahweh is often seen as light throughout Scriptures (Gen. 1:3; Ex. 13:21; 19:16-19; 2 Sam. 22:12-13, 29; Ps. 4:6; 18:28; 19:8; 27:1; 36:9; 43:3; 44:3; 56:13; 76:4; 89:15; 90:8; 104: 2; 118:27; 119:105, 130; Prov. 6:23; Isa. 2:5; 60:1, 19; Ezk. 1:25-28; Dan. 7:9-10; Micah 7:8; 2 Cor. 4:6; Jam. 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Jn. 1:5; Rev. 4:1-6; 21:23). It also was fashioned to look like a tree, symbolizing the tree of Life in the Garden of Eden and in the new earth (Gen. 1:9; Rev. 22:2). The flowers and almonds on the branches represent the new life that Yahweh's light brings. The almond trees were the first to bloom in the spring.



Christ fulfills the lampstand by proclaiming Himself as the light of Yahweh (Jn. 8:12; 12:35, 46), and Scripture also calls Him the light of Yahweh (Matt. 17:1-2; Jn. 1:1-4; Acts 9:3-6; 1 Tim. 6:14-16; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 21:23). By the fact that Christ is in us (Jn. 14:16-18; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col 1:27), we are also called to be light (Matt. 5:13-16; Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5).

**26:1-6** In Exodus 26, Yahweh described how the tabernacle itself should be built. The first curtain of four would be the bottom layer was draped over the top and sides of the frame of the tabernacle forming the roof and walls of the tabernacle. This curtain was to be made from fine linen in colors of blue, purple, and scarlet. Blue is symbolic of the sky, spiritual realm, and heavenly things (Ex. 24:10); purple is symbolic of royalty and kingship (Esth. 8:15; Prov. 31:22; Lam. 4:5; Dan. 5:7; Mk. 15:17-20; Lk. 16:19; Rev. 17:4); and scarlet is symbolic of blood and sacrifice (Ex. 12:12-13; Lev. 14:6; Isa. 1:18; Matt. 27:28; Heb. 9:19; Rev. 17:3-4). These linen curtains were to be linked together with gold rings that symbolize the glory of Yahweh.



In addition to using these three colors, the Israelites were to embroider cherubim into the curtains. As mentioned above, the cherubim were seen as a protective barrier between Yahweh and humanity, but their wings were also symbolic of the deliverance and protection of Yahweh (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11; Ruth 2:12; 2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 17:8; 18:10; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; 104:3; 139:9; Prov. 23:5; Isa. 8:8; 40:31; Matt. 23:37). When the priests looked up at the ceiling of the tabernacle, they would be reminded of their separation from Yahweh and His holiness, but they would also see His heavenly, royal sacrifice with His wings of protection and deliverance spread over them.

**26:7-14** The second curtain, which would go on top of the linen curtain, was made of goat hair. Goats are symbolic of sin (Num. 7:16; 11:15; 15:24-27; 28:17-22; 29: 1, 5; Lev. 4:23, 27-28; 9:3; 16:19-22; 23:15-19; Matt. 25:32-33). There are eleven references to goats as sin-bearers in the First Testament, which explains why there were to be eleven garments of goats' skins covering the tabernacle. These garments were to be linked together with bronze rings, which is symbolic of judgment (Ex. 27:1-2; 30:18; Lev. 29:19; Num. 16:39; 21:4-9; Deut. 28:22-24).

The third curtain was made from ram skins dyed red, which is symbolic of a substitutionary sacrifice (Gen. 3:21; 22:13; Ex. 29:15-34; Lev. 5:15-18; Num. 5:8).

The fourth and outer curtain was to be made of porpoise skins, which is symbolic of provision, protection, and security (Deut. 8:4; 9:25; Neh. 9:20-21; Ezek. 6:10). Porpoises were found in the Nile River and Red Sea.

**26:15-30** The walls of the tabernacle were to be made from acacia wood covered in gold. Each wood plank was sitting on top of two silver blocks as its foundation. Silver was symbolic of blood and redemption (Ex. 30:13; Lev. 5:15; 17:11; 27:3; Num. 3:50; 1 Cor. 3:12; 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:18; Matt. 27:3, 9). Thus, the foundation of the tabernacle represented the redemptive blood.

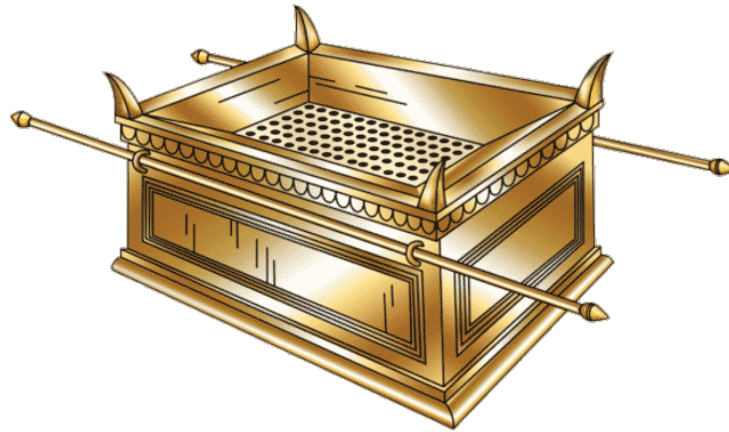
From the outside, the tabernacle was not aesthetically impressive, with its dark and unattractive porpoise, ram, and goat skins (Isa. 53:2), but the materials stood as spiritual reminders. The people would see sin (goat hair) and judgment (bronze rings) but also sacrifice (ram skins) and protection (porpoise skins). When the people (priest) entered the tabernacle, they would see the glory of Yahweh everywhere (gold walls) as well as His holiness and royalty (blue and purple linen).

**26:31-37** The veil was to be made in the same way as the first linen curtain that was the tabernacle's ceiling (Ex. 26:1-6). The veil was to be hung as a wall that would separate the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place. Once again, cherubim would be woven into the veil as a symbol of humanity's separation from Yahweh. Behind the veil would lay the presence of Yahweh, the Ark of the Covenant.

The veil symbolized the sky, which served as a separation between the physical and spiritual realms. The tabernacle symbolically portrayed these two realms coming together, with the veil as the dividing wall. The book of Hebrews uses the veil as a symbol of Christ's body torn in crucifixion, which opened the way for access into Yahweh's presence (Heb. 10:20; Matt. 27:50-51; Mk. 15:37-38; Lk. 23:45-46).

The tabernacle represented heaven, where Yahweh dwells, and so became an earthly representation of that reality. In the beginning Yahweh created the Garden of Eden to be a place where He could dwell with humanity, but that was lost in the Fall. In the tabernacle, and later the temple, He restored a portion of His dwelling through the Ark of the Covenant. The three most prominent things about the Garden of Eden were the tree of life, the perfect provision of the garden for all that Adam and Eve needed, and the presence of Yahweh. Likewise, the tabernacle had the lampstand that was decorated with flowers and almonds, representing the tree in the garden, the table of show bread, representing Yahweh's provision for Israel's needs, and the Ark of the Covenant, representing Yahweh's presence. The presence of Yahweh was more fully revealed in Christ's coming, who was the fulfillment of the tabernacle as He dwelt with humanity (Jn. 1:14; Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3; the word *dwelt* is *tabernacle* in the Greek). He even referred to Himself as the tabernacle (Jn. 2:18-22) and revealed Himself as the glory of Yahweh (Matt. 17:2; 2 Pet. 1:17-18). Scripture ultimately points to the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven, which is a restoration of the garden of Eden and the full presence of Yahweh with humanity (Rev. 3:12; 21:2). Notice that in all the images of Yahweh dwelling with humanity, He always initiates, and His presence always comes down to dwell with humanity. This is starkly contrasted with the pagan religions, where the gods always dwelt on top of a mountain and it was left to humanity to ascend to the top through their own efforts. Scripture also says the tabernacle is a symbol of Christ's work on the cross, which makes the restoration of the dwelling of Yahweh possible (Jn. 2:19-21; Heb. 3:3-4; 8:2; 9:11-12). Finally, because of Christ indwelling the believers, they are also seen as a fulfillment of the tabernacle (the individual believer: 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16, 19; Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:4-5; and the Church: 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6; 10:21).

**27:1-8** The bronze altar was a square altar with four horns on its four corners. The image of a horn was symbolic of authority and power. Thus, this altar has the authority and power to deal with humanity's sins. Both the fire and bronze of the altar symbolized the judgment of Yahweh. It was on the altar that the legal guilt of one's sins was removed when a substitutionary animal was burned in the fire of judgment in the place of the sin of the person offering the substitutionary sacrifice.



“The position of the Altar just inside the entrance to the court made it as clear as symbolism could that the beginning of fellowship between God and man must be in sacrifice.”<sup>88</sup>

Christ fulfilled the bronze altar through the cross by becoming humanity’s substitutionary sacrifice under the judgment of Yahweh (Jn. 1:29; 3:16; Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:1-2; Heb. 9:11-14; 13:10; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

**27:9-19** The fence around the courtyard was made of white linen with bronze poles holding the curtain up. The purpose of this fence was to keep humanity out. The white symbolizes righteousness (Gen. 49:12; Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18; Lam. 4:7; Dan. 7:9; Matt. 17:2; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12; Acts 1:10; Rev. 1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9; 14:14; 19:11; 20:11; and in the negative sense of false righteousness of whitewashing Ezek. 13:10-15; 22:28; Matt. 23:27; Acts 23:3), and the bronze symbolizes judgment. It is the righteousness of Yahweh that keeps the people from entering His presence. There was only one gate in the east that allowed the people to enter, and it was decorated in the same way as the first curtain (Ex. 26:1-6) and the veil (Ex. 26:31-37).

The only way through the gate was with a sacrifice of blood. The fact that there was only one entrance into the tabernacle communicated both the limited access to Yahweh due to sin but also that He had made a way possible, through blood, into His presence.

Christ fulfilled the fence and the gate by making it possible for us to come to Yahweh with no more separation from Him (Jn. 10:9; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:11-18; Col. 1:19-22).

**27:20-21** These instructions concern the olive oil that the priests were to prepare and use in the tabernacle lamps. The instructions form a transition from an emphasis on the tabernacle furnishings to the priests’ ministry that follows. The priests were required to trim and refill the lamps on the lampstand every evening (Lev. 24:3; 1 Sam. 3:3). The oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit throughout Scriptures.

**28:1-5** Here Aaron and his sons were officially appointed as priests to lead the people even though they had already been functioning as priests. The function of the priest was to first offer up gifts and sacrifices to Yahweh on behalf of the people for repentance and fellowship with Yahweh. Second, they were to meditate the relationship between Yahweh and the people. Third,

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<sup>88</sup> Frederick Brotherton Meyer. *Devotional Commentary on Exodus*, p. 349.

they were to maintain the tabernacle and guard it against the defilement of sin. The priests, themselves sinners, had to cover their uncleanness symbolically with holy clothes when they came into the tabernacle and the presence of Yahweh (Ex. 35:19; Lev. 16:4, 23-24). They were not allowed to wear these clothes at other times—they were holy to the tabernacle only. The fact that the workmen who made these garments needed to be wise and skillful indicates the importance that Yahweh placed on their construction.

“The approach to the Holy One, both within the biblical tradition and outside it, has always included some kind of mediatorial ministry, for it is inherent in any kind of ‘high religion’ that an otherwise unbridgeable chasm exist between ineffable deity and finite mankind.”<sup>89</sup>

“In earliest times, of course, Yahweh met directly with His creation, which in turn communicated with Him in word and act. With the passing of time and the rise of patriarchal familial and clan structures, the father of the household functioned also as its priest, the minister who stood between the family and its God. Finally—and even before the covenant at Sinai—there had developed some kind of order of priests, as Exodus 19:22 expressly declares.”<sup>90</sup>

**28:6-14** The ephod was a linen apron worn by the high priest as he entered the tabernacle. It was made to look like the veil before the Holy of Holies. This linen ephod symbolized the high priest’s right to represent Israel and go through the veil and into the Holy of Holies on their behalf. On the shoulders of the ephod were two stones with the names of the twelve tribes written on them—six names on each one. In this way, the high priest bore Israel on his shoulders as he went into the presence of Yahweh to atone for their sins as a nation.

“The duty of the high priest was to enter into the presence of God and make atonement for the people as their mediator. To show that as mediator he brought the nation to God, the names of the twelve tribes were engraved upon precious stones on the shoulders of the ephod. The precious stones, with their richness and brilliancy, formed the most suitable earthly substratum to represent the glory into which Israel was to be transformed as the possession of Yahweh (xix. 5); whilst the colours and material of the ephod, answering to the colours and texture of the hangings of the sanctuary, indicated the service performed in the sanctuary by the person clothed with the ephod, and the gold with which the coloured fabric was worked, the glory of that service.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>90</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>91</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 2:195.

**28:15-30** The breastplate was worn over the ephod on the high priest's chest with twelve different stones, each representing one of the tribes of Israel. So the priest bore the names of Israel both on his shoulders and on his heart.

The Urim and the Thummim were two objects intended for determining the divine will of Yahweh and were stored in some kind of pocket in the breastplate. No one is sure about their size or shape or the material from which they were made. The priest would ask Yahweh a question and then cast the objects on the ground to receive an answer (1 Sam 14:36-42). It is believed that the Urim represented the answer "no" and the Thummim represented "yes." This seems to fit with the best understanding we have of their translation, which is "curses and perfections." They seem to have fallen out of use after the Davidic period, when Yahweh raises up the office of the prophets and begins to speak through them.

**28:31-35** The robe was made of the same colors as the ephod, worn under the ephod and covering the neck of the high priest down to his ankles. Yahweh desired that the priests be completely covered in order to set them apart from the pagan priests who went into their temples completely naked.



The pomegranate was probably a symbol of the spiritually nourishing quality of Yahweh's Word (Deut. 8:3; Prov. 9:8; 25:11; Ps. 19:8-11; 119:25, 43, 50; Ecc. 15:13). The bell seems to be a symbol of the sounding or proclamation of Yahweh's Word.<sup>92</sup> Some interpreters believe that the pomegranates and bells represented fruitfulness and joy, while others believe them to represent the fruits and gifts of Yahweh's Spirit.<sup>93</sup>

**28:36-39** The high priest was to wear a white turban (righteousness) on his head. On the turban was a gold plate (glory) with the words "Holy to Yahweh" written on it, representing his separateness from the world, which means he was to be a great man of Yahweh.

"Through this inscription, which was fastened upon his head-dress of brilliant white, the earthly reflection of holiness, he was crowned as the sanctified of the Lord (Ps. cvi. 16), and endowed with the power to exterminate the sin which clung to the holy offerings of the people on account of the unholiness of their nature, so that the gifts of the nation became well-pleasing to the Lord, and the good pleasure of God was manifested to the nation."<sup>94</sup>

**28:40-43** The lesser priests were to wear white robes and gold sashes to also mark their separateness from the world and their right to represent the nation of Israel before Yahweh. These uniforms were important because the uniform draws attention to the office or function of a person, rather than the individual personality. It emphasizes his job rather than his name and gives the office its proper respect.

<sup>92</sup> See C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 2:202-203.

<sup>93</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 306, recorded several other possible explanations of these decorations.

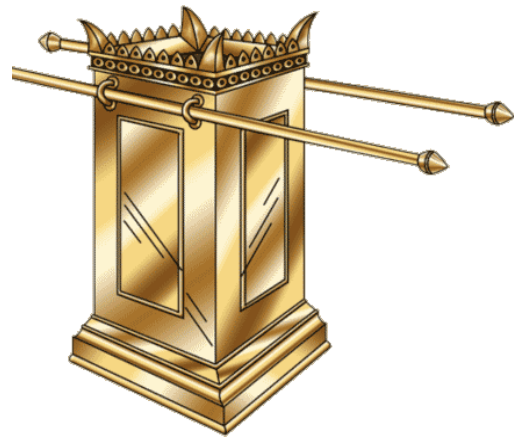
<sup>94</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 2:204.

**29:1-37** Yahweh required that Aaron and his sons be consecrated before they were able to serve in the tabernacle. The sacrifices atoned for their sins, and the washings cleansed them of their sin and defilement. The oil is symbolic of being chosen by Yahweh and receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This was done only for the priests, judges, kings, and prophets in the First Testament. The blood on the ears, thumbs, and big toes is symbolic of the priests being covered from head to foot in the sacrificial blood, which consecrates them before Yahweh.

“To Israel had been granted the privilege of being a special people; to Aaron and his sons was granted now the privilege of being a special mediating instrument between that people and Yahweh, their Lord. A covenant meal was always part of such an arrangement (cf. 24:11; 32:6), and that is precisely what is implied in the sharing of the ram of consecration by Yahweh and the priests.”<sup>95</sup>

**29:38-46** These verses list all the sacrifices that the priests were to make on behalf of the nation. These sacrifices would atone for the nation’s sins and allow the presence of Yahweh to come into the camp and dwell with them. All these sacrifices and blood on a daily basis would emphasize how horrible their sins were before a holy God.

**30:1-10** The golden altar of incense was symbolic of the worship, devotion, and prayers of Israel going up to Yahweh each day. The priests were to offer incense each morning and evening, and the high priest cleansed it with blood each year on the Day of Atonement. The First Testament describes the altar of incense as being outside of the Holy of Holies (Ex. 30:6; 40:3-5, 21-27), whereas the book of Hebrews states that it was behind the veil in the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:4). The altar of incense being inside the Holy of Holies would not be possible since the priests were to attend to it each morning and evening and only the high priest was allowed behind the veil one time a year on the Day of Atonement. Most likely, Yahweh intended it to be behind the veil but for practical purposes had Moses place it right in front of the veil so that the priests could attend to it.



Christ fulfilled the altar of incense through His death and resurrection, which allowed for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that believers could have a more intimate relationship with Yahweh (2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 3:5; 1 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 10:15; 1 Pet. 1:12; Jude 1:20).

**30:11-16** Every Israelite was required to pay half a shekel to the tabernacle each year for its upkeep. This was called a ransom tax; since not every Israelite could serve in the tabernacle, they

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<sup>95</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 51.

were to help out by paying for its repairs. This shekel was silver and so was also symbolic of a blood sacrifice being offered as a ransom.

**30:17-21** The bronze washbasin was filled with water, and, unlike all the other articles in the tabernacle, Yahweh did not specify the size that it should be. It was symbolic of the cleansing of sins; where the bronze altar removed one's legal guilt of sin, the bronze washbasin cleansed the person of their sin and defilement.



Christ fulfilled the bronze washbasin through His death and resurrection, which brought the cleansing of sin for those who trust in His Word (Jn. 15:3, 17; Eph. 5:25-26; Heb. 10:19-22; Rev. 4:6). This water is also symbolic of the Holy Spirit, for it is Him who also cleanses the believer continually throughout their life through repentance (Isa. 44:3; Jer. 2:13; Joel 2:28-29; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 12:13). Perhaps this is why Yahweh never specified a size for the bronze washbasin because there is no limit to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the continual cleansing that it offers.

**30:22-38** Moses was commanded by Yahweh to make a special oil for the anointing of the tabernacle, its articles, and the priests. This special oil was to be holy to the tabernacle and was not to be used for anything else. This was symbolic Yahweh's Spirit resting upon the tabernacle and its priests. The anointing of oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit in the Second Testament (2 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; I Jn. 2:20-27). There was also to be a special mixture for the incense that would burn in the altar of incense.

**31:1-11** Bezalel ("In the shadow of God") was Miriam's grandson. Oholiab ("The Father is my tent") was his assistant. Yahweh endowed both men with natural ability as well as with the Holy Spirit to do the work He had appointed for them. This shows that the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit are not just limited to what are listed in the Second Testament. Here we see that craftsmanship is also a spiritual gift.

"Though they were skilled, the narrative emphasizes clearly that they were to do the work of building the tabernacle by means of the skills that the Spirit of God would give them. There is an important parallel here with God's work of Creation in Genesis 1. Just as God did his work of Creation by means of his Spirit (Gen. 1:2—2:3), so also Israel was to do their work of building the tabernacle by God's Spirit."<sup>96</sup>

**31:12-18** Yahweh declared that not only was keeping the Sabbath the fourth commandment, but it was also the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. Yahweh intended this sign to teach Israel and the other nations that as redeemed people, the Israelites had already entered into a measure of rest. They were partakers of Yahweh's rest (Heb. 3-4). Yahweh takes the Sabbath so seriously that He pronounces death upon the one who refuses to honor it and exile on those who work. The Sabbath is the sign of this covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel and to not honor it is like a spouse refusing to wear a wedding ring.

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<sup>96</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 309.

“The analogy between God’s work of Creation and Israel’s construction of the tabernacle is made explicit by the reference to the Sabbath at the close of the narrative.”<sup>97</sup>

This division concludes the record that began in Ex. 25:1 describing what Moses received from Yahweh during the 40 days and nights he was in the mountain. Moses wrote the instructions concerning the tabernacle, so they parallel what he wrote about the Creation. Note some of the similarities in the narratives.<sup>98</sup>

<b>Creation (Gen. 1-2)</b>	<b>Tabernacle (Ex. 25-31)</b>
The subject of the narrative is the establishment of Yahweh’s good creation.	The subject of the narrative is the re-establishment of Yahweh’s good creation.
The heavens and earth are the arena for the creation of divine-human fellowship.	The tabernacle is the arena for the restoration of divine-human fellowship.
Yahweh’s Spirit was the enabling power in creation (Gen. 1:2-2:3).	Yahweh’s Spirit was the enabling power in constructing the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3, 6).
Structurally, the creation account consists of seven acts, each marked by divine speech (“And God said,” Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26).	Structurally, the tabernacle account consists of seven acts, each introduced by divine speech (“And Yahweh said,” Ex. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12).
Yahweh made Adam and Eve according to a specific pattern: the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).	Moses made the tabernacle according to a specific pattern: a heavenly reality (Ex. 25:9).
The Garden contained gold and jewels, and cherubim guarded it (Gen. 2:12; 3:24).	The tabernacle contained gold and jewels, and cherubim guarded it (Ex. 25:3, 7, 18).
When creation was complete, Yahweh inspected and evaluated all that He had done (Gen. 1:31) and uttered a blessing (Gen. 1:28).	When the tabernacle was complete, Moses inspected and evaluated all that was done (Ex. 39:43a) and uttered a blessing (Ex. 39:43b).
Yahweh rested on the seventh day at the end of the creation narrative (Gen. 2:1-3).	Yahweh told Israel to rest on the seventh day at the end of the tabernacle narrative (Ex. 31:12-18).
A fall followed the creation narrative (Gen. 3).	A fall followed the tabernacle narrative (Ex. 32).
This fall resulted in the breaking of the Adamic Covenant (Gen. 3:14-19).	This fall resulted in the breaking of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 33:1-5).
Yahweh covered Adam and Eve’s nakedness (Gen. 3:21).	Yahweh ordered the covering of the priests’ nakedness (Ex. 28:42).

<sup>97</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 309.

<sup>98</sup> Adapted from John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, pp. 289-90, 306, 309.

## F. The Breaking and Renewing of the Covenant (32:1–34:35)

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instructions on how to enter Yahweh's presence and worship Him, the scene shifts to what was happening in the Israelite camp, for the people had devised their own idea of worship. They had violated the covenant by crafting with their own hands an image of a golden calf to worship. This violation broke the covenant and thus their relationship with Yahweh. Their sin was so offensive that Yahweh as a holy God could no longer dwell with them. So, the narrator presents the question of what would become of Israel after breaking the covenant. Would they be left to die in the wilderness, or would they wander off to the Promised Land on their own, left to face whatever dangers lay ahead of them?

These chapters show Yahweh's goodness (Ex. 33:19) and forgiveness in great abundance, which would lead to Israel's restoration and the building and construction of the tabernacle. It shows that Yahweh was willing to accept them, forgive them, and meet Israel in an intimate relationship despite their horrendous violation of the covenant.

This section forms a chiasmic parallel that emphasizes Yahweh's giving Israel a chance to repent.

**A** The people act and Aaron, Yahweh's high priest, reacts (32:1-6)

**B** Yahweh speaks judgment (32:7-10)

**C** Moses intercedes (32:11-14)

**D** Moses goes down the mountain (32:15-20)

**E** Judgment: Investigative phase (32:21-25)

**X** Opportunity for repentance (32:26a)

**E'** Judgment: Executive phase (32:26b-29)

**D'** Moses goes up the mountain (32:30)

**C'** Moses intercedes (32:31-32)

**B'** Yahweh speaks judgment (32:33-33:3)

**A'** Yahweh acts and the people react (33:4-6)

**32:1** To the Israelites it seemed that Moses and Yahweh were absent. They did not wait for guidance from Yahweh. This reflects a shallow commitment to Him and to their leader, Moses. Evidently, they concluded that Moses had perished in the fire on Mount Sinai, and they decided to select a new leader. Moses was a god to Israel in the sense that he was their leader (Ex. 4:16). Now they turned from Moses to their new and easily manipulated leader, Aaron.

**32:2-6** Aaron responded by giving them instructions for gathering gold in order to craft an image. All the people responded by willingly offering their jewelry as an offering for the crafting of this image. The Hebrew word *kol* is often used to connote "all sorts of people" as well as "every last one." The former is preferred, and "all" is being used as hyperbole to refer to the majority of the people. It is clear that not every single person is included by the fact that later the Levites will stand against them.

Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt with Egypt's wealth, not only to compensate them for their slavery but also to fund their building the tabernacle for Him. However, they used what He had given them to honor and worship other gods and to follow their sinful desires. The idolatry of Israel so soon after their deliverance should not be too surprising, for Josh. 24:14 and Ezek. 20:6-9 state that the people of Israel were worshipping idols during their time in Egypt. One can hardly

expect an immediate change in their hearts. However, the worst part of the golden calf incident was the people's proclamation "these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" because they attributed the deliverance of Israel to the calf rather than to Yahweh. Yahweh's salvation of Israel is not only the focal point of the First Testament but is the reason Yahweh gives for requiring Israel's obedience (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:2). Now the people gave credit to a pagan god for the salvation of Israel. This would have been just as offensive as a Christian today giving Buddha credit for our salvation from sin and death through the cross.

Contrasting the words of the people with Aaron's words shows that he had a different perspective on the golden calf. However, Aaron's actions, when compared to his words "Tomorrow will be a feast to Yahweh," make his motives hard to interpret. The fact that he built the calf and then proclaimed the worship of Yahweh may suggest that Aaron feared the people at this moment more than he feared Yahweh. It may be that he had no intention to worship the golden calf but made it to appease the people rather than standing up to them as Yahweh's representative and their leader. While his actions were still a sin, they were just not as evil and rebellious as the people's actions.

The golden calf fashioned by the Israelites was not some random image they came up with; rather, it was taken specifically from the Egyptians, who worshiped the Apis bull as one of the highest manifestations of their god Re. By choosing this image, they showed themselves to still be Egyptian Israelites rather than Yahweh's Israelites. By sacrificing to it, they showed that they thought the idol had power. This was, in fact, the exact god and image that Yahweh had defeated in the fifth plague (Ex. 19:1-7).

"The bull seems to have had manifold meanings in the iconography of the Near East. It symbolized the god. It expressed attributes of a god. It represented a pedestal for the god. Each of these meanings is important in understanding the cult of the golden calves in Israel's religious experience."<sup>99</sup>

The second thing that made this sin so grievous was that Israel knew that Yahweh had forbidden idolatry, so they knew they were sinning. They knew this was a sin, first, because one of the major purposes of the plagues was to proclaim Yahweh as the one and only true God who despised the other, pagan gods (Ex. 6:7; 8:10; 12:12). Second, the Ten Commandments had already been given to Israel, and the first two commands specifically forbade the worship of other gods and idols (Ex. 20:2-6). Third, Israel had received the Ten Commandments and even heard Yahweh Himself give them, and they had made a covenant with Him that they would obey them. They even knew the consequence for disobedience to this covenant. This is important to understand when one tries to accuse Yahweh of being too harsh in His punishment of them (Ex. 19:3-9). At best, they had created an idol to represent Yahweh, and at worst, they had created an alternate, false god. Either one is a horrendous violation of the covenant.

"It is precisely the attempt to worship Yahweh by means he has already declared totally unacceptable that makes the sin of the golden calf so destructive, far more so than a simple shift of allegiance to 'other' or 'foreign' gods."<sup>100</sup>

"That the sin of Aaron and the people was tantamount to covenant repudiation is clear from the account of the making of the calf. The calf was hailed as 'the god...who brought you up

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen Von Wyrick, "Israel's Golden Calves," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986): 10.

<sup>100</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 421.

out of Egypt' (Ex. 32:4), the exact language of the historical prologue of the Sinaitic Covenant in which Yahweh described the basis of His authority to be Israel's God (20:2). Moreover, Aaron built an altar for the purpose of covenant affirmation and ceremony (v. 5), precisely as Moses had done previously on the people's commitment to the covenant arrangement (24:4). Aaron's proclamation concerning a festival and its implementation on the following day (32:5-6) was again identical to the celebration that attended the mutual acceptance of the covenant terms under Moses (24:11)."<sup>101</sup>

**32:7-8** The narrator turns to Yahweh immediately ceasing His instructions to Moses for the construction of the tabernacle in order to inform Moses of the people's construction of the golden calf. In referring to Israel as Moses' people whom he delivered, Yahweh is not shifting responsibility or blame to Moses. Yahweh's use of the second person is consistent with the way attribution of leadership for the exodus varies according to context. For Moses as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt see Ex. 3:12; 33:1; Deut. 9:12. For Yahweh as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt see Ex. 12:17, 51; 20:2; Num. 20:6. Mic. 6:4 states Yahweh, Moses, Aaron, Miriam as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt. This show that Yahweh's delegation of leadership does not denigrate His authority.

By calling Israel a corrupt people, Yahweh was not saying that the people were no longer capable of good but that they had done something so wrong that it constituted acting corruptly.<sup>102</sup> The nation as a whole could be called corrupt because even though they had not all sinned, they did not stand up and rebuke those who were sinning.

**32:9-10** Yahweh declared that, according to His covenant with the people, He was going to destroy Israel and start all over with Moses. Moses would become a new Abraham. Yahweh had every right to destroy Israel, first by the fact that He was their God who had created them and given life, and now they had sinned against Him, a holy God. They were now under His judgment as their creator and sovereign king over creation. Second, they had entered into a covenant with Him, whereby they swore by the blood of an animal sacrifice that they would obey His commands or they would die.

When Yahweh told Moses to leave Him alone, He was making a rhetorical demand. He was not commanding Moses but challenging him. Moses had no power to stop Yahweh from doing anything, so there was no need for Yahweh to ask Moses' permission. Yahweh's announcing to a prophet His intention of doing something was a way of inviting intercession for the people. This can be seen in Amos 7:1-6.

**32:11-13** Moses immediately stepped in and interceded on behalf of the people. Moses made three arguments, all of which appealed to Yahweh's character of consistency. First, Moses asked why Yahweh should undo His great act of deliverance of Egypt by killing those He had saved. This would undermine Yahweh's great display of power and glory in Egypt. Second, why should He give the Egyptians the opportunity to declare that Yahweh had brought Israel out of Egypt only to do evil to them? This would undermine the character of Yahweh as a good God. Third, would Yahweh go back on His promises to Abraham and the patriarchs? This would undermine His trustworthiness.

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<sup>101</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. "A Theology of the Pentateuch." In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 53.

<sup>102</sup> See Douglas K. Stuart. *Exodus*, p. 668.

**32:14** After Moses' intercession, Yahweh relented and chose not to destroy Israel as He had said He would. Does this mean Yahweh really wanted to kill the Israelites? Does this mean Yahweh was persuaded by a human who simply made an argument that Yahweh had not thought of and convinced Him to change His mind? Can Yahweh be persuaded?

Yahweh is both a just and a merciful God. As a just and righteous God, Yahweh cannot tolerate evil and sin. His very nature demands that He punish and deal with sin. This is what makes Him good, for no human is satisfied with a God who can look at the evil committed in the world and be all right with or apathetic to it, never exacting justice. But Yahweh is also a merciful God who loves us. He loves us so much that He does not want to punish us to the full extent that justice would require. To show mercy and forgive means that one has to give up justice being carried out on a wrong. One cannot act in a completely just and completely merciful way at the same time. To truly punish evil in a just way means there can be no mercy, and to truly be merciful means that one would have to give up a just penalty. Yet to not be just or merciful is a "violation" of Yahweh's character. This is the problem that sin in the world presents to the character of Yahweh. He cannot be both just and merciful simultaneously when it comes to dealing with sinners whom He loves. But this is not a problem for Yahweh, for since He is an all-knowing and sovereign God, He will one day reconcile justice and mercy in Jesus Christ.

As already mentioned, the sovereignty and justice of Yahweh gave Him every right and demanded that Israel be punished for their sin. But as a merciful and loving God, He also desired to forgive them. So, Yahweh invited Moses to intercede on Israel's behalf. He wanted Moses to share Yahweh's love for His people and to pray for them, to seek forgiveness. Moses was not telling or reminding Yahweh of anything that Yahweh did not know or had forgotten. Moses was articulating what He had learned about Yahweh and demonstrating that his desires for Israel had become the same as Yahweh's. Moses, who started off not knowing Yahweh and rejecting His call to deliver Israel, had come to know Yahweh so intimately that he wanted to be like Yahweh by saving Israel. Moses' three points were not an argument of persuasion but a confession and articulation of the character of Yahweh. It is this that led to Yahweh forgiving the people.

Yahweh's statements concerning His intentions or will can be either unconditional or conditional. *Decrees* are statements of Yahweh that are classified as *unconditional*, and nothing the recipient does can change this (Gen. 22:16-18). *Announcements* are statements of Yahweh that are classified as *conditional*, where if the recipient meets the conditions of the "if...then" statement, then Yahweh will relent (Jer. 26:4-6). However, most statements are unmarked, meaning it is not clear whether He is making a decree or an announcement. For example, when Nathan told David that his son would die because of his sin (2 Sam. 12:14), David cried out to Yahweh for the child's life because the condition of Yahweh's statement was ambiguous. It was after the child died that David knew that Yahweh's will here was that of a decree. On the other hand, other ambiguous statements of Yahweh have proved conditional. Micah announced that Jerusalem would become a heap of rubble because of their sins (Mic. 3:12), but one discovers from Jer. 26:17-19 that the judgment was averted by the repentant Hezekiah, proving the statement a conditional one. Ex. 32:12-14 is another example of this. Recognizing Yahweh as one who can change His mind does not threaten His immutability; rather, it shows Him as one who desires and is able to have a give-and-take relationship with humanity.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For a further discussion, see Robert Chisholm. "Does God 'Change His Mind'?" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October–December, 1995.

It must be stated clearly here that Yahweh did not change His mind because He was convinced by Moses. Yahweh has made it clear that He is just and merciful. Violations of the covenant demand justice. But in Yahweh's desire to redeem and dwell with His people, He has made it clear that if one repents, then He wants to move from judgment to forgiveness. This is His character and desire. Moses did not convince Yahweh to do something that He had not thought of or was hesitant to do. Rather Moses repented on behalf of the people, and Yahweh forgave according to His character and will. Yahweh has already in advance clearly established the two paths a person can take: refuse to repent and face judgment, or repent and experience forgiveness. Thus, Yahweh responded to Moses' choice of a path He had already presented in accordance with His character.

We learn two things here about Yahweh. First is that He so desires a relationship with us that He is willing to allow us the chance to repent and choose Him, thus changing the path we were on. Second is that Yahweh loves humanity so deeply that despite His need to execute justice, He is looking for every excuse to forgive us. With little intercession from Moses, Yahweh quickly relented and forgave Israel. This pattern is seen over and over in Scriptures—how little intercession and prayer it takes to move Yahweh to forgiveness. Decade after decade, He will allow the sins of Israel to go unpunished. And time after time, the prayers of the prophets lead Yahweh to pour out His mercy on Israel. This is not a passage that presents a problem for Yahweh's character and sovereignty; rather, it highlights the beauty and wonder of Yahweh's character and His love for us.

This means, however, that the sins of Israel will go unpunished, and Yahweh's justice will not be carried out, so His character as a just God is threatened. Thus, the cross will bring justice and mercy together in a way that nothing else can. By Jesus being a human, He could represent humanity in their sin. And all the wrath Yahweh could be poured out on Christ as humanity's representative, killing Him and satisfying His justice. Yet at the same time, Christ dying as our substitute allows humanity to be forgiven and declared truly innocent, satisfying the mercy of Yahweh. (Rom. 3:21-26). Jesus will become the greater Moses, who will not only intercede on behalf of humanity but will Himself become the judgment and forgiveness that will fully demonstrate Yahweh's character as just and merciful, eliminating the "problem" that sin presented to His character.

However, Yahweh relenting is not the same as Him agreeing to do nothing. He still punished Israel. Israel, corporately, is forgiven for its sins. However, each individual must accept this repentance in order to receive the life that Yahweh granted. Still, some will reject this forgiveness in their continued rebellion and so reap the judgment of death for their sin (Ex. 32:25-29).

**32:15-24** Moses broke the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, which symbolized Israel's breaking of their covenant with Yahweh. Nowhere in Scriptures is the breaking of the tablets seen as impulsive or wrong. He then destroyed the golden calf, dishonoring it as well as revealing its inability to do anything. Moses then ground the calf into a dust and forced the people to drink it. This served to show them that the taste of sin and its judgment is bitter. It also showed that the idol was worthless, for the very thing they worshiped would now become part of their waste.

Just as Adam and Eve did in the garden when confronted with their sin (Gen. 3:11-13), Aaron passes blame onto the people. He also lied about his behavior by making the ridiculous claim

that he merely threw the gold into the fire and the golden calf miraculously popped out. Magic was often associated with the crafting of idols to give them the spirit of the gods. Aaron may have been asking how it could be wrong if Yahweh allowed the golden calf to come out of the fire.

**32:25-29** Moses asked for those who were siding with him to stand as judges over Israel along with him. Only the Levites stood with him and so were given the job of executing the rebels. The act of the Levites joining Moses may be due to their close kinship, but it also suggests that they did not participate in the worshiping of the golden calf. Because of this action, the Levites received the blessing of being the tribe that Yahweh chose to be the priests over Israel (Num. 3:12-13). Their willingness to kill regardless of them being family or friends was evidence of their devotion to Yahweh and further confirmation of their appropriateness as the future priests of Yahweh. In contrast, by its rebellion, the nation as a whole forfeited its right to be a kingdom of priests. The firstborn of every family was to serve as priest under Aaron's family. But the nation would never receive the blessings of Ex. 9:3-6 due to their sin here. They were replaced by the tribe of Levi as priests.

Moses commanded the Levites to kill all those who refused to repent of the sin of the golden calf. To go "back and forth" means to carefully and systematically approach everyone and find out whether they intended to repent and return to Yahweh. Moses offered the people the chance to repent so they might receive the forgiveness that he had received for them on the mountain. However, some chose to reject the forgiveness and to continue in their rebellion. This revealed the true nature of their hearts and proved that the judgment they received was their own fault. Likewise, only 3,000 of the 600,000 men were killed, which is an act of mercy since all sin results in death. Yahweh could not allow these rebellious men to live because Israel was a community, and if a sinful, rebellious group were permitted to thrive, then they would contaminate the rest of the community. These drastic actions serve as an example to the rest that a holy God would not tolerate rebellion.

This becomes a foreshadowing of the forgiveness that Jesus' death provides. Jesus' intercession on the cross was so efficient and sufficient that it paid for the debt of every single human who has ever lived and ever will live, regardless of whether they accept Jesus as their lord and savior. This means no one goes to hell for their own sins, for Jesus already died for all of them. The sin that sends people to hell is their rejection of His sacrifice and of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:30-31). Just as Israel was forgiven of the golden calf sin, but those who rejected the forgiveness of Yahweh and the restoration to Yahweh that Moses obtained for them died, so all humans are forgiven of all their sins, but those who reject the forgiveness and restoration that Jesus provided for them will go to hell.

**32:30-35** Moses' willingness to die for the people in their place shows not only his love for them as a leader but also the character of Christ, which would later be demonstrated when Jesus Christ came. The book that is mentioned is not the book mentioned in the Second Testament, which refers to salvation, but rather the one that Yahweh is writing concerning the lives of those on earth. Yahweh did not allow Moses to take the people's place because each individual must be responsible for his own sin and receive individual judgment. Likewise, Moses could not pay for their sins with his own life since he, too, was a sinner. The plague became Yahweh's judgment against those who sinned against Him. The narrator did not mention how many died in the plague, if any at all. However, the plague was not the real judgment; rather, the exile would be the judgment. The plague was a small warning or taste of things to come, or the beginning of a

gradual increase of judgments that would continue to the exile if Israel did not remain faithful to the covenant (Lev. 26; Deut. 28-32).

**33:1-6** Yahweh announced that He would honor his promises to Abraham and bring Israel into the Promised Land but that He would no longer dwell with the people as He had intended. Instead, He would send His angel to guide them, for He would not go. This did not mean that Yahweh would not have further contact with Israel, just that He would not be with them. Because the people had demonstrated continuous sin before Him, He could no longer be in their presence as a Holy God. This was the same reason He removed Adam and Eve from His presence in Genesis 3. Their continuous sin created the potential for Him to destroy them, but He obviously did not want to destroy His people. Limited divine presence carried mercy with it as well.

They had already been demoted to talking to Yahweh through Moses at Mount Sinai, and now they were to have an angel added to the chain of command.

It is interesting that the people were extremely upset about the fact that Yahweh would no longer be with them. Either the people who had not participated in worshipping the golden calf or those who had repented now expressed that they never really wanted to be without Yahweh. Yet their actions had brought these consequences upon them. Yahweh commanded the Israelites to remove everything fancy (“ornaments”) they were wearing. Nothing fancy could adorn a mourner, for that would communicate cheerfulness. This dress lasted for forty years. What they had once taken off in a sinful action they had to take off again in mourning as a reminder of their sin (Ezek. 7:20).

“Throughout the remainder of the Pentateuch, the incident of the worship of the golden calf casts a dark shadow across Israel’s relationship with God, much the same way as the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 marked a major turning point in God’s dealing with humankind.”<sup>104</sup>

**33:7-11** Moses set up a tent outside the camp in order to communicate with Yahweh. The tent of meeting was not the tabernacle since it had not been built yet. In fact, this was to replace the tabernacle that would no longer be built. This tent would never have been created if it had not been for the people’s idolatry with the golden calf. No longer would the people be able to enter the courtyard of the tabernacle and have access to Yahweh through the altar and the priests. Now there was only a small tent, big enough for Moses alone. The tent of meeting was set up outside of the camp to symbolize the removal of Yahweh’s presence from the midst of the people because of their sin. And when Moses entered the tent, Yahweh would come down on the tent in the pillar of cloud, and the people would rise and worship from a far distance.

Yahweh still spoke to individuals, but now the individual had to step out of the community to go to the tent of meeting, publicly showing their contrition and loyalty to Yahweh. In contrast, Moses could speak “face to face” with Yahweh, which is an idiom that communicates intimacy (Num. 12:6-8). And because of Joshua’s faithfulness, he, not Aaron, was put in charge of the tent of meeting.

**33:12-14** Yahweh’s removal from Israel presented problems for Moses as leader. If Yahweh was not going to enter into a special covenant relationship with Israel and dwell with and lead them personally, how was Moses supposed to lead the people? It was hard enough to lead them when Yahweh was with them, but now he was on his own. So, Moses requested to know Yahweh

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<sup>104</sup> John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 310.

better by being taught His ways. It is interesting that even though Moses is in the awesome presence of Yahweh, he considers being taught by Yahweh as knowing Yahweh. For Moses, knowing Yahweh is not done through a mystical, ethereal communion with Him but by learning from Him.

Moses then interceded on behalf the people, requesting that Yahweh favor Israel and make Israel His chosen people again, to restore His covenant with them. Yahweh responded with “my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” The first “you” is implied in the Hebrew, so it is not clear whether it is singular or plural. The second “you” is singular, thus referring to Moses. The “rest” referred to a life of security and blessings in the Promised Land. Yahweh did not exactly grant Moses’ request for the people. But He did promise that Moses would not lead the people alone, that His presence would go with Moses, and that He would bring Moses into the Promised Land.

**33:15-17** Not satisfied, Moses continued to ask for the restoration of the people. Moses could have stopped here, knowing that Yahweh would be with him, but he did not. Moses knew that without Yahweh, he and the people would fail and be good as dead once they left Sinai. He knew that there was nothing special about them. What distinguished them from everyone else, what made them special, and what made them successful was Yahweh’s presence with them and His blessing. Moses understood the most important thing about humanity—that they were nothing without Yahweh. Moses pleaded with Yahweh that He would dwell with the people once again and lead them all into the Promised Land.

In amazing act of grace, Yahweh granted Moses’ request. It was the full restoration of the original plan of Yahweh to personally dwell with the people in the tabernacle and go into the Promised Land with them (Ex. 3:8, 12, 17). Once again, we see the desire of Yahweh to forgive His people and dwell with them. Moses’ prayer was successful not because Moses was favored or could get whatever he wanted but because of the goodness of Yahweh.

Even though Yahweh chose to renew His covenant with the people, they still had lost the special privilege of being a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:1-6). No longer would the firstborn of each family get to be a priest, with every tribe and family represented serving before Yahweh in the tabernacle. Because of the Levite tribe’s willingness to stand by Moses in the judgment for the sin of the golden calf, Yahweh had chosen them to be a tribe of priests in place of the nation as a whole (Num. 3:12-13).

**33:18-23** Moses then bluntly requested to see the glory of Yahweh; he wanted to see Him. Yahweh responded saying that He would show him His “goodness.” Later, He stated that no one could see Him directly and live. So, His “goodness” must be something less than what Moses had requested. Based on how Yahweh revealed Himself, this “goodness” must have been a veiled glimpse of His glory.

Yahweh then declared that His grace and mercy are bound up in his own will. Only those who found favor with Yahweh would experience His grace and mercy. Based on the context of Israel’s sin and Moses’ intercession, one finds favor with Yahweh by humbling repenting and seeking Yahweh above all else. This is the knowledge that you are nothing without Him, leading to the desire to know Him above all other things.

Yahweh told Moses that He would reveal a portion of His glory to him. Yahweh revealed His glory to Moses only after hiding Moses in the cleft of the rock, covering him with His hand, and

showing Moses His back. This is figurative language for Yahweh showing Moses only a glimpse of His glory. Yet even this small glimpse was enough to change Moses' physical appearance and to cause his face to glow (Ex. 34:29-30).

“...though Yahweh does indeed come to Moses in theophany, what he gives to Moses is quite specifically not the sight of this beauty, his glory, his Presence—that, indeed, he pointedly denies. What he gives rather is a description, and at that, a description not of how he looks but of how he is.”<sup>105</sup>

**34:1-4** Yahweh directed Moses to restore the covenant relationship by recopying the Ten Commandments on tablets. Just as Moses was responsible for interceding on Israel's behalf, he was now responsible for providing the stone tablets. However, it was still Yahweh who wrote His laws on the tablets.

**34:5-7** Yahweh descended upon the mountain in the cloud and proclaimed His character to Moses. As already demonstrated with Yahweh's merciful forgiveness and restoration of Israel, He declared Himself to be a compassionate and gracious God, a God who is slow to anger, which had been demonstrated in the wilderness after the people's continuous complaints and rebellion. He is also abounding in loyal love and faithfulness, which was seen in the restoration of the covenant when He had every right to abandon them after their unfaithfulness with the golden calf.

Then there is a contrast. Yahweh forgives sin for thousands of generations but punishes the guilty and the sin of the fathers by dealing with the children to the third and fourth generation. This seems unjust, that Yahweh would punish children for their father's sins. This is a repeat of His statement in Ex. 20:4-6 in response to people's obedience to or violation of the second commandment against making graven images. The penalty for idolatry would last into the third and fourth generation. This is how serious Yahweh takes idolatry. There are two points that Yahweh is making. First is that Yahweh wants to forgive His people, and He will. And this mercy is far greater than His punishments, for it will last for thousands of generations, whereas the punishment will last for only three or four generations. Second, despite His forgiveness, sin still has consequences. We are not to lose sight of how serious sin is in the overwhelming forgiveness and mercy of Yahweh.

**34:8-10** Moses bowed before Yahweh and worshiped. He then requested that Yahweh forgive Israel and reinstitute the covenant. Yahweh proclaimed that He would and that He would drive out the Canaanites before them and would do great wonders.

**34:11-28** After Israel's blatant violation of the covenant, and loss of the covenant and presence of Yahweh, Yahweh called Moses to remind the people of how important it was to obey His covenant laws. To remind the people of their duties in the covenant law (Ex. 21-23), He repeated the fundamental principles. First, they were to drive out all the people of Canaan, and, second, they were to worship Yahweh only as He specified, not as they pleased. Finally, Yahweh proceeded to remind them of other ordinances within the Law.

**34:29-35** The glory of Yahweh that Moses had seen in Ex. 33:19-23 was so intense that it physically made Moses' face shine with Yahweh's glory. This was so awesome that the Israelites feared him when he came into their presence. There is nothing in the text to suggest that the glory of Moses was so great that they could not physically look at him; rather, the righteousness

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<sup>105</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 452.

and awesomeness were so great that, as sinners, they feared looking at him. This gives one a glimpse into what it will be like for all believers when they step into the full presence of Yahweh in heaven and completely without sin. Daniel says that the believers will shine like the stars (Dan. 12:2-3).

This glory confirmed Yahweh's greatness, His presence with Moses and Israel, and Moses' leadership role. There is no other god who could or would do this for their people. It also showed that one who humbly sought Yahweh could come closer. Whenever Moses spoke the words of Yahweh, he spoke with his face uncovered. And when he was among the people, he put a veil over his face.

“The transformation that Moses experienced as a result of his close fellowship with God showed in his physical appearance, particularly on his face (cf. Matt. 17:1-3). This change made the other Israelites uncomfortable around him. The evidence of his close relationship with God convicted them. Evidently Moses' shining face was evidence to the Israelites that he had been in the Lord's presence and that what he told them was an oracle from God. The purpose of the veil that Moses wore over his face while speaking with the Israelites at other times was to hide the fact that the glory was fading (2 Cor. 3:18).”<sup>106</sup>

“The physical nature of this phenomenon must remain a mystery, but its theological meaning is crystal clear. Moses, as covenant mediator, was authenticated as such by his resemblance to the God of glory whom he represented. It is precisely for this reason that Moses and Elijah shared the radiance of the transfigured Jesus (Luke 9:31-32).”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Exodus*, p. 160.

<sup>107</sup> Eugene H. Merrill. “A Theology of the Pentateuch.” In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 56.

## G. Construction and Dedication of the Tabernacle (35:1–40:38)

The rest of Exodus covers the actual building of the tabernacle. The restoration of the covenant allowed Moses to have the people build the tabernacle. Without Yahweh's presence among the people, there would be no purpose for the tabernacle. Whereas the instructions for the tabernacle moved from the most sacred to the least sacred, the building of the tabernacle moves from the least sacred to the most sacred.

The purpose of spending five chapters repeating everything that Yahweh had already stated in Ex. 25-31 is a literary device called *command compliance*. By having Yahweh state in specific detail what the Israelites were to do and then repeat word for word that they did what He had said shows their complete obedience to His commands. This may seem like overkill, but when it comes to the tabernacle, the dwelling place of Yahweh, the author wants the reader to know that there was no deviation from the instructions of Yahweh. It forces the reader to acknowledge the significance of what was written, and it highlights the obedience of the Israelites in contrast to their previous sin with the golden calf. This is how literature in the ancient world worked. For the sake of this commentary, the repeated details of the building will not be discussed at length. Refer to the section on Ex. 25-31 for commentary on the tabernacle.

**35:1-36:7** The command concerning the Sabbath was repeated, for the Sabbath was Israel's rest, and the tabernacle was where Israel rested. If the tabernacle was not done right, there could be no true rest. Moses invited whomever felt called and stirred by the Spirit of Yahweh to come forward and participate in the funding and building of the tabernacle. The fact that so many stepped forward reveals that there were many among the people who had a heart for Yahweh and desired to have Him dwell among them. It also showed the people's unity.

**36:8-38** First is the description of the building of the tabernacle with the hangings and coverings, the boards and bars, and the veil and screen.

**37:1-38:20** Next is the construction of the furniture and vessels of the tabernacle and the courtyard. Here, the text emphasizes that, whereas the people participated in the building of the tabernacle in Ex. 36:8-38, the articles of the tabernacle were under the sole craftsmanship of Bezalel.

“The order of recounting the construction of the parts of the tabernacle is not the same as that of the instructions in Exodus 25-30... The purpose for this change is perhaps to begin with, and thus highlight, the part of the work that involved ‘all the skilled workers’ before moving on to that work which involved only Bezalel. Thus the picture given at the beginning of the narrative is that of the total participation of all the people.”<sup>108</sup>

There were also women appointed to serve in the tabernacle, even to the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:22). How these women were chosen and exactly what they did is not mentioned.

**38:21-31** Moses recorded the amount of metal used. Coined money did not exist until the 600s BC, when the Lydians in Anatolia (modern Turkey) invented it. The shekel Moses referred to was a measure of weight (not quite half an ounce) rather than a measure of value.<sup>109</sup> The various metals that Yahweh required in the building of the tabernacle represent the different aspects of His redemptive plan.

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<sup>108</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 318.

<sup>109</sup> See *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Metrology,” by E. McChesney, revised by Merrill F. Unger, pp. 720-25.

**39:1-31** Moses described the preparation of the priests' clothing at a greater length than the other articles of the tabernacle because of their great importance. Notice the repetition of the craftsmen following precisely Yahweh's instructions to Moses (Ex. 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31). We see again the emphasis on command compliance.

**39:32-43** The builders and craftsmen presented the finished tabernacle and items to Moses. The fact that the author lists the craftsmen again emphasizes their importance. The statement "the Israelites did according to all that Yahweh had commanded Moses—they did it exactly so" brackets the section (Ex. 39:32, 42). Once again, the author is emphasizing the command compliance in their obedience. Just as in the beginning Creation narrative (Gen. 1:28), the creation of the tabernacle concludes with a blessing (Ex. 39:43). The author is linking that first good Creation, wherein Yahweh could dwell with humanity, with the rightly constructed tabernacle, where He can again dwell with Israel, His redeemed people. This is the beginning of Yahweh's restoring His relationship with humanity, which was lost in the garden.

"The readiness and liberality with which the people had presented the gifts required for this work, and the zeal which they had shown in executing the whole of the work in rather less than half a year (see at 40:17), were most cheering signs of the willingness of the Israelites to serve the Lord, for which they could not fail to receive the blessing of God."<sup>110</sup>

**40:1-33** The fact that Yahweh commanded Moses to bring Aaron and his sons to the tent of meeting and cloth them in the priestly garments and anoint them shows that Yahweh had accepted Aaron as the high priest over Israel despite his failure and sin with the golden calf.

The Israelites finished the tabernacle on the first day of the first month, almost exactly one year after the Israelites had left Egypt. This was about ten months after Israel had arrived at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:1). Yahweh told Moses how to fill the tabernacle with the articles and how to present the priests before the tabernacle. The construction of the tabernacle allowed it to be set up in one day. The author repeats the instructions, with Moses doing them the way Yahweh commanded.

**40:34-38** Upon its completion, the tabernacle was filled with the glory of Yahweh, signifying His approval of Israel's obedience and exactness in their construction of the tabernacle. The pillar of cloud and fire lifting off the tabernacle and settling in a new location is how Yahweh chose to lead His people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. The spirit of Yahweh was leading them.

Despite how great Yahweh's forgiveness of Israel and Israel's total obedience to Yahweh's instruction on the tabernacle after their disobedience with the golden calf were, Exodus ends on a negative note. Moses was not permitted to enter the tabernacle after the glory of Yahweh entered it. Moses had been allowed to enter Yahweh's glory on Mount Sinai and the tent of meeting—why can he not here? The Israelites had sinned against Yahweh when they worshiped the golden calf. Thus, they were defiled and could not enter His holy presence. Moses, as the people's representative, was unable to enter the tabernacle. Even though He had forgiven them, they still could not enter His presence because of their sin. There has been no atonement made. Leviticus will continue the story with instructions on the sacrificial system and the holiness Code. Only after they put this in practice will they be allowed to enter the tabernacle and His presence and then begin to make their journey to the Promised Land together.

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<sup>110</sup> C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, 2:255.

## Conclusion

Yahweh began with the formation of Israel as His people, then making them into a great nation by delivering and redeeming them from the power, hopelessness, and oppression of Egypt's bondage (Ex. 1-18). He then made them His special treasure (Ex. 19:5) by bringing them into a covenant relationship. They would learn to obey Him; they would become more righteous, holy, and conformed to the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27); and He would pour out His blessings on them (Ex. 19-24). Finally, He bestowed upon them the greatest blessing of all, the tabernacle, whereby He would enter their midst and dwell with them (Ex. 25-40). He had now become their God, and they His people.

“With Yahweh's presence promised, then demonstrated, then given to Israel in theophany at Sinai, the first half of Exodus ends. The second half of the book is preoccupied with response to that Presence, in life, in covenant, in worship, and even in disobedience. The largest part of that second half has to do with the communication to Israel of the reality of that Presence, through a series of set-apart places, set-apart objects and set-apart acts, all of them intimately connected, in one way or another, with Yahweh's Presence.”<sup>111</sup>

However, this is neither the fullness nor the completion of His redemption of humanity, for they were still just one nation, still separated by sin and enslaved to their sinful nature. Thus, the exodus points to a greater salvation, the cross of Christ. The Mosaic Law points to a greater means of conformity to His image, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And the tabernacle points to a greater dwelling of Yahweh with His people, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately the Kingdom of Yahweh coming down to earth (Rev. 21).

The story of Israel continues with the book of Leviticus, which details the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, and the book of Numbers, which tells of their failure to trust Yahweh and enter the Promised Land. Thus, they are condemned to wander in the wilderness until the next generation is ready to claim the promises of Yahweh.

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<sup>111</sup> John I. Durham. *Exodus*, p. 501.

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