

EXODUS

General Observations:

The name of the book is taken from the Septuagint. A literal translation would be “the getting out of...” or “departure.” In Hebrew the book takes its title from the opening words: “These are the names ...” (*Ve-elleh Shemoth*).

The book Exodus is one of the great books of the Pentateuch and of the whole Bible. It describes one of the key episodes in the history of salvation. The lines of God’s revelation of Himself that were drawn in the lives of individuals in Genesis come together in this book in a more complete and clearer picture of YHWH, the “I AM” the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. This God occupies the central place in the book, and He reveals Himself in His call to man. Maybe the best title of the book would be the words of Hosea: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”¹

The title Exodus is, in a certain sense, misleading in that it gives the impression that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt would be the main event in the book. The great happening is the encounter with God; what Moses called before Pharaoh “a festival to Me (YHWH) in the desert” (ch. 5:1). The Exodus itself was the means, not the goal.

It has been said that all theology in the Bible begins with ch. 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’” Those dynamic words reveal and, at the same time, hide the mystery of who God is. In Genesis we see how God moves away from man when man falls into sin. In Exodus we see how God moves back to earth and draws man to Himself. God pitched His tent on earth to live among people who lived in tents. In Exodus we find for the first time the Immanuel concept: “God with us.” It comes to us as an image that finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh and pitched His tent among us, as John puts it.²

We find a rather complicated mixture of models in Exodus; some are given in the form of images and pictures and some in, what we would call, realities. The oppression of Israel in Egypt was a hard reality of daily life for suffering people. It was, what we may call “real life.” At the same time it becomes a picture of evil, of the power of darkness and human sin. The reign of the Antichrist is said to occur in Sodom and Egypt.³

The great picture album is found in the chapters 25-40 where Moses received the concept of the tabernacle with its furnishings, and the execution of the work and the erection of the tent. The finished product is a metaphor of earthly matter of spiritual realities of heaven. Moses is shown a pattern while on Mount Sinai. We read this in ch. 25:9,40. The writer to the Hebrews picks up this theme in his epistle.⁴ In several places in the book of Revelation, John shows us that the original, of which the tabernacle with all its furnishings was a copy, is in heaven. (“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.”)⁵ The highly poetical language of Revelation suggests that there is no building in the earthly sense of the word but a spiritual reality which surpasses anything matter can express. Paul puts it clearly in Colossians: “These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”⁶

It is important to remember that the principal truth expressed in the book of Exodus is the Incarnation, that is, that God came down to earth to dwell with man. This truth is woven into a closely knit pattern of other truths which, to our human mind, are more easily accessible. There is Egypt with its demonic oppression. There is the call of a man. There is judgment upon the world which says: “Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?” (ch. 5:2). Then there is the Passover, the actual Exodus or deliverance and the feast of unleavened bread. There is the journey through the desert, the mentality of the people of Israel, which God describes as “stiff-necked.” There is the law, the code of moral behavior and finally there is the tabernacle, which expresses at the same time fellowship with God and separation from God. The writer to the Hebrews observes astutely that the tabernacle was an obstacle

¹ Hos. 11:1

² John 1:4

³ Rev. 11:8

⁴ Heb. 8:5

⁵ Rev. 11:19

⁶ Col. 2:17

to fellowship with God. In Hebrews we read: "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing."⁷

Outline of Exodus:

The division of Exodus in sections is not very difficult. The great dividing line is at ch. 19 where Israel has arrived at Mount Sinai. So we can divide the book in two:

- A. Toward Sinai. ch. 1-18.
- B. At Sinai. ch. 10-40

A. Toward Sinai ch. 1-18

The first two chapters compress a history of about two centuries and the opening verses (1-5) link the book with Genesis with which it probably formed one volume originally. The rest of the first chapter paints a grim picture of repression and persecution such as will probably be surpassed only by the reign of the Antichrist.

Chapter two gives the account of the birth of Moses, his miraculous escape both at birth and as an adult.

Chapters three and four describe God's call of Moses to which he submits very, very reluctantly.

Chapters five through twelve describe the ten plagues which force Pharaoh's hand; chapters thirteen through fifteen record the completion of the deliverance and the destruction of the enemy.

Chapter sixteen vs. 1 through seventeen vs. 7 give examples of the various needs of Israel during the journey in the desert toward Mount Sinai and God's provision for those needs.

Chapter seventeen vs. 8 through 17 give a brief but dramatic account of Amalek's attack on Israel and Israel's victory.

Chapter 18 tells of Jethro's visit to Moses, Moses' heavy burden as leader of the people and Jethro's sound advice to lighten this burden.

B. At Sinai ch. 19-40

Chapter nineteen gives a description of the descent of the glory of the LORD on Mount Sinai and Moses' first ascent. Chapter twenty vs. 1-17 give the Ten Commandments, chapter twenty vs. 18 through twenty-three vs. 19 contain various laws, mainly concerning human relations. Chapter twenty-three vs. 20 through 33 outline the plan for the conquest of Canaan. Chapters twenty-four through thirty-one describe Moses' second ascent and the unfolding of the plan for the tabernacle and the priesthood.

Chapters thirty-two through thirty-four could be called "The Breaking of the Law." The people committed the sin of idolatry by making a Golden Calf, and Moses literally breaks the two tablets of the law. This section is at the same time the deepest and the highest point of the whole book. In their idolatry the people tried to syncretize the demonism of Egypt with the worship of the only true God. In trying to atone for the sins of the people, Moses drew closer to God and saw more of His glory than any other man in the Old Testament.

Chapters thirty-five through thirty-nine detail mainly the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishing, and chapter forty shows how the tabernacle is put together and then describes how the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

Authorship and Date:

There should be less confusion about the authorship of this book than of Genesis, but there isn't! Besides the theory that places the whole Pentateuch after the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, which we reject, there is enough confusion about existing sources from before the actual time

⁷ Heb. 9:8

of departure out of Egypt. The fact that Jesus calls Exodus “The book of Moses” in Marks’ Gospel⁸ should settle the matter for us.

That some of the laws written down in Exodus were already accepted codes of moral behavior long before Israel arrived at Mount Sinai seems quite plausible to me. The Ekagi tribe in Irian Jaya had knowledge of the laws that were on the second stone tablet long before any missionary entered with the Gospel or any contact with other civilizations was established. The only reasonable explanation of this phenomenon seems to me to be that, after the flood, all the descendants of Noah knew that their Creator did not want them to steal, lie, or commit adultery. The Ekagi must have preserved this knowledge without much alteration throughout the ages. But the fact that at least some of the laws were not new makes them no less a part of divine revelation.

According to ch. 7:7, Moses was eighty years old at the time of the Exodus. The book of First Kings tells us that the temple was built 480 years after Israel left Egypt,⁹ which was (according to Thiele, quoted in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*) in the year 967 BC, placing the Exodus at 1446 BC, which was during the reign of Pharaoh Tutmos III (>*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2, pg. 290).

The Text:

A. Toward Sinai ch. 1-18.

1. Israel’s Presence in Egypt 1:1-5

These verses give the historical background, indicating that Jacob and his sons arrived in Egypt previous to the events that are narrated in this book. Thus, Moses establishes a link with the book of Genesis where we find a similar and more detailed list of the people who went down to Egypt from Canaan.¹⁰ The number “seventy” is the total of Jacob’s sons and their families, including Joseph. The Septuagint gives a number of 75, probably including Joseph’s three grandsons and two great-grandsons.

We have noted before that Jacob’s offspring who settled in Goshen never showed any inclination to leave Egypt and return to Canaan. No reason for this is given. When Jacob died, his body was returned to Canaan to be buried in the cave of Machpelah. It is our understanding that the sons may have been buried in Sechem, although there is no record of this other than Stephen’s remark in Acts.¹¹ When Joseph died, it seems that conditions had changed to the point that it had become impossible for the people to leave, so his body had to be placed in a coffin awaiting the time that God would come to their aid.¹²

Initially, life in Egypt was too good to leave and go back to the uncertainty of a nomadic existence in Canaan. Goshen felt like home. When conditions worsened, leaving Goshen was no longer an option. God’s hand was in all of this, but few people would have recognized that fact.

It is hard to be away from home. It is even harder to have no home. Home is part of a man’s security in life. It is impossible to consciously live a nomadic existence if God is not completely and exclusively the surety of one’s life.

The story of Israel in Egypt and on their way through the desert to Canaan is full of illustrations of our spiritual pilgrimage. The writer of Hebrews grasped this so well when he emphasized that living in tents is the only way to live on earth. We read in Hebrews: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country; a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”¹³ And from another part of Hebrews we learn that Canaan was only a picture of the real rest, not the reality itself. We read: “God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through

⁸ Mark 12:26

⁹ I Kings 6:1

¹⁰ See Gen. 46:8-27

¹¹ See Acts 7:16

¹² See Gen. 50:24-26

¹³ Heb. 11:13-16

David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."¹⁴

The emphasis in vs. 7 is on the prolific increase of the people of Israel. Theirs was a population explosion which started with seventy people and grew in a little more than one century to probably two million people or more. Several commentaries point out that this prodigious increase was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis,¹⁵ repeated to Isaac¹⁶ and finally renewed to Jacob.¹⁷

2. Tribulation of Israel in Egypt 1:8-22

Walter Kaiser, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, divides this section into two parts which he calls "The first pogrom" (vs. 8-14) and "The second pogrom." (vs. 15-22). It does not seem to me that there were two distinct pogroms, but rather an increase of the oppression to the point of extermination. We are not specifically told at what point during Israel's sojourn in Egypt this oppression started. We do get the impression that the events that are described in ch. 1 and 2 all took place during the reign of one Pharaoh.

It is difficult to determine who this king was and whether he was one of the Semite shepherd kings (Hyksos) or a Pharaoh who deposed the Hyksos and brought the land back under Egyptian rule. If we try to explain the sympathetic attitude of previous Pharaohs toward Joseph and his extended family in terms of racial affinity, such as would exist if the Pharaoh at that time was himself a Semite Hyksos, we could conclude more easily that the fear of the Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" was built on racial prejudice.

We should not interpret the fact that the new king who came to power "did not know Joseph" as if his majesty was ignorant about history. He must have known who those Israelites were and where they came from and how they came there. "Did not know" in this context means "did not agree." *Adam Clarke* says: "The verb *jada*, which we translate 'to know' often signifies 'to acknowledge' or 'to approve.'"

When this Pharaoh ascended the throne, he faced a situation that had grown historically over the centuries. No man makes history single-handedly. We were all born into a world that existed long before we did and we were all handed down conditions and situations over the forming of which we had no control. No single human being has the insight and wisdom that are necessary to know how to act. Without supernatural guidance, man will never find his bearings. Since history is the stage on which the cosmic struggle between God and Satan is acted out, we receive our guidance either from God or from the devil. Those who think they can live without guidance are fools. Pharaoh received his guidance from the powers of darkness.

The amazing fact that shows through the measure he takes is that he was governed by fear. The basis for the oppression is fear. We often fail to realize that most brutality and show of force is based on fear. A dog barks and bites when it is afraid. Men do the same. Behind the human fear of death, is the fear of Satan himself. James puts it correctly when he says: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that; and shudder."¹⁸ The Egyptians mistreated the Israelites because they were afraid of them.

In Pharaoh's opinion there were two things to consider: the economy and the security of the country. Probably Egypt had known a period of prosperity which, they recognized, was due to the presence of the Israelites. If the mentality of Israel then was anything like the Jewish spirit of later centuries, the Israelites must have shown themselves superior in intelligence and zeal. Pharaoh feared the Jews because of their financial acumen in the same way that Hitler did. That is why we see this strange paradox that Pharaoh hated the Israelites, but he didn't want them to leave either. Israel's presence was a threat to the security of Egypt, but Israel's absence would mean the economic collapse of the country.

¹⁴ Heb. 4:7-11

¹⁵ Gen. 17:2-6; 22:17

¹⁶ Gen. 26:4

¹⁷ Gen. 28:3,14;35:11; 48:4.

¹⁸ James 2:19

So the king consulted with his advisors, and they decided to “deal shrewdly” with the Israelites, that is, they wanted to outwit them. Having said this, they did exactly the opposite. Use of force is seldom an indication of wisdom.

We are told that the king consulted his people. Pharaoh probably wanted to appeal to a general anti-Semitic sentiment among the Egyptians to carry out his plan for the extermination of the Israelites.

Under Joseph’s administration, the Pharaoh became more powerful than his predecessors; people were obliged to relinquish their land and livestock in exchange for food. At least some of this power seems to have eroded at the point in history in which Exodus starts, or, it could be that this Pharaoh favored a more democratic form of government. The powers of darkness are just as active in a democracy as in an absolute dictatorship. Majority rule is not necessarily more righteous. Hence, the Lord’s warning to Israel: “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.”¹⁹

We should not forget that the real issue was, of course, not Israel’s position in Egypt but a demonic effort to hinder God’s revelation in this world and to make the coming of the Messiah impossible.

Although, initially, Pharaoh may have had most of the people of Egypt behind him, maybe some simply because of indifference and others because of anti-Semitism, when the plagues started to take effect, he became more and more isolated.²⁰

The first phase of the persecution consisted of slave labor. Probably all the males of Israel were forced to work. The men were required to make bricks and to build cities. So the two cities of Pithom and Rameses came into existence. There is no complete agreement among the experts (!) as to the location of these cities. Kaiser, in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, thinks there is enough archeological evidence to identify the cities with Tell er-Retabeh and Quatir, both situated in Goshen.

We are given no details of the policy that was instituted to reduce the population growth through slave labor. It could be that the men were confined to barracks for extended periods of time and thus were separated from their wives. Whatever the practical arrangements, the policy had the opposite result. The population increased in proportion to the persecution. Persecution does often have the opposite result from the goal it is intended to produce. This principle would make the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church in later centuries.

There seems to have been a gradual increase of hardship. It started with slave labor, which is a denial of human rights and a denial of the dignity of the individual. This was followed by torture and other forms of cruelty which probably took the form of beatings in connection with the demands of labor. We have sufficient examples of this kind of treatment in modern history to be able to imagine what life must have been for the people of Israel. The Israelites may have been afraid of their Egyptian masters; however, ironically, the Egyptians’ of their slaves grew in proportion to their own cruelty. The devil does not allow peace in the hearts of those who serve him. God used the beatings to strengthen His people. We find illustrations of this phenomenon also in modern history. The purest expression of the Gospel is found in places where Christians are persecuted.

The word “ruthless” occurs several times in connection with the way the Egyptians treated the Israelites. They were not being treated as fellow human beings.

The Pulpit Commentary remarks here that the Egyptians used stone for their grand edifices, temples, palaces, and treasuries and that brick and mortar were used mainly in inferior buildings. Regarding the phrase “All manner of labor in the field” (KJV) we quote: “The Israelitish colony was originally employed to a large extent in tending the royal flocks and herds (Gen. xlvii. 6). At a later date many of them were engaged in agricultural operations (Deut. xi. 10). These, in Egypt, are in some respect light, e.g. preparing the land and ploughing; ... but in other respect exceedingly heavy. There is no country where care and labor are so constantly needed during the whole of the year. The inundation necessitates extreme watchfulness, to save cattle, to prevent the houses and the farmyards from being inundated, and the embankments from being washed away. The cultivation is continuous throughout the whole of the year; and success depends upon a system of irrigation that requires constant labor and unremitting attention. If the ‘labor in the field’ included, as Josephus supposed, ... the cutting of canals, their lives would indeed have been ‘made bitter.’ There is no such exhausting toil as that of working under the hot Egyptian sun, with the feet in water, in an open cutting, where there can be no shade and scarcely a breath of air, from sunrise to sunset, as forced laborers are generally required to do.” The

¹⁹ ch. 23:2

²⁰ See ch. 9:20; 10:7; 11:3

Commentary further asserts that during the construction of the Suez Canal 20,000 out of 150,000 laborers perished.

If *The Pulpit Commentary's* assessment is correct, Pharaoh was in fact operating Nazi or Communist style labor camps, which were, for all practical purposes, death camps.

When forced labor fails to produce the desired result of limitation of population growth the king resorts to other measures. The first is a secret plot to murder male infants at birth and the second is an open order to the whole Egyptian population to kill all the little baby boys.

In verses 15-21, we read that instructions are given to the midwives who assist the Hebrew women during labor and birth. The names of two Hebrew midwives are mentioned: Shiphrah and Puah. Those women are honored by the fact that they are recorded in God's hall of fame for what they did for Israel. They are called "Hebrew midwives," but they were probably Egyptian women who assisted the Hebrew women at birth, or rather they must have been the overseers of the clinics that provided this kind of service. It would be hard to believe that only two women would serve several hundred thousand Hebrew women.

Evidently, Pharaoh's instructions were given secretly. He had not come to the point yet where he wants to be accused of infanticide. It would be comparatively easy for a midwife to kill a baby at the moment it was born, without giving proof of murder. It would arouse suspicion, though, when it became known that only boys would be born dead. The midwives flatly refused to comply because of their fear of God. We may presume that their own lives were at stake; since if the king learned that the women refused cooperation they would, most likely, have been executed. If it were true that these two women were at the head of a larger clinic, they probably never passed on the word to those who actually assisted the Israelite women at birth. When they were called by the king to give account of the failure of the order to be carried out, they protested that they were rarely called in by the Hebrew women. In answer to the king's questions, they reported that the Hebrew women were less delicate than their Egyptian counterparts; they delivered their babies without assistance. The implication is that the Israelites were less civilized than the Egyptians; a point that would go over well with the king.

We get the impression that a period of several years is described in these verses. After all, if all male infants were killed at birth, it would take a while before the statistics would show this. Also we read in vs. 21, "And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own." One does not get a family in just a few months. We are not told how much time passed between the giving of the king's secret order and his calling the midwives to account, but it must have been at least five years or more.

Now it is obvious that Siphrah and Pua were not the only two women in Egypt who would have families of their own. There must have been something unusual in this fact that singled out their families as coming to them from the Lord. Again we are not told what the general situation in Egypt was, so we cannot compare. It could be that Egypt was into family planning and that most families were small, or that venereal diseases were so rampant that many Egyptian women were sterile. Siphrah's and Pua's families must have stood out as healthy and solid among a decaying culture. Children are a blessing of the Lord- especially if they come to know the Lord personally. The Psalmist says: "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him."²¹

When the secret plan to curb population growth through the maternity clinics fails, Pharaoh throws away every pretense to secrecy. We read in vs. 22: "Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'" Everybody in Egypt is called upon to become a murderer. We do not know how many people obeyed this order and brought guilt upon themselves. It does not take a large number of criminals to make a nation guilty. When Hitler came to power, the Nazi's were, comparatively, a small minority. The majority of Germans during World War II were guilty through inertia.

Even if relatively few children died among the Israelites as a result of this pogrom, the emotional stress must have become unbearable for the people. Every pregnant woman would pray fervently that her baby would be a girl.

There is more behind Pharaoh's command than meets the eye. The Nile was Egypt's sacred river, and the land owed its life to its inundations. Throwing Hebrew children into the river, therefore, was a religious act. By appealing to the nation the way he did, Pharaoh appealed to their piety. One could not withhold sacrifices to the river and remain a good Egyptian. Pharaoh's command brought out the demonic

²¹ Psalm 127:3

influences that were prevalent in Egypt. Only “the murderer from the beginning,”²² as Jesus calls Satan, would come up with a scheme like this. Egypt was in the grip of demons. That is why God tells Moses in ch. 12:12: “I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.”

At the same time, by overstepping the boundaries, Satan brings judgment upon himself and the nation. He is not the victor in this holocaust.

3. “Unto us a child is born.” ch. 2:1-10

Under the circumstances described in the last verses of the preceding chapter, a son is born into a family of the tribe of Levi. At this point no names are mentioned. We learn later that the father’s name is Amram and the mother’s Jochebed. ch. 6:20 says: “Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses.” We are told later that two children were born before the birth of Moses: Mariam and Aaron. Aaron was three years old when Moses entered the family, according to ch. 7:7.

Probably when Aaron was born the decree to drown all male babies in the river had not been issued yet. But now Jochebed becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son under the most terrible circumstances one can imagine. The baby is condemned before it is born.

During the Second World War, a pregnant Jewish woman in Germany gave away her baby carriage to a neighbor, saying that she would not need it. She knew that soon she would be taken to one of the death camps and that her baby would be killed with her. This is human despair to the limit! Under such circumstances Moses was born.

But Jochebed was a woman of faith. The testimony about her faith is sparse but clear. We read that she saw that her baby was “a fine child.” Few mothers think their baby is ugly, even if it is. It seems, though, that Moses was exceptionally handsome and well built. She and her husband clearly understood that God would not give them such a fine specimen of manhood to give it up for destruction. The writer to the Hebrews says: “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”²³ It was not just natural parental love that made them decide to make every effort to spare their son’s life but faith.

Even in a world that is polluted by sin the birth of a child is one of the most moving miracles to behold. There is the wonder of one living being bringing forth another. There is the beauty of a little body with all its members. If we are moved in seeing the birth of a little baby that comes into the world with a sinful nature and a capacity to kill, what would it be like to see sinlessness being born, such as Joseph and Mary saw when God became man in Jesus Christ? The birth of Moses was a vague image of the birth of Jesus. And in the same way as the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born,²⁴ so Pharaoh meant to devour Moses. But God intervened.

Evidently it was not too difficult to hide the baby for the first few months. Even if he cried, they could pass him for a girl. We do not know if Egyptians soldiers regularly swept through the neighborhood to look for children, or whether the ghetto was interspersed with informers, but hiding Moses became more and more difficult. Although the Bible speaks of the faith of the parents, it must have been sheer agony to surrender the little child to the river. What actually happens is a strange mixture of divine humor and human despair. If only Amram and Jochebed could have known how it would end, it would have been easy to abandon Moses to the water of the river. But how could they know what God would do? They had no guarantee that all would end well; no guarantee but God!

It seems that Jochebed took the initiative, although we can hardly assume that her husband would have been left out of the plan. He may have been absent because of his forced labor assignment. We are given no details about how the plan was conceived and why it was carried out the way it was. Probably Jochebed’s abandon of her baby was an even greater act of faith than keeping him in hiding. Jochebed’s sense of realism indicates a high degree of spirituality. Blind motherly instinct would have kept the baby at all cost until it was taken from her by force. But she said to herself: “If I try to keep him, I lose him.” She discovered one of the most fundamental laws of spiritual life.²⁵ The plan and its execution suggest divine guidance. She must have prayed and God must have shown her what to do.

²² John 8:44

²³ Heb. 11:23

²⁴ Rev. 12:4

²⁵ See Luke 9:24.

The plan was laced with irony though; because of the tension of the moment, probably Jochebed did not appreciate this. Her son had to be thrown in the river; but not to drown. Moses was, in a certain way, given over to death, and thus his life was saved. Although it is not symbolic in itself, Jochebed did literally give her son to the river. Her action was certainly full of symbolism and deep lessons. Death surrounds us in this world. Death is our final destination on earth. The only way to escape death is to surrender to it. If we fight death, we will be conquered by it and our life is made meaningless. If we surrender to death, we overcome it and our life becomes meaningful.

Moses' death in the river was an image of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our life is in our fellowship with Him in His death. Moses was given over to death by his mother. If we want to keep our children, Jochebed's example is the only way.

The means used were very simple. Papyrus grew in abundance along the side of the river, and tar and pitch were also available in large quantities. Similarly, the means of salvation are never far. It is as Moses himself said later: "Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it."²⁶

Presumably, the plan was carried out by night or very early in the morning. Jochebed herself placed the basket in the reeds along the river, and Miriam hid in the vicinity to see what would happen. Whether they knew that Pharaoh's daughter was in the habit of taking a bath at that very spot, we do not know. If they knew, they would probably have considered it unwise to put the basket there. That would have been too much of a gamble. But there came her royal highness! The basket was spotted, and opened and Moses cooperated by crying his lungs out, making his way right into the princess' heart.

In writing this story Moses did not identify the princess. There is a rich variety of traditions about this person, none of which is historically verifiable. *The Pulpit Commentary* says that she was "probably a daughter of Seti I, and a sister of Ramses the Great. Josephus calls her Thermuthis."

What had happened must have been immediately obvious to her. She was looking at one of the Jewish babies that had been condemned to die by her father. Whether her father's edict had touched her or not, we do not know. But there is quite a difference between hearing and seeing. She may have been vaguely upset about the fact that little babies were being killed, but seeing this beautiful baby makes the thought that he too should be killed unbearable to her. When the baby's sister appeared with the suggestion that she find a Hebrew wet nurse, the princess consented immediately.

It is quite possible that the princess saw through the plot, but if she did she did not show it. Moses' mother receives back the son she had given up and from that time on she was paid for nursing her own child. Who says God does not have a sense of humor! Not only is one single boy saved from death, but the boy was the one who would be the undoing of Egypt and all its evil power. And now the crown was paying for his food and later for his education. The devil must have been furious. This story shows that there is no doubt as to who is actually in charge of this world.

A few years later, probably after the baby was weaned, the princess adopted him officially as her son and gave him his name "Moses." He probably had a Jewish name also, but we are not told what that was. The Hebrew form "Mosheh" may have been used for him at home. The Egyptian name would have been "Mesu." There is a name "Mesu" on some Egyptians monuments under the nineteenth dynasty, according to *The Pulpit Commentary*, but there is no proof that it would be the same Moses from Exodus. In Hebrew "Mosheh" has a wide meaning of "born, brought forth, child." It could be that the princess was childless and that in adopting Moses she was saying, "My child was born from the water."

We do not know anything about the lady who was the instrument in God's hand for saving Moses, but she gives the impression of being an intelligent and reliable person. *Adam Clarke* suggests that she may have been instrumental in abolishing the murder of the babies. We quote: "It has already been conjectured that the cruel edict of the Egyptian king did not continue long in force. ... And it will not appear unreasonable to suppose that the circumstance related here might have brought about its abolition. The daughter of Pharaoh, struck with the distressed state of the Hebrew children from what she had seen in the case of Moses, would probably implore her father to abolish this sanguinary edict."

4. The disgrace of Christ ch. 2:11-25

²⁶ Deut. 30:11-14

In the text of Exodus itself Moses withholds information regarding his years in the palace. We read some of the details about this period of his life in the New Testament, where the tradition, which must be considered reliable, since the Holy Spirit incorporates it into the Word of God, is preserved.

Stephen tells us that Moses was forty years old when he started to get involved in the suffering of his people. During those forty years he had been “educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”²⁷ Undoubtedly, Moses was aware of his Jewish roots. We read in Hebrews: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.”²⁸ These verses suggest that there may have been a struggle in Moses’ heart when he came to the point where he had to identify himself either with Egypt and the palace or with the suffering Hebrews. There must have been affection for Pharaoh’s daughter who had saved his life. But that had been forty years before. If the princess was still alive when Moses turned forty, she would have been in her late sixties or early seventies. Moses’ identity crisis may have occurred at the moment of her death. These thoughts are mere speculation, but they could make us appreciate the fact that Moses must have gone through a struggle before he came to the point where he stated clearly, “I am a Jew.”

When he came to that point he went beyond mere identification with the suffering nation; he became convinced that God had called him to be their Messiah. It took another forty years before he was proved to be right in this assumption, a long period in which he must have gone through another identity crisis. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it there was faith involved. He knew fellowship with God and understood that God had saved his life and put him where he was for a purpose. As Stephen testified: “Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.”²⁹ I remember a sermon by Leroy Webber about being misunderstood by others. Webber edited the above verse effectively by reading it as follows: “He supposed his brethren would have understood ... but they understood not” (KJV).

The issue here was not that Moses was misunderstood by his compatriots; Moses misunderstood God. He was right about the fact that God had called him, but he launched himself into this “call” without taking time to find out prayerfully and patiently how and when this call should be worked out in practice. Waiting for God is one of the most essential features of the life of a Christian. It is also the hardest thing one can do. Wrestling with his blindness, John Milton wrote: “They also serve who only stand and wait.” David says: “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”³⁰ It takes strength of heart and character to wait for the Lord. Moses botched his call and probably prolonged the suffering of his people by acting in his own strength and not waiting for God. My own experience has taught me that the working out of God’s call for me meant bumping into closed doors and waiting for others to open. The Gospel entered Europe because both Satan and the Spirit of Christ closed the doors for Paul and Silas in Asia, and it took them some time to discover this.

So Moses went out on his own. He saw an Egyptian slave driver beating one of the Hebrews. In his anger he killed the Egyptian. *Adam Clarke* justifies Moses’ act by saying that the Egyptian had probably beaten the Hebrew to death. However, the Bible does confirm that; therefore, legally Moses had the right of revenge. It is easy to look at this incident from a distance and to decide that Moses was wrong. Obviously he was! But should he have turned around and gone home? The Egyptian was wrong, just as wrong as the guards in the Nazi concentration camps. But more was wrong than just the behavior of one individual. The system was wrong. Moses did not change the system by killing one person. It would take nine plagues and the killing of thousands of first born Egyptian children to change the system. The enemy should not be underestimated.

What Moses did was an act of terrorism. He killed one man, thinking that nobody would know. “Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” He may have thought that, if he could surreptitiously kill one here and there without being discovered, he could sow panic among the Egyptian taskmasters. It didn’t work.

Moses probably hoped that the Israelites would appreciate his intervention. Stephen hints at this incident in the verse we quoted above. There may have been other episodes that are not mentioned

²⁷ Acts 7:22

²⁸ Heb. 11:24, 25

²⁹ Acts 7:25

³⁰ Psalm 27:14

in Scripture by which Moses wanted to prove that he was running for the presidency of Israel. If no, the question, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?” does not make much sense. One murder does not mean leadership.

The irony of the situation is that Moses was right in principle. He recognized the plight of his people better than they did themselves. He realized that their slavery and oppression was unbearable. That is why he was so upset when he saw that among themselves the Israelites did not form one united front against Egypt. When there is infighting there is a lack of sense of reality. When soldiers fight each other instead of the enemy they do not realize what war is all about.

This lack of realism is amply illustrated in the history of the church also. The devil has managed to draw the eyes of God’s children away from the real enemy to concentrate on peripheral differences. That is why we see churches split and church leaders go on ego trips. Moses was absolutely right when he interfered with the two men who were fighting, reminding them that they were brothers. The fighting men did not share his vision. The man who answered him insinuated that Moses did not stand for a righteous cause but that he just liked killing people.

Jesus picks up this man’s reply rather sarcastically in Luke’s Gospel, when someone comes and asks Him to mediate in a dispute about an inheritance. We read: “Jesus replied, ‘Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?’”³¹ In this quote Jesus draws the parallel between Moses’ rejection as leader of Israel and His own rejection by the people He came to save. It is hard to save people who are not aware of their need of salvation.

Why Moses ever thought that the killing of the Egyptian would remain a secret, even among the Israelites, is not clear. The man who was beaten by the Egyptian knew what Moses did. Why would he keep quiet about it?

Interestingly, the Bible says that it was the man who was in the wrong who answered Moses. Evidently Moses must have investigated the cause of their quarrel and pronounced a judgment. Hence the mans answered: “Who made you ruler and judge over us?” According to Stephen, Moses thought that his fellow Hebrews would recognize his authority as coming from God. But when this authority was tested, Moses buckled with fear. It is important that others recognize God’s call in our life, but our assurance of this call should not rest on this recognition. If we depend upon people’s opinion we will fear. We can only be fearless if our assurance is of God.

There seems to be a contradiction between Moses’ fear for his life and the comment of the writer to the Hebrews: “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.”³² *Adam Clarke* circumvents the problem by saying that the verse in Hebrews does not speak of Moses’ flight to Midian but of the Exodus of the people. If that is true, the author of Hebrews would have reversed the chronology. Fear for one’s life and faith in God do not necessarily exclude one another. Having faith in God does not always mean that we shouldn’t flee either. It would have been foolishly daring and, maybe, tempting God if Moses had stayed and defied Pharaoh, unless God had clearly told him to do so. Fleeing does not strike us, though, as an example of faith.

It seems that Moses, in describing his own conduct in the killing of the Egyptian and in his flight to Midian, sees himself as a failure and that both Stephen and the writer of Hebrews are saying that his relationship with God was basically right. God evaluated Moses’ life differently from the way Moses did. It is, of course, ultimately God’s evaluation that counts. We should not abolish self-evaluation, but we must be aware of snares. Paul speaks about this evaluation and he says: “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.”³³ On the other hand, without self-evaluation we would be unable “to take the plank out of our own eye,” as Jesus says.³⁴ We should only examine ourselves in the presence of the Lord. We cannot trust our own heart.

Vs. 15 says: “When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses.” It does not sound as if Pharaoh wanted to arrest Moses and take him to court. It seems to be more a covert operation in which the king wanted Moses to be assassinated. The Jewish question may have been a sensitive issue in Egypt. Putting Moses on trial would have opened a can of worms in which the cruel and inhumane treatment of the Israelites would be exposed. We do not really know what Egyptian justice was like.

³¹ Luke 12:14

³² Heb. 11:27

³³ I Cor. 4:1-5

³⁴ Matt. 7:1-5

This Pharaoh was probably a relative of Moses by adoption. If he was the son of the Pharaoh whose daughter adopted Moses, he would have been Moses' step-uncle. This relationship may have made it difficult to have Moses executed publicly.

Moses fled to Midian before the arm of justice could reach him. Midian was probably located in the vicinity of Mount Sinai. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "The land of Midian is a somewhat vague expression, for the Midianites were nomads, and at different times occupied distinct and even remote localities. Their principal settlements appear to have been on the eastern side of the Elanitic Gulf (Gulf of Akabah); but at times they extended northwards to the confines of Moab (Gen. xxxvi. 35; Num. xxii. 4, 7, etc.), and westward into the Sinaitic Peninsula, which appears to have been 'the land of Midian' whereto Moses fled."

When the text says: "Moses went to live in Midian," it shows a sense of purpose and probably of guidance. But as soon as Moses arrived where he knew he was supposed to be, he sat by a well as a forlorn fugitive. He may have known that God wanted him in Midian, but when he arrived there, he says: "Now, what?" I picture Moses fleeing Egypt in the middle of the night at great speed. Things happened almost too fast. And here he sat by a well, several miles from the inhabited world, not knowing what to do. And God let him sit there, so to speak, for forty years, according to Acts.³⁵ Things happened in those years, of course, but nothing comparable to the sophistication and high speed of life in Egypt. I believe we can use such modern expressions and apply them to the Egypt of forty centuries ago, because such was life for Moses. Often, when God calls a man, episodes of endless waiting are interspersed with moments of breathtaking speed. We have trouble to adapt to either, but they are typically the way God deals with us.

Moses eventually was invited by a priest in Midian, whose name is Reuel, or Jethro. The editors of *The Pulpit Commentary* surmise that Reuel and Jethro were not the same person, but that after Reuel's death Jethro became the head of the tribe and took over the functions of Reuel. We have seen in Genesis that in the heathen world of the Middle East there remained pockets of worship of the true God. God did not appear to Abraham as a stranger in Ur. In Canaan there were Melchizedek and others who worshipped God. The Bible says nothing negative about Jethro's priesthood, so we suppose that he did not serve idols, but God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

Moses' act of courtesy for Jethro's daughters established the contact with Jethro. The seven daughters of Jethro who shepherded their father's flock were discriminated against by some male shepherds when they came to water their animals at the well. Moses did basically the same thing that he did in Egypt; he took the side of the underdog. He must have had quite some authority, though, to stand up as a single individual against several rough men. Moses did not lack courage.

There are other pictures in the Bible of men who sat beside a well at a crucial point in their life. Abraham's servant, Eliezer, sat at the well when God answered his prayer regarding a wife for Isaac. Jacob sat at a well, probably the same well, when he met his cousin Rachel with whom he promptly fell in love. And centuries later Jesus sat at the well that Jacob had dug in Sechem when the Father opened the hearts of the Samaritans for the Gospel.

The girls report to their father what Moses did for them, calling him "an Egyptian." And so Moses is invited in for a meal and he becomes a member of the household for the next forty years, marrying one of the girls, Zipporah.

Gershom is born. Actually, the birth of Gershom is the only detail Moses himself gives about this dramatic and important part of his life. In naming his son, Moses expresses his deepest feelings of being an alien. The question arises: "Where is home?" It was not the palace, nor the slavery of Goshen and, although he had a wife and family in Midian, it wasn't Midian either. I wonder if Moses wanted to express more in the name of his son than a displacement on earth. He may have come to the same conclusion as the author of Hebrews when he writes in his biographical sketch of the patriarchs, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own."³⁶ And, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."³⁷

³⁵ Acts 7:30

³⁶ Heb. 11:13,14

³⁷ Heb. 13:14

Later, in ch. 4:24-26, we shall see that Moses and Zipporah did not see eye to eye concerning rearing their son, and that Zipporah's influence was the stronger one in the family.

From Stephen we learn that Moses lived in Midian for forty years. Our text simply says, "During that long period ..." (vs. 23). The death of Pharaoh did not bring an end to the persecution of the Israelites. It seems that their condition got even worse and they started to pray and cry to God.

The last verses of this chapter show the depths of God's compassion. They also give us insight in the workings of God's redeeming intervention. We do not know when, during that long period, Pharaoh died. *The Pulpit Commentary* takes it for granted that God called Moses immediately upon the death of the man who had tried to kill him and so they looked for a Pharaoh (who reigned for forty years or more) and they chose Rameses II. But nothing in the text assures us that God acted promptly upon the death of Pharaoh. There are in the Bible episodes in which God waited and acted with a slowness that is inexplicable to us. In John's Gospel we read: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. [Yet] when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days."³⁸ And the Apostle Peter writes: "They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."³⁹ It could well be that Pharaoh died a decade or more before the Lord called Moses. We are not told why. God's deliberation can be a source of frustration and even despair to us.

We have to realize that only God has the whole picture. In looking at God's way of acting we have to start from the premise that all God's dealings are dominated by love and perfect wisdom. God only waits when that is the best thing to do. Letting the evil of Egypt turn into a boil and letting it ripen till it burst brought about a great demonstration of God's power and glory. This gave Israel the impetus it needed to get out of Egypt and on its way to Canaan. History shows that even this impetus was barely enough; for only the second generation actually reached the goal.

When God's patience is put in historic perspective, it shows itself as the perfect way. That is why David says about the kings of the earth: "And they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD."⁴⁰

God never acts on the basis of deep emotions alone. The emotions are there, as we also learn from ch. 3:7. He bases His actions on the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He takes legal steps against the enemy. The relations between God and Satan are too complicated for us to understand. Yet, the whole of history is built upon this mystery. From Adam to Job and all the way to the book of Revelation, there is a clear line that shows that a cosmic "chess game" is being played in which sacrifices are brought, the depth of which the human mind cannot grasp.

The expression "God remembered" is, of course, an anthropomorphism. The all-knowing God cannot forget so He does not have to remember. Moses used those words, or rather, the Holy Spirit used them, to make us understand that there is the similarity between our reactions, feeling and reasoning and God's. As persons made in the image of God we act similarly to the way the One after whom we are modeled acts. He is moved by our suffering and afflictions.

5. The Call ch. 3:1-4:17

a. God's Revelation of Himself ch. 3:1-10

In the first verse of this chapter we find Moses going routinely through his daily chores. He has become an old and lonely man. We should try to picture this man, who had grown up in the refinement and sophistication of Pharaoh's court. Forty years of communion with sheep do something to a man's

³⁸ John 11:5,6

³⁹ II Pet. 3:4-9

⁴⁰ Ps. 138:5 (RSV)

initiative and vitality. By this time Moses must have given up the ambitions of his life to be the man of God's choice to deliver His people. God calls him when his own ambitions are dead.

Apparently Moses was not involved in a large operation. We do not read that he had a group of shepherds under him, since the flock he kept must have been small enough to be handled by a single man. As we witness Moses in the different stages of his life, first coming out of the palace, later on the back side of the desert, we can say: "How low can you get!" Moses would probably have agreed.

Regarding the term "father-in-law," *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "The word 'father-in-law' is of much wider application, being used of almost any relation by marriage. Zipporah uses it of Moses in ch. iv. 25, 26; in Gen. xix. 12, 14, it is applied to Lot's 'sons-in-law.' Its application to Jethro does not prove him to be the same person as Reuel, which the difference of name render improbably. He was no doubt the head of the tribe at this period, having succeeded to that dignity, and to the priesthood, when Reuel died. He may have been either Reuel's son or his nephew."

The name given to the Sinai mountain as "the mountain of God" was, probably, given in retrospect. There is no reason to believe that the place was an existing sanctuary.

When Moses came to a dead end, he has the most spectacular experience a human being can have: an encounter with God. Moses obviously knew about God through the history of his people. How intimately he knew God personally we do not know. Up to this point Moses may have had very little idea what his purpose in this world was to be. People who do not know God do not know the meaning of their existence. Ironically, when Moses learned what this meaning, or purpose was, he did not like it! But first, let us look at the revelation of the Person of God to this human being in the desert.

God is omnipresent. He had always been with Moses, not only in this desert but before and at his birth, in the water of the Nile when Moses was put in the basket, and in Egypt in the palace,. But Moses had never been aware of God's presence until this point in his life.

Now he sees a bush on fire, but the fire does not burn up the bush. Fire decomposes and as such it is an instrument of death. God and death are incompatible. God is the God of life. He is Life. So the bush that God created does not die when He touches it. The phenomenon draws Moses' attention. He is used to death, but here he sees something that should burn and die, but it doesn't. He goes to investigate, but he gets more than he bargained for. It is one thing to want to acquire knowledge and to look into religion in that context, but it is quite another thing to meet God. Moses is deeply shaken at the realization of the holiness of God. The encounter turns him around completely. It makes him a different man.

The Person Who appears is called "the angel of the LORD." In the rest of this chapter He is identified with God Himself. Most Bible commentators agree that this angel is not a created being, but the Second Person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ before His incarnation. A comparison between Isaiah 6 and John 12:40,41 lends Biblical credence to this supposition.

Moses is drawn to the bush out of mere curiosity. He isn't looking for a spiritual experience. Yet, it isn't until Moses moves in God's direction that God calls him. It would be wrong to build a theological theory about the way God calls people upon this particular incident. There are cases in the Bible where God calls people who apparently have had no previous inclination toward religion. Abraham and Gideon could be mentioned. But we do not know anything about Abraham's previous life in Ur. Of Gideon we read that he was aware of the fact that God had revealed Himself in history before. Generally speaking it seems that there are usually some preparatory workings of God's Spirit in the life of persons whom He calls for certain tasks.

The burning bush was the turning point in Moses' life. Yet, in retrospect, as Moses got to know God better, he must have realized that God had been present in his life before. Without God's hand upon the little basket in the Nile he would have perished. Even when he "thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them,"⁴¹ he was not completely mistaken.

My life was turned around during a Youth Retreat in Holland in 1950. Before that time I thought I was a Christian, but I did not know Christ. After my conversion, I started to realize that God had already been at work in my life. Such a realization does in no way diminish the revolutionary aspect of a conversion, but it puts it in the right perspective. Very often the Holy Spirit besieges the citadel of our heart until we are starved out and surrender.

Moses' call was as clear as any call can be. God called his name twice, "Moses, Moses!" Moses answers the call with "Here I am." Up to this point the dialogue does not differ from any human communication. Moses is intrigued, but he does not realize with whom he is dealing, or rather who is

⁴¹ Acts 7:25

dealing with him. When the Word of God comes to a human being, it changes him. Jesus says that when the Word of God comes to people it makes them “gods.”⁴² When God descended upon the thorn bush, His presence turned the spot into holy ground. How much more will people, who were created in God’s own image, be changed when God comes to them and speaks to them.

There is a difference, though, between mere material, a dead piece of ground, and a living human being. The transformation of the ground was instantaneous, the transformation in humans is gradual. The difference is in the human will which almost invariably puts up resistance. Moses’ resistance is very obvious.

When we approach earthly monarchs, we have to observe the proper etiquette. One does not speak with royalty as with common people. The protocol to be observed when dealing with God is much more rigorous. God gives Moses two commands which should govern his behavior in His presence. First, he is not allowed to come close; secondly, he must take off his sandals. The distance to be kept is for Moses’ own protection. Going too close and seeing too much of God’s glory might have killed Moses. In ch. 33:20 God says to Moses: “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross has changed this all. With our sins forgiven by His blood and our lives covered with His righteousness, “we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.”⁴³ And Paul even says in Second Corinthians: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”⁴⁴ This glorious privilege we have as New Testament Christians carries with it the danger that we become immune to God’s holiness. Our eyes can become so blinded that we do not see the glory any longer. May God keep us from that curse.

Secondly, Moses is told to take off his sandals. It is customary in the East to take off shoes and sandals before entering a house. The reason for this is not a very flattering one. In Indonesia houses in a rural setting have no indoor plumbing. People use outhouses which are polluted and messy. They wear sandals to go outside, but upon entering the house those sandals and their pollution are left outside in order to keep the house clean. I do not think this is the reason for God’s command to Moses. God’s holiness cannot be polluted by human refuse. God wanted Moses’ bare skin to actually contact His holiness in order to be transformed by it. On the one hand, Moses had to be protected from God’s holiness by not going too close, and on the other hand, he had to touch it.

God reveals Himself to Moses as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” I see no reason to interpret “your father” any other way than literally, that is “I am the God of your father Amram.” After all it was through his father that Moses was a member of his people. We know nothing about Amram, but God identifies Himself with this man in the same way as with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is one thing, Moses discovered, to know about God from your father and another to meet God face to face. Children have the tendency to put their spiritual and cultural heritage in a category by itself: something only vaguely related to the real life they are facing. Many children feel they have to hack their own way through the jungle of life. Young people often stick together in this operation, without realizing that the ground they are covering had been covered before by previous generations. God wants His children to be aware of their heritage. Israel had to keep the memory of the facts of salvation alive. Most people do not know what to do with their own history until they focus upon God, receive His revelation and see the perspective. For Moses this was a crisis experience. “At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

In verses 7-10, God tries to share His burden about the people of Israel with Moses as part of his call. It turns out that God is infinitely more concerned about the people than Moses is.

God’s thoughts and feelings are described in human terms for the benefit of Moses. It is hard for us to imagine what goes on in the mind of the eternal God. God wants us to know, however, that our thoughts and feelings are a reflection of His. God knew about the misery and suffering of His people centuries before. He mentions to Abraham that his descendants will be mistreated and suffer in a land that is not their own.⁴⁵ Israel’s redemption was part of God’s eternal plan of salvation. So in that sense of the word, God has not “seen” and “come down” as if He just discovered what was going on. But God

⁴² John 10:34,35

⁴³ Heb. 10:19

⁴⁴ II Cor. 3:18

⁴⁵ Gen. 15:13-16

wants Moses to see conditions as He sees them and to feel what He feels about the condition of people who are in bondage.

God's emotions about the condition of man are as far removed from our superficial reactions to suffering as time is from eternity. Jesus shared the depth of His feelings with His disciples. We read: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"⁴⁶ The same feelings are expressed in John's Gospel: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." God wants us to "open our eyes and look at the fields."⁴⁷

Where the NIV says "I am concerned about their suffering," the KJV and RSV probably give a better rendering by saying "I know their sorrows" and "I know their sufferings." God is concerned about human suffering because He has been a partaker of it. The Word became flesh. He partook of our human nature in our fallen bodies and suffered all the consequences of sin during His life on earth and at His awful death on the cross. He knows torture by experience. It is true that when God spoke to Moses Jesus' body had not gone through all of this in time and space, but for the eternal God that made no difference. The Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world.

God further says to Moses: "I have come down to rescue them." Here again, much more is implied than appears from the words. Salvation for mankind rests on the fact that God has come down. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt required that God Himself leave His heavenly glory and come to earth, not just to force Pharaoh to let God's people go, but to pour out His own life on earth for this salvation. The Exodus would have been impossible without the Passover lamb. Pharaoh had no inkling what was going on. His brazen statement in ch. 5:2: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go," shows that he talked without knowing. But the Prince of Darkness, his master, must have had some idea that God was going to the limit and farther in order to rescue His people. He probably understood that more and worse judgment was in store for him in the future.

Surely, Moses had very little idea at this point of the importance of the moment. Undoubtedly, he was familiar with the promise to Abraham in "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates; The land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." He must have known those words as a part of his people's heritage. Whether they had any practical meaning for him is doubtful. After all, the promise was about four hundred years old, about twice as ancient as the Constitution of the United States of America.

Not all of the inhabitants of Canaan God mentioned in the promise to Abraham are mentioned here. *The Pulpit Commentary* says about this: "The enumeration of the nations of Palestine here made is incomplete, five only of the ten whose land was promised to Abraham (Gen. xv. 19-21) being expressly mentioned. One, however, that of the Hivites, is added. We may suppose that they had succeeded to the Kenizzites or the Kadmonites of Abraham's time. The only important omission is that of the Girgashites, who hold their place in most other enumerations (Gen. x. 16; xv. 21; Deut. vii. 1; Josh. iii. 10; xxiv. 11, etc.), but seem to have been the least important of the 'seven nations,' and are omitted in Judg. iii. 5. ('Girgashites' is introduced in the Samaritan version and the Sept.)"

The Exodus of Israel from Egypt and their conquest of Canaan was part of a complex plan of God, not only for the redemption and rehabilitation of His people and the establishment of a point of reference on earth for His revelation, but also a judgment upon the sin of the people of Canaan. We have seen before that, for centuries, there were pockets of true religion in Canaan. Melchizedek knew God. Some of Abraham's friends may have worshipped God in truth; Abimelech of Philistea had some contorted knowledge. But even in Abraham's days, corruption had gotten to the point that God could not tolerate it any longer, as was the case in Sodom and Gomorrah. But God told Abraham that punishment of the whole nation would have to wait several centuries. "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Matt. 9:36-38

⁴⁷ John 4:35

⁴⁸ Gen. 15:16

If we cannot see Israel's conquest of Canaan in this context, as a divine mandate to punish the sins of the nations, of the same order as the flood in the days of Noah, it would be nothing but a senseless genocide. Israel's conquest was justified by God, as we see in Joshua where God defeats the kings of Canaan by raining meteorites upon them and letting the sun stand still at Joshua's request.⁴⁹

So God's plan of redemption for Israel is part of a scheme that spans the ages. It is also an image of the ultimate redemption and judgment at "the Day of the Lord" which is to come.

Then comes the ultimate call: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." This call comes to Moses as the shock of his life. Of the old vision from forty years ago, nothing is left. As far as spiritual ambitions are concerned, Moses is a dead man. The only thing in him that is still alive is his resistance. Moses argues five times with God.

He tries to convince God that He is calling the wrong person. In ch. 3:11 he counters the call by saying: "Who am I?" In ch. 3:13 he tells God to imagine the situation in Egypt. Nobody will believe that he has had a divine revelation. In ch. 4:1 he basically repeats the same argument: Nobody will believe me. In ch. 4:10 he comes back to his first excuse; his own person, and he points out to God his handicap: "Slow of speech and tongue." Finally, in ch. 4:13 he flatly refuses the call.

The amazing thing is that Moses feels that he will not be able to stand up against Pharaoh, but he does not hesitate to argue with the Almighty. Moses' first reaction was in ch. 3:11 - "Who I am?" There is a sense in which the question is quite appropriate. It is the most fundamental question anyone can ask at any time. But it is the presence of God that stimulated the question more than anything else. Sin has erased the defining lines of our existence. Only the presence of God, in Whose image we are molded, brings back the realization that we are derived from His being and related to His Person.

But it isn't in this sense that Moses is asking himself the question. Moses uses it as an excuse. He puts himself on the basis of his insufficiency to prove to God that God does not know him and does not understand the situation. Otherwise God wouldn't use him for such a task. In this attitude of Moses, there traces of realism and humility. In his self-evaluation he finds himself insufficient. But then the requirement never was that he would act on the basis of his own resources. Moses could have quoted Paul: "Who is equal to such a task?"⁵⁰ Paul answers his own question, where God answers Moses': "Our competence comes from God."⁵¹ This is the deepest lesson any Christian can learn.

It is propaganda from hell that made us lose the sense of our identity. It is only in God's presence and in fellowship with Him that we become what we are. And we are much more than we suspect. The key to self-discovery is in obedience. Jesus said: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."⁵² D.L. Moody heard someone say: "The world hasn't seen yet what God can do through a man who is wholly dedicated to Him." Moody answered: "By the grace of God, I want to be that man!" At this point Moses says: "I will not!"

There comes a point in Moses' life where he understands clearly what the grace of God has done in his life. We read in Numbers: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth."⁵³ What other attitude could one have in the presence of the Lord?! In another instance, however, he completely forgot who he was. Later we read: "He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'⁵⁴

The root of our rebellion against God may be deeply buried in our life; it does not die until we do. And we appear to be clever in manipulating it. We can use it to obey or to refuse, to elevate ourselves or to humble ourselves. Paul wraps the whole complex of the elements together under the term "the flesh."

⁴⁹ Joshua 10:11-14

⁵⁰ II Cor. 2:16

⁵¹ II Cor. 3:5

⁵² John 12:26

⁵³ Num. 12:3

⁵⁴ Num. 20:10-12

Here Moses says to God, "I am not big enough for the job." And God answers: "True, but I am!" God's answer to our inability is, "I will be with you."

This promise should have closed the conversation and finished the matter, but it did not. Sin has made us worse than blind. Jesus assures us: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁵⁵ We act as if it does not make the slightest difference.

The problem with the presence of God is that it is not visible to the naked eye. The writer to the Hebrews says about Moses: "he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."⁵⁶ And Peter quotes David by saying: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."⁵⁷

The Lord is with us and there is a way to know it, but it is not by means of sensual experience. It is through a faculty we possess, but which needs development. We can see Him only with the eye of our soul. Or, as C.S. Lewis says in his book with the same title: "How can we meet the Gods face to face, till we have faces?"⁵⁸

The sign God promised Moses is not what we would call a sign. God didn't think that Moses needed a physical token to remind him that God had spoken to him. He would never afterward doubt his senses and think that he had been hallucinating. When God speaks to you, you know it. Gideon asked for a sign. We read in Judges how Gideon brought the angel of the Lord some food and then, when he realized Who had talked to him, he was afraid he would die.⁵⁹ Thomas thought he needed confirmation with physical signs, but when he saw the risen Lord, he received an assurance that went beyond any confirmation by the senses.⁶⁰ Our senses are not robust enough to face the ultimate reality of God's presence. We either fall down and worship or we flee, only to find out that there is no place to hide.⁶¹

When God speaks about a sign He speaks about the ultimate reality of His presence for all the people of Israel. "You will worship God on this mountain." "You" is plural.

The call of the Lord is always linked to His presence. God never calls us and then He sends us out in the cold. When God says to Moses: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt," He also says: "I will be with you." In the same way Jesus says: "Therefore goAnd surely I will be with you always."⁶² Obeying God's call means following the Lamb wherever He goes.⁶³ God goes always before us. We are not leading, but following.

In spite of the fact that Moses shows signs of genuine humility when he says: "Who am I?" the assurance of God's presence makes no real impact on his mind. He keeps his eyes on himself instead of on God; hence his continuing objections to his call. God's assurance should have finished the matter, but it did not. We should say, fortunately not; because God answers Moses' second objection with one of the greatest statements of the whole Bible.

It sounds like an academic question that the Israelites would ask for the Name of God. What Moses is actually saying in vs. 13 is: "Who am I speaking with?" We can hardly suppose that Moses had any doubts himself. Moses plays a very dangerous game. Asking for God's Name means asking for His character. To ask that question with ulterior motives, in a dishonest way, can be very dangerous. Pharaoh asked: "Who is the LORD that I would obey Him?" (ch. 5:2). The question cost him his life. Moses' motives are not fundamentally different from Pharaoh's. He asks for God's Name in order to avoid obeying the call. Yet God answers him seriously. God takes all our questions seriously, even the ones we do not intend to be taken seriously. "I AM WHO I AM."

Adam Clarke comments here: "I AM THAT I AM. *Eheyeh asher eheyeh*. These words have been variously understood. The Vulgate translates, 'I am who I am.' The Septuagint, 'I am he who exists.' The Syriac, the Persic and the Chaldee preserve the original words without any gloss. The Arabic

⁵⁵ Matt. 28: 18-20

⁵⁶ Heb. 11:27

⁵⁷ Acts 2:25

⁵⁸ C. S. Lewis – *Till we have faces*

⁵⁹ Judges 6:17-24

⁶⁰ See John 20:26-28

⁶¹ See Rev. 20:11

⁶² Matt. 28:19,20

⁶³ Rev. 14:4

paraphrases them, 'The Eternal, who passes not away.' As the original words literally signify 'I will be what I will be'; some have supposed that God simply designed to inform Moses that what He had been to His fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He would be to him and to the Israelites; and that He would perform the promises He had made to his fathers by giving their descendants the Promised land. It is difficult to put a meaning to these words; they seem intended to point out the eternity and self-existence of God."

Jesus explains the content of the Name best in John's Gospel, where He speaks of the Father having "life in Himself."⁶⁴ All created life is dependent upon an outside source for its existence. God is self-existent in His un-created life. He is the source of life, according to David: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."⁶⁵ Jesus also identified Himself with the "I AM." Not only do we read in the Gospel of John the seven I AM's - but in John, He makes this astounding statement: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."⁶⁶ The Jews were so afraid to use the expression "I am" for fear of using "The Name of the Lord in vain" that they refrained from saying the words. In reading the Tetragrammaton YHWH they substituted "Adonai" for "Yahweh." The Name YHWH, Yahweh or Jehovah is not easily defined. In *Smith's Bible Dictionary* we read: "The true pronunciation of this name, by which God was known to the Hebrews, has been entirely lost, the Jews themselves scrupulously avoiding every mention of it"

The fact that the Name is used throughout the Pentateuch should not be seen as a problem. Accepting the fact that Moses is the author, we recognize that he did not write the book of Genesis before God's revelation to him in ch. 3:14. The first mention of YHWH is in Genesis. "The LORD God"⁶⁷ is the English translation of YHWH Elohim. The choice of LORD, which is only distinct from Lord by its capitalization is very unfortunate. Jehovah God, as the RSV translates it, has at least the merit of making a distinction. To cut up the Pentateuch according to the use of the name in Jehovist and Elohist sources, as the Higher Criticism tried to do, is sheer speculation.

Actually it is too bad that one gets so easily sidetracked at the reading of this verse, which is one of the peaks of revelation. It has been said that all theology starts with Exodus 3:14, the revelation of God to Moses and to us as the I AM. Our own existence is a mystery to us. We do not understand ourselves because we do not understand existence. We make progress if we grasp the fact that we are because HE IS. Standing at the edge of his life and looking into the abyss of death, contemplating the possibility of suicide, Hamlet said: "To be or not to be, that is the question." God gives the answer to Moses in saying "I AM." How God's "I AM" has its bearing upon our existence is revealed in Jesus' words to John in Revelations: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."⁶⁸

There is an infectious exuberance in Jesus' words: "And behold I am alive for ever and ever." Jesus speaks as a man. Speaking as God He could not say, "I was dead." Jesus says to John, "Look what the Eternal 'I AM' did to this created body!" The joy of it is explosive. It begins with God saying to Moses: "I AM" and the end result will be that we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is.⁶⁹

It sounds so simple, "I AM." There is nothing more fundamental. It is too simple for us to grasp. At the same time it is not mere existence, but existence to the uttermost. God is "I AM" in the infinite eternal sense of the word; limitless quantity and limitless quality.

"I AM WHO I AM" also indicates that God can only be compared with Himself. He is incomparable. He can only be measured by His own standards. Anything or anybody put next to God for comparison is always measured by Him, never the other way around. Nobody can judge God. I believe that is the theme of the book Job. The confrontation between God and Satan in which Job is caught is incidental. The real issue is the Person and character of God. Once Job acknowledges God as the Creator, he is healed. God is, first of all, God and then Redeemer. That is the message Moses receives. We tend to reverse the order because we do not start to know God until we are redeemed. It is after we have been taken hold of by Jesus Christ that we want to take hold of Him, as Paul says in Philippians.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ John 5:26

⁶⁵ Ps. 36:9

⁶⁶ John 8:58 (KJV).

⁶⁷ Gen. 2:4

⁶⁸ Rev. 1:18

⁶⁹ I John 3:2

⁷⁰ Phil. 3:12

In spite of the depth of this revelation, Moses remains unimpressed. It isn't until much later that he will say: "Now show me your glory" (ch. 33:18).

We do not know how much Adam, in his sinless state, grasped of the Person and character of God. The fact that there was a Tree of Life, of which he never ate, would indicate that he had not come to a place of spiritual maturity when he ate of the tree that had been forbidden. Once he fell into sin, his ability to understand died completely. In Moses' case we see how hard it is, even for the omnipotent God to penetrate the death in man's soul. Although Moses was afraid to look at God, he was much more overawed by the finite power of Pharaoh than by the eternal power of the living God. Sin makes us lose touch with reality.

In the rest of this chapter, God shows Moses, with infinite patience, what will happen when he arrives in Egypt. First, he has to talk to the elders and then they will go, as a committee, to Pharaoh and present him with a proposal which is a test-case. But first of all, Moses has to identify to the people that YHWH is the source of his mission and that He is the God of history: their history.

We cannot read these verses without making mention of the way Jesus quoted them: "But about the resurrection of the dead; have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁷¹

Moses is sent to the house of death that is to Egypt, with this message of life. In our thinking, history is what happened to the dead. God's history is "Heilsgeschichte," history of salvation from death. If God is the God of history, He is, according to Jesus' words, in the first place, the God of Life.

Secondly, He is the God of promise. That is why Paul can say: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."⁷² Israel had to understand not only Who God is, but also the intrinsic value of His promise to them. The exodus from Egypt and entrance into Canaan was not a hastily conceived plan of convenience. It was a plan drawn up in eternity, part of an eternal covenant that included the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (vs. 15). Not every generation experiences sensational facts of salvation. It took two generations to bring Israel out of Egypt into Canaan. The third generation, which was born in Canaan started to forget immediately what happened to their ancestors. When Aaron's grandson, Phinehas was still priest,⁷³ we read: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."⁷⁴ God wants His Name to be remembered by every generation. But man looks only at himself when he comes into the world. He is too proud to look behind him to see where he came from; and if he does, it is with derision and with the notion that the fathers didn't know a thing. There is very little hope for people who do not read history.

God wants Moses to impress upon the people of Israel that what is happening to them is a link in the chain of history that began with the call to Abraham to leave Ur and live in Canaan as a stranger and then the conquest of Canaan and its inheritance by Israel. Now it is important for man to see where his place in the plan of God is and to surrender to the Lord in order to fit into this place. Very few people do this. Our life span is short, and it is very hard for us to see beyond the limits of our life back into history and forward into eschatology. Consequently, we have very little notion of the slot we fit into. This is complicated by our own ambitions. Paul's injunction is generally applicable: "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."⁷⁵

Moses caught that vision, so did Joshua and David and the apostle Paul. But the only one who fully knew who He was and why He had come is our Lord Jesus Christ. He never got bogged down in the details and difficulties of His life on earth. Every instance was judged in the light of eternity. Although, for obvious reasons, we cannot fully emulate His example, we can keep it in mind and come back to it. Solomon says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."⁷⁶

Moses was to unfold the whole of God's plan so people would know why they were leaving and where they were going. Christians should know this too.

⁷¹ Matt. 22:31,32

⁷² II Cor. 1:20

⁷³ Judges 20:28

⁷⁴ Judges 21:25

⁷⁵ Phil. 2:21

⁷⁶ Prov. 29:18 (KJV)

Moses is assured by God that this time the people will recognize God's call upon his life. Moses had been rebuffed forty years earlier and had, evidently, never completely overcome his failure. Now things are different. God had said: "I will be with you." Therefore the people would accept God's encounter with Moses as a revelation to the whole nation of Israel. Otherwise they would never say: "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us" (Vs.18).

It sounds as if the proposal to Pharaoh was to be a test-case. "Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD, our God." According to *Adam Clarke*, however, the distance from Goshen to Sinai could be covered in three days by normal travel over the shortest route. So there was no deception in the proposal.

Also Pharaoh's refusal is predicted. So the Israelites would have no reason to lose heart when things would get worse instead of better. The series of miraculous plagues is announced, although the content of the plagues was not revealed, only the end result. Israel knew that the enemy would not give up without a struggle. It would become more obvious that their struggle was "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."⁷⁷ Although the Lord tells them clearly, in ch. 12:12, that the judgment is upon "all the gods of Egypt," I do not think this fact ever penetrated the heart of the people of Israel. They never understood who the real enemy was. Had their eyes been open to the spiritual issue, they would have reacted differently, but they remained in bondage even after they gained their liberty.

Finally, the Lord revealed to Moses that the general populace of Egypt would sympathize with the cause of Israel and that the people would receive payment for their slave-labor. God would not allow them to leave Egypt empty handed. They did not leave as slaves and paupers but as free people, well dressed and well provided for. Most of all, they would have enough silver, gold and jewels to build the tabernacle, and enough to bring sacrifices to the Lord. The sad thing is that they gave their first sacrifice of gold for the Golden Calf. Everything God told Moses here is a clear picture of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

In chapter four Moses continued his objections to God's call. As we have seen, he presented three points: Nobody will believe him (ch. 4:1); he has a handicap; he cannot speak (ch. 4:10); he does not want to go (ch. 4:13).

In ch. 3:13 Moses had already brought up the point of unbelief, asking God to identify Himself. As an answer, he received more than he had bargained for. This was too much for him to take in, and he feels that if he takes God's case to the people, just like that, it will go completely over their heads. In this second plea of unbelief on the side of the people, his intention is, obviously, that God will give him some down-to-earth things he can show to the people: something on their level.

God's answer could not be any more simple. God asked for Moses' staff, the shepherd's rod that he carried with him. From that moment on, the staff changes owners. Moses' staff becomes "the staff of God" (vs. 20). It is with this stick that Moses will enter Pharaoh's palace and perform his miracles. Initially he will be mocked, because, in comparison with Pharaoh's golden scepter, his wooden stick made a poor show. But with this he will strike the Red Sea to let the people of Israel pass and to drown the whole Egyptian army, all this because he gave his staff to God. Before God met him it was the symbol of his trade; after the encounter at the burning bush, it became the symbol of God's authority. There is a beautiful poem in Dutch about a cleaning woman who cleans floors with a broom and dustpan. She spends her life doing this lowly work. The poet says: "One day God will find her on His floor, going the golden streets of His city, beating with the broom on the dustpan. For symbols become cymbals at the hour of death."⁷⁸ It may be pure poetry to portray it this way, but I believe that when Moses went to heaven, he took this stick with him.

In our life with God, we can use anything to build a monument of praise for Him. The woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Jesus Himself took a basin and a towel and left us a monument of humility that stands throughout the ages. He took the bread and wine that were on the table during the Passover feast and said: "This is my body, ... this is the blood of the new

⁷⁷ Eph. 6:12

⁷⁸ De Werkster - Gerrit Achterberg

covenant....” We are surrounded by utensils that can become instruments of praise, as long as we open our eyes and fix them upon God.

The staff becomes the first sign of Moses’ authority and victory. When Moses threw it on the ground, it turned into a snake. The word used for snake, *nachash*, is the general name for any serpent. It was not necessarily a poisonous snake that Moses saw, but the shock of the transformation was enough to scare him out of his wits. God ordered him to take the snake by the tail. One should never pick up snakes by the tail; that is the surest way to get bitten. And experienced snake handler will pick up a snake by the head, but when Moses obeyed God and grabbed the snake’s tail, he had again his wooden stick in his hand.

It seems a strange sign that God gave to Moses in order to prove that he was on a divine mission. So are the two following: the hand covered with leprosy and the water that turned into blood. I believe can interpret those three signs as symbols of victory over sin and evil. Sin entered the world in the form of a serpent. The effect of sin upon man is an infection with an incurable disease, a leprosy of the soul, and the victory over sin and its author is through blood. Moses and the people of Israel may not have seen more in these signs than miracles, the suspension or reversal of laws of nature. But God had much more in mind. He thought of the redemption of Israel in terms of the defeat of the enemy and the salvation of the whole of creation. These three signs place the exodus in the larger context of God’s eternal covenant, signed by the blood of Christ and confirmed by His victory over death.

The first sign of the serpent symbolized a power that came from outside. The snake was not present in the stick that Moses held in his hand. It appeared, so to speak, from nowhere. The leprosy seemed to develop from the inside as an external sign of internal corruption. It showed how bad the inside of the bosom actually was. The water that was poured out on the ground symbolized the sacrifice. Water or blood that is poured out cannot be recovered. It is given up to God, and it cannot be reclaimed. Moses and the Israelites may not have understood all this, but their enemy probably received some insight into what God was up to and he must have trembled. Maybe the signs were meant more for him than for them.

The signs may have convinced Israel; they did not convince Moses. Or at least Moses was not ready to yield yet. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the expression “O Lord” is a very forceful one. Moses is making a plea of despair, even though he realizes that he must be trying the Lord’s patience to the limit. He pleads a lack of eloquence, which he deems necessary to appear in Pharaoh’s court. The fact that God spoke to him had not brought healing. Several suggestions have been made as to the meaning of “I am not eloquent.” If it had been a matter of not finding the right words, his conversation with God would have been less clear. He seemed to have no trouble being understood. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Kalisch, who interprets it as “a natural impediment owing to defect in the organs of speech.” The commentary further mentions the Jewish tradition that Moses had difficulty in pronouncing the labials b, v, m, ph and p. All this, of course, is hard to prove because of intervening centuries. We can understand though how Moses must have felt if, standing before Pharaoh’s throne, he could only stutter words like: “Lllet Mmmmy Pepepeople go-o-o!” The effect upon Pharaoh would have been less than overwhelming. If this is true, Moses did have a valid reason.

God’s answer is astonishing and in a way incomprehensible. “The LORD said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’ ”(vs. 11) We feel that Moses would have a right to expect healing. We believe that healing is included in the atonement. This is part of the Fourfold Gospel that is preached by The Christian and Missionary Alliance. Not only does God not give healing to Moses, but He takes responsibility for the defect! In our thinking God gives life and health, but the devil makes deaf and mute and blind. Also, God’s answer seems to contradict the fact that God pronounced His creation perfect. In Genesis we read: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”⁷⁹

So, obviously, God was not speaking to Moses about creation. God knew, as well as Moses, that sickness and death, including Moses’ impediment, were the result of the Fall. What God seems to be saying to Moses is the same thing He said to Paul when the apostle prayed for the removal of his “thorn in the flesh”: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”⁸⁰ God intends to fight the devil with his own weapons. He uses the weakness and suffering and death that the enemy brought into this world that God had created to defeat the foe. It was through the death of our Lord

⁷⁹ Gen. 1:31

⁸⁰ II Cor. 12:9^a

Jesus Christ that death was defeated and the devil dethroned. It is through the foolishness of the Gospel that people are saved. Pharaoh may have laughed at and mocked the stuttering Moses who told him in the Name of YHWH to let His people go, but it was not Moses who lost. Moses and the people of Israel had the last laugh at the other side of the Red Sea.

This does not mean that Moses was given a pleasant task. It is hard to be mocked, even if it is for the sake of the Gospel. And we need all the encouragement of Jesus Christ, when He says to us: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."⁸¹ "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."⁸²

God did promise Moses, though, that He would not let him down. In vs. 12 He says: "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." Moses will have to learn that it is the message that counts, not eloquence. There is always the danger that eloquence will distract from the message and sometimes even replace the message. My call to the mission field of Irian Jaya came through a man who was, decidedly, a poor speaker. But the presence of God was obvious in his life and in what he said. The apostle Paul, evidently, was not an eloquent speaker. He quotes people as saying: "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing."⁸³ And in I Corinthians he admits: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power."⁸⁴

Finally, Moses refuses. In vs. 13 we read: "But Moses said, 'O Lord, please send someone else to do it.' The KJV is probably closer to the original, although, definitely less clear. It says: "And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send." *Adam Clarke* comments: "The Hebrew literally translated is, "Send now [or, I beseech Thee] by the hand thou wilt send"; which seems to intimate, Send a person more fit for the work than I am. So the Septuagint: 'Elect another powerful person, whom thou wilt send.' " The fact that this reply kindles the Lord's anger, as vs. 14 shows, is proof that Moses' words should be read as a refusal.

There is something to be said in favor of the man who considers himself unfit for God's call. As a matter of fact, without such consideration the person would be useless to the Lord's work. Anybody who feels himself called by God and believes that God made the right choice, will have to rethink his premises. We cannot become "fishers of men" unless we have the attitude of Peter who fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁸⁵ We must conclude, though, that Moses' answer was more than a realization of unworthiness, it was unwillingness to obey. The Lord would have responded differently to an absence of pride and an expression of humility.

Moses' refusal is not accepted by God. He has no choice but to obey. He could have quoted the apostle Paul: "I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"⁸⁶ Paul's compulsion was a moral one. He felt he had no choice because of his previous persecution of the church. Moses' compulsion is less clear. It could be his previous volunteering to be the "ruler and judge" of the nation. God did not allow him to brush this off as if it had been a youthful impulse instead of a divine vision.

The bringing in of Aaron seems like God's "plan B," but this supposition is contradicted by the fact that, according to God's word, Aaron was already on his way to meet with Moses, while this conversation was still going on. Obviously, God knew what would happen. He knew Moses' reactions before Moses knew them himself. The encounter with God, therefore, was for Moses a lesson in learning about himself.

The relationship between Moses and Aaron will be, to use God's own words, that Moses will be as God and Aaron will be the mouth, or the prophet. Aaron was the older brother who had to bow to the authority of the younger one. Also Moses would be one step further removed from the people and from the

⁸¹ Matt. 5:11,12

⁸² John 16:33

⁸³ II Cor. 10:10

⁸⁴ I Cor. 2:1-5

⁸⁵ Luke 5:8

⁸⁶ I Cor. 9:16

action at Pharaoh's court. There would be no direct communication. This relationship seems to have changed over the years as Moses gained more confidence. In the book of Deuteronomy there is no trace left of Moses' shyness as was exhibited at this point.

God spoke to Aaron, as He spoke to Moses. We read in vs. 27 - "The LORD said to Aaron, 'Go into the desert to meet Moses.' So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him." This call must have taken place previous to the call to Moses, or maybe simultaneously, for we learn that Aaron was already on his way to meet Moses while God was still speaking to him. Also the brothers met while Moses was still at Sinai. It must have been shortly after the burning bush episode, and it is likely that Aaron accompanied Moses to Jethro's house and that they left for Egypt together.

The revelation ends with God reminding Moses about his staff. I do not know if there is any irony in God's reminder, as if He wants to say: "Do not forget your stick." Vs. 17 "But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it." On the other hand, this verse is the Old Testament counterpart of Jesus' words in the Great Commission: "Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go'"⁸⁷ Moses went with God's authority of which his staff became the symbol.

It does not seem that Moses mentioned anything about the divine revelation to his father-in-law Jethro. He pled family reasons as an excuse to go home. This would seem strange if indeed at this point Aaron were with him. It also seems that God had to remind him again to return to Egypt. For we read in vs. 19: "Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, 'Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.'" In the light of the following episode we would conclude that Zipporah was aware of her husband's encounter with God.

Whether God appeared to him once at Mount Sinai and twice in Midian is not clear. We get the impression that God spoke to Moses several times. After the dramatic call at the burning bush, there was the assurance that it is safe to go back to Egypt. Moses' life was not in danger. And then, probably during the third revelation, God told Moses to announce to Pharaoh directly the tenth plague, that is, the killing of the first born of Egypt. In ch. 4:22,23 we read the instruction to "say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,' And I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me. But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'" The fact that Israel is spoken of collectively as God's firstborn son would make Pharaoh understand that the killing of his firstborn son would involve more than the death of one individual. Pharaoh knew this from the very beginning. The tenth plague cannot have come to him as a surprise. God told him clearly what he should expect if he persisted in his disobedience. But even during the progressive increase of pressure, Pharaoh persisted in his refusal. The tightening of the screws only made his resistance worse, till he reached the point of no return. But we shouldn't run ahead so fast.

In vs. 20 we see Moses and his family packing up and leaving for Egypt. This was the end of his forty-year-long preparation in the desert. He was then about eighty years of old, and he recognized that the staff in his hand was now "the staff of God."

God's speaking to Moses in vs. 21 - 23 seems to have taken place subsequently to the encounter at the burning bush. Thus far we have heard only of three miracles that Moses was given power to perform. But, evidently, in these verses the Lord is speaking about all the ten plagues that will come over Egypt as a result of Pharaoh's hardness of heart. Whether God told Moses at this point what the content of each plague would be, is not clear. But Moses is told what Pharaoh's reaction will be.

God takes responsibility for Pharaoh's hardness in the same way that He took responsibility for Moses' speech impediment. And the same question arises here, as to how all this fits into the perfect character of God.

First of all, we have to recognize that the battle was not against flesh and blood, but against demonic powers. God knows who governs Pharaoh, and He knows that the enemy will not give up without resisting to the very end. The fact that Pharaoh, at some point in his life, had surrendered to those powers of darkness, cannot be laid at God's doorstep. He had as much freedom to refuse as does every human being. He used this freedom several times by hardening his own heart. We read six times that Pharaoh hardened his heart⁸⁸ before we read for the first time that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Ch. 9:12 says: "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses." So the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not the result of God's

⁸⁷ Matt. 28:18-20

⁸⁸ (ch. 7:13,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7, (34))

predetermination, but of his own choice. God knows how man will react. That is why God did not have to kill His Son as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. It was enough to send Him into the world. The prince of this world would see to it that He would not stay alive.

God's Word also makes clear that the purpose of redemption is worship. The essence is: "Let my son go, so he may worship me." This demand hits the core of the devil's resistance. His objection is to the worship of God. In the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, the devil says: "All this I will give you, ... if you will bow down and worship me."⁸⁹ Deliverance from slavery could have been compromised, but not this worship. The enemy knows that people who come to worship God are lost to him for eternity. A three-days journey into the desert would mean the end of Israel's slavery in Egypt for ever. They would no longer be slaves, even if they could be forced to work. That is why Paul could say to people who were legally slaves of their masters: "For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men."⁹⁰

When God calls Israel His firstborn son, He is referring to the Incarnation. Israel is seen and treated as one person in Christ, just as everybody else is considered as one person in Adam. In dealing with Pharaoh, God speaks about the most fundamental issues. It is between death in slavery or life in worship. This is also why Matthew can quote Hosea's prophecy about Israel's exodus and apply it to Jesus, without violating the principle of prophetic interpretation. See: "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"⁹¹ and compare with: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."⁹²

There is a strange interlude in vs. 24-26. On the way to Egypt, while the family spent the night in an inn, somebody became violently sick to the point of death. Although the text does not mention the name, it is generally understood that it was Moses' life that was in danger. Because of the lack of details given, it is hard to fill in the blanks. Evidently, there had been some difference of opinion between Moses and his wife regarding the circumcision of their sons. We gather from this incident that circumcision was being practiced among the Israelites in Egypt, but that the Midianites did not practice it. *The Pulpit Commentary* supposes that it was Moses' second son, Eliezer, who had not been circumcised and that he was born shortly before the departure of the family for Egypt. Since only one child is mentioned, it is logical to suppose that the child in question was the last born. Moses must have prevailed upon his wife to have the circumcision done on Gershom, but had not overruled his wife's objection regarding Eliezer. The commentary also suggests that Eliezer had been born eight days before this incident took place, since, according to Genesis, that was the day when circumcision was supposed to take place.⁹³ It is true that Eliezer's birth is not mentioned in chapter 2. But omissions do not constitute proof. It is obvious from Zipporah's comment that she had objected to the rite, probably because she could not stand that sight of the blood of her little baby. And after the circumcision she called Moses a "bridegroom of blood."

Adam Clarke's explanation is that it was the child's life that was in danger, whether Gershom or Eliezer, is not clear. He also supposes that Zipporah, after this incident decided to take her children and go home. He refers to ch. 18:1-6. The text is too condensed to argue one way or the other. It seems to me that, if it was the son's life that was at stake, Moses would have performed the circumcision himself. The impression we get is that Moses had been disobedient to God's command and that, before going down to Egypt, he had to put his house in order.

One could wish for more details in the story. It seems that there are some precious lessons hidden in the text. The text may have been corrupted in the transmission. These verses seem to be saying to us that one must obey in the smaller issues, before he obeys in the larger ones. It also seems to say that when a wife must choose between her husband and her child, she should choose her husband. It also seems to teach us that in God's economy the man should be the head of the home.

It seems that vs. 27 and 28 go back in time. God had told Moses in vs. 14 that Aaron was already on his way to meet him. It could be, of course, that Moses had returned to Midian and passed again by Mount Horeb on his way to Egypt when Aaron met him. Anyhow, Moses briefed his brother about his

⁸⁹ Matt. 4:9

⁹⁰ I Cor. 7:22,23

⁹¹ See Matt 2:15

⁹² Hosea 11:1

⁹³ See Gen. 17:10-12

meeting with God and the powers that were given to him for the encounter with Pharaoh in Egypt. The meeting of the two brothers was warm and affectionate. Moses stated specifically that Aaron kissed him. We have to remember that the brothers had not grown up together; Aaron had stayed at home while Moses lived in the palace. They hardly knew each other. But blood is thicker than water. Whatever envy there may have been in Aaron's heart toward a brother who had lived in ease and affluence while the rest of the family suffered persecution, melted away when they met after almost eighty years.

The miraculous signs mentioned in vs. 28 are probably only the three: the first involved the staff; second, the leprous hand; and third, the water turning into blood. Whether or not Moses gave a demonstration to Aaron, we are not told. But in the next verse they have arrived in Egypt, and Aaron explained to the elders of the people what the Lord had told Moses, and Moses demonstrated the signs. The first reaction of the elders is faith and joy. We may suppose that the first meeting was held in secret. It was the beginning of an underground movement against the government of Egypt. It was also the beginning of worship. We read in vs. 31: "And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped." We do not know how much worship of YHWH there had been in Israel during the four centuries of their exile in Egypt. There must have been some decline after the death of Joseph; in fact it is a miracle that, after such a long period of time, there was a revival of religion: the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Worship and hope are analogous. Circumstances had not changed, but change was in the air. It would not take long, though, for the reality of slavery to catch up with these people. We will see in the next chapter that their joy and worship were short-lived when Pharaoh clamped down on them.

We should never underestimate the enemy, not even when he is defeated. He knows he has nothing to lose and that makes him bite back ferociously. For Israel it was enough to lose their worship and joy.

CHAPTER FIVE

The confrontation

After consulting with the elders of the people, Moses and Aaron asked for an audience with Pharaoh. Probably a small delegation of elders accompanied them.

About this Pharaoh *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "According to the bulk of modern authorities, and according to our own views of Egyptian history, this was Menephtah, the son and successor of Rameses II. Menephtah was a weak prince, whom events had favored, and who had been thus led to have an exalted opinion of himself. A great invasion of Egypt had occurred at the beginning of his reign, which had been met and completely repulsed, not by his own skill or valor, but by the skill and valor of his generals. Menephtah himself had pointedly avoided incurring any danger. He claimed to be in direct communication with the Egyptian gods, who revealed themselves to him in visions, and pleaded a distinct command of Phtah as preventing him from putting himself at the head of his army. Still, he counted as his own all the successes gained by his generals, and was as vainglorious and arrogant as if he had himself performed prodigies of valor. Such was the temper of the king before whom we believe that Moses and Aaron appeared."

The above analysis seems quite plausible. There is no doubt about Pharaoh's arrogance. Arrogance is often a cover-up for insecurity or lack of self-worth. This feature would explain Pharaoh's overreaction to the request.

Moses and Aaron present their cause with divine authority. "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.'" Those words are probably a condensation of the more extended version that God gave to Moses before he arrived in Egypt. In ch. 4:22,23 God told Moses to say: "Israel is my firstborn son, And I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son." Most likely those words were spoken during this first audience. Moses and Aaron did not come to plead a cause, but to present God's case to the enemy. This was not a request but a confrontation. In the same way Jesus showed His authority over the demons He cast out. People recognized this authority, as we read: "The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority...."⁹⁴

Moses and Aaron spoke in the Name of YHWH. "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel" (KJV). Pharaoh may have understood more than we would give him credit for. The Name Yahweh may have been

⁹⁴ Matt. 7:28,29

new to him; the concept of a Lord of heaven and earth certainly was not. His daily devotion may have been to local deities, but the knowledge of the Almighty surely had not died at this point in history. Pharaoh may have thought it impossible that the Supreme Being would pay attention to a people the Egyptians used as their slaves. He probably considered Moses' claim to speak for Yahweh as a preposterous boast. We should not lose sight of the relationship between the Egyptians and the Israelites. For a nation of slaves to call upon the Most High and then claim to have received a revelation from Him was probably incredible in Pharaoh's eyes. God would have spoken to the important people first. A revelation of Yahweh to Israel would be highly insulting to Egypt.

Then there is the ludicrous contrast between their condition of slavery and their request for a feast. Not only did these people claim to have received a revelation from the God Who is above all, but they also pretended that God wanted them to have a feast with Him. He believed that these people should be emotional wrecks who should be able to talk about nothing but suffering and misery. And here God had invited them to a feast! This is the same kind of mockery that God had demonstrated in Bethlehem, where the Lord of glory was born in a stable and where His glory was revealed to a bunch of poor shepherds, the lowest cast of all, while the royal palace and the upper-ten were left out of the picture. This divine revelation must have grated on Pharaoh just as much as it did Herod.

A seventeenth century Dutch poet once said: "Heaven chooses that which is small. He who is born again in humility belongs to the heavenly generation."⁹⁵ God mocks human greatness, not because He does not love man, but because great men mock Him.

So Pharaoh answered: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." As we said before, this question was fatal for him. Even if he had no personal knowledge, he should not have dismissed the request as he did. His master knew Who was talking and Pharaoh should have checked with him. James says: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that; and shudder."⁹⁶

In a way, of course, Pharaoh spoke the truth when he said, "I do not know the LORD." He certainly did not know God in the sense of which Jesus speaks in John's Gospel: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."⁹⁷ But it seems impossible to me that the Egyptians of the second millennium before Christ would have lost every trace of knowledge of an Almighty God, the Creator. Four millennia later we discovered that the Stone Age tribes people of Irian Jaya (formerly Dutch New Guinea) still preserved knowledge of the Creator "Ugatame." If Balaam knew Him, why not Pharaoh?

So Pharaoh was defiant and refused the request offhand. This did not deter Moses and Aaron, who continued to explain that if Pharaoh would not willingly let the people go, he might lose them in a different way "with plagues or with the sword." Pharaoh should have paid attention to this point, because "the sword" would mean that his country could be invaded by an outside enemy. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes Brugsch in *History of Egypt* which says: "The eastern frontier of Egypt was at this time very open to invasion, and was actually threatened by a vast army some ten or fifteen years later."

The request for a three-day journey into the desert was part of the mandate God had given to Moses in the previous chapter. We saw already that this implied a trip to Mount Sinai. Pharaoh must have understood the intent. The animal sacrifices the Israelites would make would include animals that were considered holy or divine by the Egyptians. It would be impossible to kill a holy cow of Egypt without repercussions from the Egyptian priests and probably from the population at large.

Pharaoh must have shouted his answer: "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" That his anger is based upon fear is clear from the following verse. It is almost a cry of despair when he says: "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working." He surely must have regretted those words because they indicate that he was not in control of the situation. That is why he overreacted to the request and made his own situation more difficult. By hardening his heart he comes to the point where God hardens his heart.

All this means that Pharaoh put himself in a position of weakness, although his position should have made him the stronger one in this situation.

⁹⁵ (Joost van den Vondel - "De hemel heeft het kleen verkoren. Al wie door ootmoed is herboren, is van het hemelse geslacht.")

⁹⁶ James 2:19

⁹⁷ John 17:3

The empire strikes back! In vs. 6 - 9 we read that Pharaoh issued an executive order to withhold straw from the slaves, demanding that they gather it themselves, and that the daily quota continue to be filled. *The Pulpit Commentary*, quoting Canon Cook, says: "It has been estimated that by this change their labour was 'more than doubled.'" The straw, which must have been used to give consistency to the clay, was provided for them before. It seems that the labour required still left the Israelites some spare time. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "They had been able, apparently, to cultivate their own plots of ground (Deut. xi.10), to raise crops of cucumbers, melons, leeks onions, and garlic (Num. xi. 5), to catch fish (ibid.), and attend public meetings (Ex. iv. 30,31) They had, in fact, had time which they could call their own. Now this was to be so no more." By making life impossible for the Israelites, Pharaoh gave them an effective weapon. Even those who would not have been too interested in leaving Egypt for Canaan would no longer be willing to stay.

This passage also indicates how efficient the Egyptians were in their exploitation of the Israelites. Every day the number of bricks produced was counted and written down. There was a set quota that had to be met. Efficiency was, evidently, not invented by the Germans. That is why Jesus, in the parable of the dishonest manager, uses a crook as an example. "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."⁹⁸

Pharaoh's verdict is that the people of Israel are inclined toward religion because of laziness. Vs. 8 reads: "They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'" Not even Pharaoh himself could have believed this, but it gives us an interesting insight in the way the devil thinks and operates. He knows that extreme fatigue is not conducive to fellowship with God. Since he tries to push people to the point of exhaustion, we need to be aware of this danger in order to protect our own spiritual life. There is no danger in hard work, but if we work to the point that our spirit is too exhausted to hear the voice of God, there is something wrong with our life. God had to deal with Elijah concerning this matter. We read that Elijah went into a depression, and God let him undergo a sleeping cure and afterwards a six-week trek to bring him to an experience with God so that he could again hear the voice of the Lord.⁹⁹ In our own lives, we are not always the master of our time, but even if we were, we would probably not always make the wisest decisions.

Pharaoh did not consider the Israelites to be human beings with souls that needed nourishment. He wanted to use their bodies to work. At the death camps in Nazi Germany the inmates were treated in the same manner. Those from whom some labor could be extracted were worked till they succumbed; those that gave no promise of productivity we herded to the gas chambers. Jesus correctly calls the devil "a murderer from the beginning."¹⁰⁰

But, most of all, Pharaoh's order was a direct defiance to God. Dismissing the proclamation of Moses and Aaron, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert,'" as "lies" was an act that went against what he must have known to be the truth. His guilt was much greater than is apparent on the surface.

In the verses 10 and 11 we read that the order was passed on to the people of Israel by the "slave drivers and the foremen." The slave drivers were Egyptians, but the foremen were chosen from among the Israelites. Initially the seriousness of the order did not penetrate. The people thought that the idea to withhold straw and require the same quota of bricks originated with the slave drivers. The foremen were beaten when the quota was not met. It wasn't until those men requested an audience with Pharaoh and heard the same thing from Pharaoh himself, that reality penetrated. And so the leaders of Israel turned to Moses and Aaron. If this is salvation, who wants to be saved. Moses and Aaron didn't have the answer, so they turned to the Lord.

If we preach salvation to people as the end of all their troubles, we mislead them and sin against the Lord. Life becomes harder after conversion, not easier. Unless we understand this, we will give up. We should never underestimate the enemy, but neither should we underestimate the power of God. Jesus emphasizes the hardship of those who hear the Gospel in the parable of the sower. In Matthew's Gospel we read about the seed of the Word: "Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a

⁹⁸ Luke 16:8

⁹⁹ I Kings 19:4-18

¹⁰⁰ John 8:44

short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”¹⁰¹ Jesus’ words imply that the Gospel and persecution go together. The seed that bore fruit did not yield a crop because there was no hardship, but it produced a good crop because the ground had been well prepared and broken up.

Moses brought a message of salvation, and the people enjoyed listening to it; but when the empire struck back, they blamed Moses and God. We have no trouble understanding this attitude. Very few young Christians escape the trap the evil one sets for us. We accept the Gospel; the devil strikes back and says: “You see what God does when you invite Him into your life!” Salvation is not easy. The door is small and the road is narrow. Unless we recognize the danger signs when there is no persecution, we easily end up where we do not want to go.

The people blamed Moses as the source of their trouble. He should have left them alone. The fact that they were slaves and that their children were taken from them and killed was, conveniently, forgotten for the time being. They said to Moses: “May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” What made them think that they were ever a sweet smell to Pharaoh and that he didn’t intend to kill them.

Pharaoh’s counter attack provoked a crisis in Moses’ own heart. He did the only thing a child of God can do; he handed the matter back to God. We cannot say, though, that Moses was victorious in the way he dealt with this matter. But at this stage we could hardly expect that Moses’ understanding would be sufficient to take the apparent defeat in stride.

It was not that God had not warned him. In ch. 3:19,20 God had told Moses: “But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.” And in ch. 4:21-23 we read that God says to him: “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, And I told you, ‘Let my son go, so he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’ “ God had told him what to expect, but when what was predicted happened, Moses was caught by surprise. Taking the Word of God seriously is a growing process. We have to learn to use the Word of God as a weapon, as Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the desert. Moses had seen God as nobody else in his generation had, but he did not believe what God said.

Yet, there was something good and spontaneous in his reaction to the terror that was released over Israel. First of all, it did not leave him unmoved. The people to whom he had brought the message of salvation held him personally responsible for the increase in hardship and persecution. That seems a natural reaction. It does not show much spiritual understanding, but we understand why the people reacted this way. They saw both the cause and effect as coming from Moses. They did not even blame God, but Moses. Moses, however, knew that he was not to be blamed. He had only obeyed orders, so he put the blame at God’s feet. He reproached God that there was a counter attack. God had promised salvation, but where was it?

Very often God is blamed for what the devil does in this world. “If God is love”; Moses says the same things that Job had said. We have to distinguish between the sources; otherwise, nothing will make sense.

But imagine the situation. Moses came with the promise of redemption of the people, and the next thing he knew was that some of them were beaten before his very eyes because of this message. Who would not be confused, and question: Where is God when it hurts? Why do not God’s promises make sense?

Accepting the Gospel makes life harder, not easier, at least not in the short run. The perspective is important, but we are short sighted people. Does not the eternal God understand that we cannot see that far. But then, can’t we believe God Who sees the end from the beginning?

CHAPTER SIX

I AM THE LORD

This chapter is divided into six sections:
vs. 1-5 God’s answer to Moses

¹⁰¹ Matt. 13:5,6,20,21

- vs. 6-8 God's answer to Israel
- vs. 9 Israel reaction, or the lack of it
- vs. 10-12 The renewed address to Pharaoh and Moses' objection
- vs. 13-27 The genealogy of Moses and Aaron
- vs. 28-30 Recapitulation

God's answer to the discouragement of the people and of Moses is concise: Remember Who I am and remember who you are. Moses' reaction is summarized: It won't work and Israel indicates that the Word of God is not relevant to their situation. How different life is when we understand what God means when He says: "I am the LORD."

The immediate result of Moses' appearance before the people and before Pharaoh had been the opposite of what they had expected. In the hearts of the people hope had been kindled. But Pharaoh had not only refused the request of the people to leave the country, he had struck back with increased oppression. God's patience with man was exhibited in this; He was even patient with Pharaoh, and with the devil. In ch. 9:15 we read: "For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth." There was an underlying tone of compassion in all of this. It was not God's will that even Pharaoh would perish but that he too would be saved.

God announced to Moses that He was ready to act. Twice in the first verse God mentioned His "mighty hand." In vs. 6 He called it "an outstretched arm." According to *The Pulpit Commentary* an outstretched arm in Egypt writing signified action. God promised action. The onset would be slow, but the pressure upon the Egyptians would increase to the point to which they could not stand it any longer, and they themselves would drive Israel out of Egypt. If only Moses and the Israelites had waited for the Lord, they would have been encouraged beyond measure; but they felt they could not afford to wait. They were wrong. It takes moral strength to wait for the Lord. David said: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."¹⁰²

There is a hermeneutical problem in the verses 2 and 3. God had revealed Himself to Moses as Yahweh, YHWH or Jehovah. Vs. 3 says that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God as "God Almighty" *El-Shaddai*, but not as YHWH. *The Pulpit Commentary* says about this: "The explanation of this passage is by no means easy. God himself, according to Gen xv. 7, revealed himself to Abraham as Jehovah before declaring his name to be El-Shaddai (God Almighty); and again revealed himself to Jacob as Jehovah-Elohim (ib. xxxviii. 13). Abraham named the place where he had been about to sacrifice Isaac, 'Jehovah-jireh' (ib. xxii. 14). That Moses regarded the name as known even earlier, appears from Gen. iv.1. It was probably as old as language. The apparent meaning of the present passage cannot therefore be its true meaning. No writer would so contradict himself. Perhaps the true sense is, 'I was known to them as a Being of might and power, not as mere absolute (and so eternal and immutable) existence.' This meaning of the word, though its etymological and original meaning, may have been unknown to the patriarchs, who were not etymologists. It was first distinctly declared to Moses at Sinai (ch. iii. 14,15)." It seems to me that the solution is easier if we approach the verse not from the etymological angle but from a spiritual one. The name YHWH stands for the character of God. In the exodus of the people from Egypt and their entrance into Canaan they would know a part of God's character that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob never saw. The patriarchs were never anybody's slaves. They never experienced deliverance from bondage as the people in Moses' day were going to experience. The name YHWH was from then on particularly linked with deliverance from bondage. Yahweh is the same Person as our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave the real application of this passage to the Jews of His day when He said: "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."¹⁰³

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt and their conquest of Canaan epitomized the essence of God's promises to the patriarchs. On the basis of this covenant with their fathers, God paid attention to the groaning of Israel in Egypt.

The Israelites would be redeemed on the basis of a covenant that had been established before they were born. They had had no input in this. Their deliverance was not the result of anything they had done themselves. It went back to a promise that had been given centuries before they entered into the

¹⁰² Ps 27:14

¹⁰³ John 8:34-36

picture. But now God wanted them to become part of it. Not only would they receive what God had promised to their ancestors, but they were invited to enter this personal relationship with God that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had known. In vs. 7 God says: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians." The purpose of redemption is knowing God and knowing God is eternal life. Jesus says it this way in John's Gospel: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."¹⁰⁴

God guarantees the deliverance of Israel by linking the promise to His own character. As in vs. 2, so in vs. 8 God says, "I am the LORD." This should have settled the matter for Israel and for Moses, but it did not. They had no idea Who the God was Who promised this to them. They were unable to look over the boundaries of their present condition. Slavery had made them blind and deaf. They could not hear the Word of God, and they could not reach out in faith to the promise. The reality of their present condition of slavery was greater to them than the promise of God. The devil had them exactly where he wanted them. And in spite of the great miracles God would perform before their very eyes, their hearts never changed. They went out of Egypt but Egypt never went out of them.

The parallel with the Christian life is striking. We may be saved by the blood of Christ and yet keep on living as people who are still in bondage to the power of sin. God expected Israel to start behaving as citizens of Canaan, but they remained Egyptian slaves even as they reached the border of the promised land. It is the condition of our heart that counts. That is why Paul says to the Colossians: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."¹⁰⁵

As we have seen before, God had compassion on the people. At the burning bush, He had said to Moses: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering" (ch. 3:7). And here again in vs. 5 He says: "Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant." Jesus shows the same compassion in Matthew, where we read: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."¹⁰⁶ God weeps bigger tears than we do, and the Holy Spirit groans more loudly than we do. But God does not act on the basis of emotion alone, no matter deep the emotion may be. The actual basis is a legal one, the covenant He made with the patriarchs.

As a marriage starts with two persons being in love with one another and is concluded in a legal ceremony in which vows are exchanged, so does God put His relationship with us on a legal basis. We have been legally adopted by Him, and any rejection of that relationship is a breach of contract.

The promise of redemption is, moreover, linked to the person and character of God. Moses had to say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians" (vs. 6,7). Their redemption should make them understand Who God is.

Also God promises them a very unique relationship that is unequalled in this world. There is an interesting verse in Deuteronomy, which reads: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance."¹⁰⁷ On the basis of new evidence discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Good News Bible translates this as: "The Most High assigned nations their lands; he determined where peoples should live. He assigned to each nation a god, but Jacob's descendants he chose for himself."

That is why Paul says: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, The people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are

¹⁰⁴ John 17:3

¹⁰⁵ Col. 3:1-3

¹⁰⁶ Matt. 9:36

¹⁰⁷ Deut. 32:3,8

the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”¹⁰⁸

This message that should have turned the lives of the people around, falls on deaf ears. We read in vs. 9: “Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.” The Word of God was considered not relevant to their present need. How wrong they were! It seems that the people had a reasonable excuse for not paying attention to Moses. They suffered hardship beyond description and, in their thinking, the increase of pressure was the result of Moses’ speaking. Their logic was wrong, but it looked like logic. Their oppression did not come from God but from the enemy. But the enemy hid behind God’s back so the Israelites did not see him. As long as the devil remains hidden our world view will be distorted, however reasonable our thinking may sound.

The word “discouragement” seems a weak translation for *kotzer ruach*. Literally, it means “shortness of spirit” or “shortness of breath.” The KJV and RSV bring out better the anguish of the people with the words “anguish of spirit” or “broken spirit.”

God repeated the order to Moses to go to Pharaoh. Whether this order was given at the same time as God’s promise to the people in the preceding verses is not clear. It was probably a few days later, since Moses had addressed the people in the meantime with very poor results. At this point Moses was utterly miserable. He repeated to God the same argument as he had given in the desert, that is, that he could not speak properly. The Hebrew word that is translated “faltering” in the NIV is *aral* which literally means “uncircumcised.” It has the larger meaning of anything that is superfluous. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “‘Lips inefficient for the purpose for which lips are given; as ‘uncircumcised ears’ are ears that cannot hearken (Jer. vi. 10), and an ‘uncircumcised heart’ a heart that cannot understand (ib. ix. 26).” Evidently Moses was leaving his eloquent brother out of the picture.

There is a slight but important change in the second command God wanted Moses to give to Pharaoh. Whereas, the first time the three-day journey was mentioned, during the second audience Moses had to announce an unqualified demand for departure. It seems that the first time, in ch. 5:1,3 there was a request that could imply a return of the people to Egypt, the second time this seems to be dropped completely. It is obvious, though, that return to Egypt was never the plan. God wanted the people in Canaan, not in Egypt. Initially the door seems to have been kept open to bring Israel and Egypt into normal relations with one another. Pharaoh’s violent resistance resulted in expulsion and enmity for centuries to come.

The Genealogy of Moses and Aaron vs. 13-27

Obviously the verses 13-27 and 28-30 are an interruption of the actual narrative. *The Pulpit Commentary* supposes that, although Moses might have prepared the genealogy, the verses were inserted in the book at a later date by the final compiler. The intent is obvious: later generations should have a clear understanding of the historical links, especially of the genealogical line of the leaders who were the main instruments in bringing the people out of Egypt to Canaan.

This is not a complete genealogy of all the sons of Jacob and their offspring. The list starts with Reuben and Simeon and stops at Levi. Neither the rest of Lea’s children, nor any of the other brothers are mentioned. Why Reuben and Simeon are mentioned at all is not clear. The obvious intent is to distinguish the family of Levi.

The details of the lists are of very little consequence for our study. The most revealing fact is that the name of Moses’ father is mentioned in vs. 20. *The Pulpit Commentary* says here: “That this Amram is the ‘man of the house of Levi’ mentioned in ch. ii.1, cannot be doubted; but it is scarcely possible that he should be the same Amram of ver. 18, the actual son of Kohath and contemporary of Joseph. He is probably a descendant of the sixth or seventh generation, who bore the same name, and was the head of the Amramite house. That house, at the time of the Exodus, numbered above two thousand males (Num. iii.27,28).”

CHAPTER SEVEN

In chapter seven the confrontation between God and Pharaoh becomes acute. Up till now it has been Pharaoh’s word against God’s Word. Now words change into actions.

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 9:3-5

In vs. 1-9 God gives precise instructions to Moses, which heals Moses' despondency and changes his attitude for good.

In vs. 10-13 Moses orders Aaron to perform the first sign in front of Pharaoh. The king counters this by ordering his magicians to perform the same sign, but, although they produce their snakes, their performance is obviously inferior to Moses'.

In vs. 14-25 the second sign is executed and should have devastated Pharaoh's power, since it affected the symbol of Egypt greatness, the River Nile. But in spite of the fact that the river god is killed and his blood is all over the country with the smell of decay, Pharaoh is unmoved.

In vs. 1 God says to Moses: "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet." Obedience to God's command brought about a drastic and fundamental change in Moses. This change was so obvious that one as hostile as Pharaoh would notice it. It is the work of God. "I have made you like God," God said. It started with Moses' shepherd's staff. God had shown him in ch. 4 how to use the staff and in ch. 4:17 we read that God told him: "Take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it." In vs. 20 Moses' staff became "the staff of God." "So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand."

So it started with the surrender of a simple stick. It does not take much to be transformed by the power of God into His likeness, does it? Jesus says that if the Word of God comes to a man, it makes him into a god. Quoting from the Psalms, He says: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came; and the Scripture cannot be broken; What about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"¹⁰⁹

When the Word of God first came to Moses in ch. 3, Moses was shocked profoundly. He tried to refuse. Finally he accepted reluctantly. At the end of ch. 5 he felt himself rejected, a complete failure. But here the Lord became his confidence. This confidence increased to an intimacy that was unparalleled in the Old Testament. God said to Israel about Moses: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"¹¹⁰ And in Deuteronomy we read: "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, Who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt; to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."¹¹¹

The hardest thing to understand for us New Testament Christians is that in Jesus Christ Moses is inferior to us. Jesus says about John the Baptist: "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."¹¹²

And Paul, comparing the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us now with the ministry God gave to Moses, says: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, ... and if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! ... We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ... And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."¹¹³

With this transformation Moses was ordered to go to Pharaoh again and to repeat the unqualified demand that they depart. The Lord also repeated to Moses what Pharaoh's reaction would be. Again God took responsibility for the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. As we have seen already, this means that Pharaoh would reach a point of no return, but the reaching of this point was the result of his own choices.

¹⁰⁹ John 10:34-36; See Ps. 82:6

¹¹⁰ Num. 12:6-8

¹¹¹ Deut. 34:10-12

¹¹² Matt. 11:11

¹¹³ II Cor. 3:7,11,13,18

Pharaoh would push his resistance beyond the limit. Even after the exodus took place, after the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind and tried to recapture the people. Ch. 14:5 - "When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, 'What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!'" It all started out with Pharaoh's question: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." But God assured Moses that, when the tenth plague occurred, "The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it."

The audience described in vs. 10-13 was the second that Moses and Aaron had with the king. Maybe we should say it was the second audience Pharaoh had with Moses. The details are quite sketchy. Evidently Pharaoh had prepared himself and had ordered his court magicians to be present because he wanted to elevate the matter and bring it on a supernatural plane. It was Pharaoh's initiative. He was the one who challenged God by asking for a miracle. The sign he received was very strange: Aaron's rod turned into a snake. Ever since sin entered the world, the serpent had become its symbol. In Revelation, Satan is called "that ancient serpent."¹¹⁴ Here God confronted Satan with his own symbol; He met him on his own ground. I wonder if the devil guessed at this point that Jesus Christ would eventually crush him by meeting him on his own turf?

There is, of course, a danger of seeing too much symbolism in signs such as these. But what happened here is too strange not to ask questions. What did God mean by opening the confrontation with a sign that obviously stood for sin? The snake in Paradise was sin personified. Jesus used the term snakes and scorpions for demonic powers. He said to the disciples: "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."¹¹⁵ The snake is the only animal in the Bible God cursed. Now, here God has Himself represented by Moses as a snake, as a curse. The only explanation I can think of is the one Paul gives: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."¹¹⁶

The mystery of the Incarnation is that Christ became a curse for us in order to conquer the curse. This was what happened symbolically in Pharaoh's court. Aaron's rod, which became a snake, swallowed up the snakes of the magicians. It must have been a very convincing performance that caused fear in the hearts of the magicians. They understood that they were facing superior power. Pharaoh must have understood the same, but for him too much was at stake to admit and confess. He decided to harden his heart.

During the German revival in the Ruhr area shortly after World War II, one of the leading brothers in the group of Hermann Zaiss visited a woman in a mental ward, who told him: "I am the personified serpent." The man, who must have been full of the Holy Spirit, answered: "The personified serpent was Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. And I command the evil spirit in you to come out." The woman was healed.

The first sign indicated that God immediately penetrated the core of the matter. It was not only, or even in the first place, a confrontation between a nation of masters and a people of slaves, but between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. The sign indicated the mode in which God was going to subdue the enemy. He would become man, so that through His death He could conquer death.

The second sign, which was also the first plague, described in vs. 14-25 is even more horrendous. It affected the heart of the life of Egypt, the source of its sustenance of its religion. The River Nile was not just a river of water, it was a deity. Egypt's god died when Moses struck the river with his staff. Nietzsche once dismissed religion by saying: "God is dead and the stench of His decaying body fills Western Europe." The great German philosopher was partly right. He was wrong in his identification of the corpse that was the source of the odor.

The king went to the river to take a bath. This was probably an act that combined hygiene with ritual. It was a meeting of deities: the king and the river. If there was a place that was separated for the baths of royalties, the place where Moses and Aaron met Pharaoh may have been close to the spot where baby Moses had been found by the princess eighty three year before. Pharaoh never got into the water; in

¹¹⁴ Rev. 12:9

¹¹⁵ Luke 10:19

¹¹⁶ Gal. 3:13,14

fact, he went home without touching it. This must have made him furious. But this was not the worst part of the power encounter. Not only did the water of the river turn to blood and spew out its fish, but the drinking water, which is one of the most fundamental needs of man, became a severe problem. To make it worse, the magicians imitated the miracle, using up whatever usable water there was to turn it into blood, thus making the emergency worse. I can understand the rationale in countering Moses' snake with their own snakes, but why spoil more water?

The result of the "miracle" produced by the magicians, which may have been a fake, was that Pharaoh did not take the matter to heart. He had already made up his mind, of course, before this evidence was presented to him, but it gave him the pretext he wanted. In doing so, he purposely missed the point God had made, that He is the LORD. In ch. 5:2 Pharaoh had said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." In each of the plagues that God sent over Egypt, he received the answer to his question.

The last verse of this chapter says: "Seven days passed after the LORD struck the Nile." Whether this means that the Nile remained in this condition for about one full week or whether this was the interval between this plague and the next one, is not clear. Some commentators believe the water remained blood for the week.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The eighth chapter gives us an account of three successive plagues which come in the form of pests: frogs, gnats, and flies.

These plagues did not involve death, but life; too much of it. God created frogs as one of the miracles of nature, not without a touch of humor. But through man's sin the devil seems to be able to manipulate the control, as God permits him to. It is hard to understand this. Too much of a living thing is as much a curse as death. In Revelation frogs are symbols of demons. We read: "Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet."¹¹⁷ The worship of the Nile, like all idol worship, is connected with demonism. Pharaoh's religion was catching up with him.

God ordered Moses to repeat the demand for the third time to let the people go. There was no longer question of asking to leave. Pharaoh knew by now who the LORD was and at the end of this plague we see him waver for the first time.

The Pulpit Commentary gives the following interesting comment: "Frogs were among the Egyptian sacred animals. One of their deities, Heka, was a frog-headed goddess; and they seem to have regarded the frog as a sacred emblem of creative power. The great multiplication of frogs, whereby they became an annoyance and a curse, was a trial and strain to the entire religious system." Then the commentary continues to describe in a vivid and graphic way the impact this plague must have had upon the nation.

We are further informed that the frog in this case was the *Rana Mosaica*, which resembles the toad, which crawls rather than leaps and croaks perpetually - exactly the kind of creature people would love to have in their houses! Thousands of them! It is one thing to call upon "Heka" for help, comfort, and protection, but the deity should leave when she is no longer needed. This she did not do. When we invite the devil in he comes to stay, whether we want to or not.

Adam Clarke correctly points out that the announcement of the plague was an act of mercy. It not only proved to Pharaoh that the coming of the frogs was no coincidence, but it also gave him a chance to repent and submit. The end of the plague proved the truth that God is in control of these events. Pharaoh requested that the plague would cease "tomorrow," and it did.

Announcement of judgment is always an act of mercy. Jonah understood that, when God sent him to Nineveh to announce the destruction of the city in forty days, the aim was the salvation of the people. That was why he refused to go. Hell should take nobody by surprise.

These verses record Pharaoh's first prayer to God, even though it is in an indirect form. We read in vs. 8 that Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD." It was also the first time that Pharaoh changed his mind. He played a very dangerous game. Having recognized the power of the Lord, instead of saying: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the

¹¹⁷ Rev. 16:13

LORD and I will not let Israel go,” (ch. 5:2) he wanted Moses to pray to God and he promised the people that they may go. But it is a double repentance. When Pharaoh broke his promise, he reached the point of no return.

Up to this point Pharaoh had treated Moses and Aaron without respect. The plague of the frogs changed this. Now he summoned Moses and Aaron to the palace to ask them for a prayer on his behalf. But the only thing he wanted was relief. He should have asked for deliverance from himself, instead of from the frogs. God is the only one who would have been able to deliver Pharaoh from himself. He could have had his stone heart replaced by a human heart. Pharaoh could have received what God promised in Ezekiel: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”¹¹⁸ But Pharaoh was interested only in relief of pressure, not in a change of heart. He had by then understood the superior power of the LORD. He did not want to submit to it; he wanted only to use it for his own purpose.

What Pharaoh did not understand was that YHWH is a serving God. Jesus makes this abundantly clear when He says: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹¹⁹ He washed the disciples’ feet. He gave a piece of bread to Judas and He died for our sins. But receiving His service and not allowing Him to change us is the most dangerous thing we can do. Judas experiences this. John says: “As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.”¹²⁰

The expression translated by the NIV with “I leave to you the honor ...” has puzzled Bible commentators. The literal translation, given by the KJV, “Glorify me,” is probably the correct one, however difficult it may fit into the logic of the text. Pharaoh should have given God the glory. Instead, he took it to himself, as if the ceasing of the plague was, at least in part, his doing. To accept God’s help for our own purposes can be disastrous. “As soon as Judas took the bread Satan entered into him.” So the frogs entered into Pharaoh. He never got rid of them.

For the last time, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to duplicate the plague. In other words, they made the situation worse. After all, who wanted more frogs? At the third plague of the gnats, we read that they were unable to perform the miracle (Ch. 8:18,19). The only thing they proved was that calling up frogs was not an exclusive miracle that only YHWH could perform. Supposedly, this would diminish the exclusiveness of the LORD. What they were not able to do was to make the plague cease, which was what Pharaoh desired. The king was more interested in the practical than in the theological aspect of the matter. Moses prayed and, exactly at the time the king had requested the frogs died.

It appears that it would not have been sufficient for Moses to utter a simple prayer. We read in vs. 12 that Moses cried out to the LORD. The word is emphatic. Moses realized that he was facing the powers of darkness who would be deferred only by the fullness of God’s power. His own feeling of inadequacy made him cry loudly. The devil may have attacked him on his rashness in letting Pharaoh set the time. When he got home, he realized that his faith was not big enough. This may have made him cry loudly. Faith simplifies prayer. Moses had said to Pharaoh, “Glorify me.” Did this backfire now? Moses had to get used to the fact that he was “like God to Pharaoh.” (Ch. 7:1). God had endowed him with the authority to make decisions. This is a New Testament principle also. Jesus gives us in the Holy Spirit the authority to speak and act in His Name. It is good, though, not to take this authority lightly.

Moses’ downfall came when he used God’s authority to speak and act in His Name, when he struck the rock.¹²¹ As a result of Moses’ prayer, all the frogs died. Their death was almost as bad as their being alive. Vs. 14 says “the land reeked of them.” It must have taken the better part of one day for the decomposition to manifest itself - just long enough for Pharaoh to feel relieved and to change his mind about letting Israel go free. Pharaoh was the greatest fool on earth at that time.

The Third Plague. The Gnats 8:16-19.

In the third plague the country of Egypt was covered with gnats; tiny insects that buzz around people’s ears and in front of their eyes. Gnats are always present in hot countries. They are not dangerous,

¹¹⁸ Ezek. 36:26,27

¹¹⁹ Matt. 20:28

¹²⁰ John 13:27

¹²¹ Num. 20:10

but they are bothersome. They tend to make people jittery and nervous. This plague had a psychologically unsettling effect.

The KJV uses the word "lice" for the animals that cause the plague. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "It is disputed among the best critics, whether the plague was really one of 'lice' (as given in the Authorized Version) or of mosquitoes. To the present writer the arguments in favor of mosquitoes seems to preponderate; and he believes the 'kinnim' to represent those subtle pests."

Adam Clarke believes that the insect was a tick, based on vs. 18 in the KJV, which says: "so there were lice upon man, and upon beast." Evidently the Hebrew text says, "in man and in beast."

Most of the plagues were not miracles in the sense that they were supernatural events. No law of nature was broken or suspended. The miraculous aspect was the timing. Their beginning and end were announced beforehand with meticulous precision. The third plague was the first one the magicians were unable to duplicate. They said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." So Pharaoh had no longer an excuse to ignore the exclusiveness of YHWH, but it did not matter anymore. He had now come to the point where proofs and facts were no longer important. This is *Escape from Reason* to borrow the title of Francis Schaeffer's book.

We do not read that Pharaoh was informed beforehand about this third plague. There must have been another confrontation, though; otherwise, how would it be known that Pharaoh hardened his heart. It sounds like the confrontation was more between Pharaoh and his magicians than with Moses. Friction started to build between the king and his advisors, which must have isolated Pharaoh into a position of stubbornness and increased hardness. The magicians issued a serious warning in vs. 19. They concede and acknowledge defeat, but not the king. We read "The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.' The answer to Pharaoh's question, "Who is the LORD?" becomes clearer and clearer.

The Fourth Plague 8:20-32

The plague of flies was probably a natural result of the massive dying off of the frogs. The flies bred in this fertile decomposition and covered the land. The Philistines knew Beelzebub, "the Lord of the Flies." Egypt may have know him too.

There is some question, however, as to whether a gnat in the sense we know the insect, was meant. The Hebrew word is *arob*. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "The exact character of the fourth plague depends on the proper translation of the word 'arob.' The Jewish commentators connected this word with 'Ereb' and 'Arab,' words meaning 'mingled' or 'mixed'; and supposed a mixed multitude of animals - beast, reptiles, and insects - to be meant. But the expression used throughout, which is 'ha-arob,' 'the arob,' marks very clearly a single definite species. So much was clear to the LXX., who rendered the word by 'kunomuia,' 'the dog-fly,' which is not the common house-fly (*Musca domestica*), but a distinct species (*Musca canina*). Flies of this kind are said to constitute a terrible affliction in Egypt. ... but they attack men chiefly, and do no harm to houses or to the fruits of the field, whereas the 'arob' is spoken of as a pest in the houses, and as 'destroying the land' (verse 24). It has been, therefore, suggested that the 'Blatta orientalis,' or kakerlaque,' a kind of beetle, is really intended. These creatures suddenly appear upon the Nile in great numbers; they 'inflict very painful bites with their jaws; gnaw and destroy clothes, household furniture, leather articles of every kind, and either consume or render unavailable all eatables.' They sometimes drive persons out of their houses; and they also devastate the fields." And the comment on vs. 24 says: "As with the frogs, so with the beetles, it aggravated the infliction, that, being sacred animals, they might not be destroyed or injured. Beetles were sacred to Ra, the sun-god; and one form of Ra, Chepra, was ordinarily represented under the form of a beetle, or as a man with a beetle for his head."

Flies are not just bothersome as gnats; they were more dangerous as carriers of diseases. The fifth and sixth plague were probably a result of this massive invasion of flies. As with the first plague, this one also began with a confrontation with Pharaoh at the time he was going to take his bath in the river. There is a specific mention in vs. 22 and 23 that Goshen would be exempt from this plague. Beelzebub would be allowed no entrance in Goshen. Whether this means that the Israelites were subjected to suffer the first three plagues themselves also is not clear; it is not specifically stated, but it could very well be that the Lord allowed them a measure of identification with the rest of the world. They would be more aware of the distinction that was being made from this point on.

Flies are Satan's inventions. We do not know how this fitted into the original pattern of creation. Of course, Satan did not create the original fly, just as he did not create the carnivorous animals. He

probably corrupted existing species and made them into pests. There exists an Ekagi¹²² myth that goes back to the story of the fall. A woman ate a certain sweet potato at the advise of a large lizard, after which flies made their appearance and people started to get sick and die.

The Egyptians probably feared flies, knowing that, where flies appeared, sickness followed not far behind. Flies and death go together. Flies thrive on decomposition. They are the emissaries of “the Lord of the Flies.”

Again, Moses and Aaron are summoned to the palace. Pharaoh proposed a compromise. The Israelites would be allowed time off to sacrifice, but they should not leave the country. Moses’ objection was that the Israelites would sacrifice animals that were considered sacred by the Egyptians. Their worship would cause a public outcry and probably murder. Whether Pharaoh was just naive, or whether he had not thought the matter through, or whether this was a deliberate ploy to have the religious leaders of Israel murdered by the populace, we do not know. Of course, it was not up to Pharaoh to decide where and how God should be worshipped.

In the announcement of the plague, God wanted Moses to say specifically to Pharaoh, “I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials ...” and then He proceeded by saying that the plague would not touch the Israelites. So we can picture the scene when Moses and Aaron are summoned to the palace. The slaves surrounded Pharaoh and the ministers with their fans and fly swatters, trying to keep the flies away from his majesty and their excellencies. But even as Pharaoh was talking to Moses and Aaron, flies settled on his eyes, in his ears, and they got into his mouth. Those flies that were bred in the decomposing frogs dominated the audience. But there are no flies on Moses and Aaron! I wonder if the expression “no flies on me” comes from this scene. It should have been the other way around. Moses and Aaron were not being fanned, but the flies did not land on them and here was the king, looking worse than an Egyptian cow. The contrast must have been impressive.

We read in Revelation that a seal of protection is put on God’s people before the plagues are released over the earth. “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”¹²³

In vs. 28 Pharaoh gave in. It sounds pathetic and we would almost pity the monarch. “Pharaoh said, ‘I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.’”

For the second time in his life, Pharaoh asked for prayer. In vs. 8 we read: “Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.” But here, in vs. 20, he became more personal as he said, “Now pray for me.” This sounded too good to be true. If Pharaoh had really asked for prayer for himself, there would have been hope. We understand, however, that this was not an honest request. Even as he promised to let the people go into the desert, he did not have the intention to let them go. It was an empty promise. Moses must have sensed this and therefore he gave this severe warning in vs. 29, “Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

All of these plagues were initiated by God. Unlike the experience of Elijah who took the initiative in prayer to bring about the drought.¹²⁴ James says about that plague: “Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.”¹²⁵ But in the case of the Egyptian plagues, we find that Moses prayed for the plagues to cease, at least in most cases. Without Moses’ prayer the country of Egypt would have been ruined much earlier.

The fact that Pharaoh kept on hardening his heart indicates that he acted against what he knew. His spiritual condition was such that he allowed himself to be led to destruction knowingly.

CHAPTER NINE

Fifth Plague - The Plague among Livestock 9:1-7

Again, Moses and Aaron were sent to Pharaoh with the demand to let the people of Israel go. The punishment for disobeying was a fatal sickness among the Egyptians’ livestock. The KJV uses the word

¹²² Name of a mountain tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia

¹²³ Rev. 7:3

¹²⁴ I Kings 17 and 18

¹²⁵ James 5:17

“murrain” which *Webster* describes as a fatal pestilence among cattle. *Adam Clarke* says about the sickness: “The murrain is a very contagious disease among cattle, the symptoms of which are a hanging down and swelling of the head, abundance of gum in the eyes, rattling in the throat, difficulty of breathing, palpitation of the heart, staggering, a hot breath, and a shining tongue; which symptoms prove that a general inflammation has taken place. The original word ‘deber’ is variously translated. The Septuagint has ‘death’; the Vulgate has ‘pestis’, a ‘plague’ or ‘pestilence.’”

Obviously the disease was fatal. It decimated the domestic animal of the Egyptians. The phrase: “All the livestock of the Egyptians died,” should be understood to mean that all the animals that died belonged to the Egyptians, since we still find cattle in the next plague.

This is the first time the horse is mentioned in the Bible. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “Horses, which had been unknown prior to the Hyksos invasion, and which consequently do not appear in the list of animals presented to Abraham (Gen. xii. 16), first became common under the eighteenth dynasty, when they seem to have been employed exclusively in war. Their use for agricultural purposes, which is perhaps here indicated, was not till later.”

Contagious, fatal diseases among animals like this one, were not uncommon in Egypt. The miraculous feature of this plague was not the disease but the timing and the fact that the cattle belonging to the Israelites remained untouched. Pharaoh sent a fact-finding committee to Goshen to investigate, but their report failed to make an impression upon his majesty. Now he was beyond the point where mere facts would make him change his mind. This brought him to the point of no return. From now on we will read the phrase: “But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron” (vs. 12). We find the other references in the chapters 10:20,27; 11:10, and 14:8.

Sixth Plague - The Boils 9:8-12.

Just as the dust was a most unlikely vehicle to produce gnats, so soot does not produce boils. Being the product of the fire in the furnace, it tends to be antiseptic. God used these sterile means to bring about the plagues.

Moses appeared again before Pharaoh, obviously in the open air, not inside the palace. It does not seem likely that Pharaoh was on his way to take his bath in the river, since the scene takes place in the vicinity of a furnace. We are not told what kind of furnace this was, but it could very likely be one of the places where the Israelites had to bake the bricks, a brick-kiln. This is what the Hebrew word *kibshon* means. We could, therefore, picture the king on an inspection tour, looking at the Hebrew slaves at their labor. If this was the scene, the means by which this plague of boils was produced has symbolic significance. No pun intended, but the furnace backfired. Thus far the result of slave labor had been pure gain for Egypt; now it became evident that Israel’s treatment by the Egyptians was a festering sore. The reality of the corruption of Egyptian affluence is shown.

The seventeenth century history of Western Europe has been called “The Golden Age.” Holland was one of the richest nations at this time, before it was overshadowed by England. The colonies that later became the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, brought wealth and affluence. Even more the slave trade fattened the Dutch wallets. Few people realize, even in retrospect, that what is called “The Golden Age” was a festering sore. Western Europe’s Golden Century was the sixteenth centuries when Christians were burned at the stake for reading the Bible!

Nowhere is this corruption of affluence better pictured than in Revelation where John shows us the fall of Babylon, the epitome of world trade and affluence. At the destruction of the city we read: “The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more; Cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; Cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.”¹²⁶

So the soot spread as a fine dust over the land of Egypt, like the fall-out of a volcano. Where the particles came upon the body of men or animals, festering boils broke out. One boil is enough to make the whole body sick and the word is used here in the plural. This plague hurt the Egyptians more than any of the previous plagues.

¹²⁶ Rev. 18:11-13

Satan knew the effect a boil would have on the human body. That is why, in dealing with Job, he says to God: "Skin for skin! ... A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."¹²⁷ And vs. 7 tells us: "So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head."¹²⁸ Satan is a master in manipulating for destructive purposes the defense mechanism God built into every living being. But here God initiated the plague and allowed the enemy to torture his victims.

Those who were the enemy's emissaries seem to suffer the most. We read that "the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians" (vs. 11). At this point they faded out of the picture. They had been present from the beginning. When Moses and Aaron first appeared before Pharaoh, they were there and changed their staffs into snakes also. They added to the misery of the first three plague by duplicating them, but they had to acknowledge defeat at the fourth one. They could not call up the gnats.

"But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses" (vs. 12). The magicians had been Pharaoh's initial support in the decision to ignore the Word of the Lord. When they produced the same miracles and plagues that Moses and Aaron caused, Pharaoh could reasonably say that there was no difference between the power of YHWH and other supernatural forces. But at the fourth plague, the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Ch. 8:19). It is true that initially Pharaoh could claim ignorance. When he said, "Who is YHWH?" he could be considered an honest agnostic. But the layers of supposed honesty were slowly stripped from his heart and mind. Pharaoh had chosen to be in the enemy camp and to remain there, not on the basis of available facts, but because he chose to remain.

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart has been a point of hot theological debate ever since theology existed. The apostle Paul seems to add more to the problem than to explain it when he says: "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?' But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath prepared for destruction?"¹²⁹

The mystery of man's freedom and God's predestination will never be solved on this side of time and space. The limited dimension that are accessible to our finite minds do not permit us to probe the depths of it. We know, though, that man is not a robot and that God has not created man as a pre-programmed entity. Man's choice is real, although diseased. As we have seen already, the book of Exodus clearly states that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart started as an act of free choice. God made it irrevocable at a certain point, and He used it to His glory, but Pharaoh will never be able to stand before the throne of God and accuse God that He had been unrighteous. Pharaoh's heart never belonged to God; it was his own and he had surrendered it to the devil. *The Pulpit Commentary* says that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was "the natural effect upon his soul under God's moral government of those acts which he willfully and wrongfully committed."

The Seventh Plague- Hail ch. 9:13-35.

This seventh plague was a strange mixture of grace and punishment. As always, the fact that God announced punishment was an act of grace. God did not threaten in a sadistic fashion, so that He might enjoy the reaction of fear among the people. His aim was repentance and restoration.

This seventh plague was, next to the tenth, the most severe of all punishments that afflicted the country. A hail storm that broke every record in the history of the country was announced. God reminded

¹²⁷ Job 2:4,5

¹²⁸ Job 2:7

¹²⁹ Rom. 9:15-22

Pharaoh of the mild pressure that was exerted upon him initially and to which he did not respond. The pressure increased with plagues that were annoying, then dangerous, but never fatal. Obviously, Pharaoh had received a clear answer to his first question: "Who is the LORD?" but he refused to surrender.

God revealed Himself in this plague at the same time as the tender, loving God, who yearns to redeem His creatures and as the living God in whose hands it is dreadful to fall.¹³⁰ Whereas the previous plagues had been moderate demonstrations of God's power, the seventh one reveals God's full force. Yet God's omnipotence is covered up in this demonstration so that Pharaoh's limited mind might be able to grasp some of the immensity of it. The hail storm was only a very limited expression of God's wrath. In the book of Revelation, we get a clearer picture of people's reaction to the full demonstration of God's anger. "They [the earth's population] called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!' " "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."¹³¹ If the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki could wipe out the population of two cities in seconds, God would not need a sickness that would last several weeks to wipe a nation off the earth. But this was language that a mere man like Pharaoh should be able to understand.

Another point of wonder is God's identification of Himself with the people of Israel. In vs. 17 God says: "You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go." In the very same way Jesus identified Himself with the Christians of the early church when He said to Paul on the road to Damascus: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,"¹³² And in Matthew Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."¹³³

Moses found Pharaoh at the usual time and probably at the same place, on his way to the River Nile for the ceremonial bath. Pharaoh was an early riser. The plague that was announced was an unusual phenomenon in Egypt. Frogs had been in the river before, and gnats and flies were not uncommon. People have had boils for centuries, whether in Egypt or elsewhere in the world. But rain was a rarity in Egypt. The country obtained its fertility from the flooding of the Nile, not from rainy seasons. Hail was even more unusual, since Egypt is only about 30 degrees north of the Equator. The omnipotent God sent a hail storm that broke all the records in Egyptian history. Thus Egypt received a foretaste of the hail storm that will come upon the earth at the end of time, such as is described by John in Revelation: "From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."¹³⁴

The announcement of the plague and the description of it is the lengthiest, with the exception of the last plague. God announced this plague to Pharaoh as "the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people." And, yet, we know that this hail storm was nothing in comparison with the omnipotence of God. The destruction of the country and its harvest was not even a total one. We read in vs. 31 and 32, "The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom. The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later." Of the food for human consumption only the barley was destroyed. This plague did not necessarily mean famine.

Also the advice to bring cattle and servants inside before the storm tempered the impact considerably, at least for those who paid attention to the Word of God.

God still reveals Himself as "the LORD, the God of the Hebrews." But the implication of this plague is that God is not a local deity or a god whose domain is limited to one particular group of people. The plague gave a demonstration of the fact that there is no one like YHWH in all the earth (vs. 14). And in vs. 29 Moses says: "When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the LORD's." After this plague Pharaoh had the acknowledge that the LORD was right and he was wrong. (vs. 27). This does not mean, however, that the king had a change of heart. Not only did he immediately break his promise, but he continued to harden himself. Knowledge alone does not change the heart.

¹³⁰ Hebr. 10:31

¹³¹ Rev. 6:16; 20:11

¹³² Acts 9:5

¹³³ Matt. 25:40

¹³⁴ Rev. 16:21

The book of Psalms describes this plague at several places: “He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet. He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning.”¹³⁵ And: “He turned their rain into hail, with lightning throughout their land.”¹³⁶

Vs. 16 presents a theological problem in that it makes it sound as if God created an evil man for the only reason that God might be made out good. We read: “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Paul quotes this verse in Romans: “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’”¹³⁷ Paul does not try to explain the problem or even to justify God in it. He simply says that mere man cannot argue with God. This does not mean, of course, that we would not be allowed to think about it.

It is obvious that God did not create evil. Pharaoh was not pre-programmed in the sense that he had no moral choices. Initially, he was the subject of God’s redeeming love, which he adamantly rejected. That is why Paul, in the same chapter of Romans refutes the argument that man has no choice. In vs. 19 and 20 he says: “One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”

The important word in vs. 16 is “raised up.” If we interpret this as if God pulled Pharaoh to his feet and told him to stand there so He could pound on him, we run into problems. But if we understand this to mean that Pharaoh stood up against God, as we know he did, and that God allowed him to remain standing, most of the moral and theological implications fade away. The context of this whole section of Exodus corroborates this viewpoint.

We know that God did not create man for sin but for His glory. Man was created to acknowledge God, to love Him and to praise Him. We should all be able to take this verse, “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth,” in a personal and positive way, by submitting to God. The fact remains that if we resist, God’s glory will in no way diminish, but He will be glorified at our expense.

Adam Clarke’s comment on this portion is interesting. We quote: “Thus God gave this impious king to know that it was in consequence of His especial providence that both he and his people had not been already destroyed by means of the past plagues; but God had preserved him for this very purpose, that He might have a further opportunity of manifesting that He, Jehovah, was the only true God for the full conviction of both the Hebrews and the Egyptians, that the former might follow and the latter fear before Him. Judicious critics of almost all creeds have agreed to translate the original as above, a translation which it not only can bear but requires, and which is in strict conformity to both the Septuagint and the Targum. Neither the Hebrew, ‘I have caused thee to stand’; nor the apostle’s translation of it, Rom. ix. 17, ‘I have raised thee’; nor that of the Septuagint, ‘On this account art thou preserved,’ namely, in the past plagues, can put on the words by certain commentators, namely, ‘That God ordained or appointed Pharaoh from all eternity, by certain means, to this end; that He made him to exist in time; that He raised him to the throne; promoted him to that high honor and dignity; that He preserved him, and did not cut him off as yet; that He strengthened and hardened his heart; irritated, provoked, and stirred him up against His people Israel, in his obstinacy and rebellion; all which was done to show in him His power in destroying him in the Red Sea. The sum of which is, that this man was raised up by God in every sense for God to show His power in his destruction.’ So man speaks; thus God hath not spoken.”

The storm must have been an awesome demonstration of God’s majesty. Thunder and lightning have caused men to change their minds throughout the history of the world. Martin Luther made the decision to enter the monastery instead of studying law, during a severe thunderstorm. This storm squeezes the confession of sin out of Pharaoh. In vs. 27 we read: “Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. ‘This time I have sinned,’ he said to them. ‘The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.’”

Some interpret the lightning as balls of electricity that shot back and forth over the surface of the earth. Where the NIV says: “lightning flashed down to the ground,” the KJV translates it with: “the fire ran along upon the ground” (vs. 23). It must have been a fearful scene. Also it was not a passing storm, but it

¹³⁵ Ps. 78:47,48

¹³⁶ Ps. 105:32

¹³⁷ Rom. 9:17

must have hung over Egypt for several hours – it was worse than a bombardment during a modern war, causing death and destruction throughout the country.

CHAPTER TEN

Eighth Plague- The Locusts 10:1-20

While Egypt was still in the throes of trauma incurred by the hail storm, the eight plague was announced. This time God explained to Moses and Aaron that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was for the benefit of Israel. The demonstration of God's power should make them realize also whom the God is they serve. The patience and mildness of the initial approach had the adverse effect upon Israel they thought God was weak, and that He was no match for the mighty power of Egypt. They were almost as mistaken as Pharaoh. By the demonstration of God's power to destroy, they learned that the same power was there for their deliverance. The generation of Moses and Aaron which made history, as well as the generations that would follow, could know from these records who God was.

The problem is that few people know their own history and fewer learn from it. People who make history are seldom able to interpret it. Generally speaking, the Jews have done better than any other nation to commemorate the high points of their history. Many of them still faithfully observe their feasts. But if the God of history is not predominant in the facts of history, history itself becomes a fetish.

For the first time in this narrative we read the word "humble." Moses says to Pharaoh: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself." The original sin, the sin which caused Lucifer to fall, is pride. Pharaoh would have humbled himself had he been a realist.

The Dutch poet, Herman Marsman, wrote a poem about a fellow Dutch poet, Willem Kloos. Kloos had one period of poetic inspiration in his life, which fizzled out as he grew older. In his eulogy, Marsman says that it is much better that our flame would flare up and singe God in the face and then to die than to smolder unnoticed. I doubt very much that the Almighty ever felt the heat. The unrighteous do not get close enough to Him. Pharaoh's resistance never made a dent in the eternal character of God.

By refusing to humble himself, Pharaoh distorted reality just as much as Marsman did. To humble oneself means to recognize Who God is and who we are. It simply means taking a realistic view of the situation.

We do not read that God gives specific instructions to Moses regarding the plague of locusts. It is understood, though, that Moses did not initiate this plague himself.

Locusts are not uncommon in the Middle East. They have been known to fall upon fields by hundreds of thousands and finish off whole crops. The unusual feature of this plague consisted in the timing and in its sheer magnitude. The plague would break every record in the history of the country. We read in vs. 6, "They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians; something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now."

The announcement of the plague causes fear in the heart of Pharaoh's ministers. They counsel the king to give in. There does not seem to be much conviction about the Person of God among them since they consider Moses to be the main problem, not God whom they resist. They call Moses "a snare." This indicates that they have never taken the content of Moses' message seriously because they do not really believe that there is a God, who is the creator of heaven and earth and Who is almighty. If God is in their thoughts at all, He is a local deity who is connected with Israel. Moses is the predominant figure in their reasoning a man who has supernatural powers, like their own magicians, only stronger. The magicians new better; that is why they had withdrawn at an earlier stage.

Upon the advice of the cabinet, Moses and Aaron are called back for further questioning. But Pharaoh is not yet ready to surrender. He wavers, but he overrules his ministers at the last moment. He wants the plagues to cease, but he does not want to get rid of his slaves.

It is hard to believe that Pharaoh might have been taken by surprise in hearing who would actually participate in the worship of YHWH in the desert. "Let My people go" meant that nobody would be left out. At this point it seems to dawn on the king that if all went, they might never return. Is it possible that Pharaoh had never thought through before? Suddenly his majesty's anger is kindled, and Moses and Aaron are chased away from his presence in a very insulting manner.

The problem remains, though, that God's intent was not that Israel would return to Egypt after the festival at Mount Sinai. The request that was presented to Pharaoh was to let the people go for a worship in the desert, and although the return was never specifically mentioned, it seemed to be implied. We do get

the impression, however, that Pharaoh had understood from the very beginning that once the people had left, they would never return.

On the other hand, we can only consider the way the request was presented as a problem if we maintain that the Egyptians had a right to exploit the Israelites; which, of course, is not true. Permission to let the people go to worship God would have meant a fundamental change of the attitude of the Egyptians toward the Israelites. This kind of permission would have abolished slavery. Once a slave is considered to be a human being, on the same level as a free man, he ceases to be a slave. That is why, during the slave trade between Europe, Africa, and America in previous centuries, the Europeans (Christians [?]) had to accommodate their theology and philosophy, so they could sell slaves with a clear conscience. (No irony intended!!)

We can hardly accuse Pharaoh of demonstrating, at any point, a sense of humor. But his warning to Moses and Aaron: "The LORD be with you; if I let you go, along with your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil," or as the RSV puts it: "The LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind," is rather humorous. Look who is talking about evil and evil purposes! His invoking the Name of the LORD is, of course, meant sarcastically. Obviously the king is very angry, up till the moment that the locusts come.

Nowhere do we read that Moses asked for only the men to leave. Pharaoh accuses Moses and Aaron of changing their minds about what they want. Again, this is an effort to turn the roles. The one who had been changing his mind was the king. Ironically, he is indignant about people whose word cannot be trusted. Obviously, Pharaoh knew what moral behavior was, and he was acting treacherously. Human nature has not changed over the centuries.

Then God orders Moses to stretch out his hand over Egypt and call the locusts. Moses' gesture brings on a strong easterly wind which carries an extraordinary army of locusts from the North Arabian Peninsula. It is said that locusts need wind to be able to fly. Without wind they can propel themselves only over short distances, but they need a windstorm in order to cover long distances.

The Pulpit Commentary says that "the species intended is probably either the *Acridium peregrinum* or the *OEdipoda migratoria*." The Hebrew word *arbeh* describes the multitude, not the species.

There is another interesting quote in the same commentary, taken from Ollivier, "Voyage dans l'Empire Ottoman" which reads: "A traveler in Syria says - 'It is difficult to express the effect produced on us by the sight of the whole atmosphere filled on all sides and to a great height by an innumerable quantity of these insects, whose flight was slow and uniform, and whose noise resembled that of rain; the sky was darkened, and the light of the sun considerably weakened. In a moment the terraces of the houses, the streets, and all the fields were covered by these insects.'"

The apostle John comes closest to the fear this phenomenon must produce in his description of the army of Apollyon in Revelation. When the lid of the Abyss is taken off, the atmosphere is polluted by a dense smoke which brings these demonic creatures out of the pit to cover the earth.¹³⁸ There is a demon in every plague and the fear of darkness accompanies it.

Pharaoh experiences something of this fear for the master he serves. When the enormity of the plague dawns upon him, he panics and calls for Moses and Aaron. He even utters words which sound like a confession of sin. Vs. 16 says: "Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you.'" The sin against Moses and Aaron was, obviously, their being chased away from Pharaoh's presence the day before. Pharaoh's words express the tragic truth that one can say the right words, "I have sinned," and yet not repent. The human heart is so deeply ensnared by sin and darkness that it cannot turn around without the help of the Holy Spirit.

When the hail storm hit the country, there was still hope that famine could be averted. But after the locusts turned Egypt into a moonscape, it was obvious that there would be no wheat harvest and nothing else to eat for months to come. Now Pharaoh had the choice of keeping his slaves or letting his people die with famine; in his hardness of heart, he went beyond all reason and logic and decided to keep the slaves. Demons will send man on a course of self-destruction.

Ninth Plague Darkness 10:21-29.

This plague does not cause any physical harm to the country and the people. But there are things that are worse than physical injury. Emotional and spiritual oppression are much harder to bear. During the

¹³⁸ Rev. 9:1-11

three days of darkness the whole country comes to a standstill. It is as if every Egyptian has gone on strike, and God has gone on strike by withholding light from man. John says in his Gospel: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."¹³⁹ By withholding light God squeezed the life line of the people. This was a warning, a preparation for the final plague in which all the first born sons would actually die. The warning was lost.

This ninth plague is a foreshadowing of the plague the Antichrist will endure at the end of his reign; we read in Revelation: "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony." There is something demonic about this darkness, as if spiritual realities find their expression in material phenomena. It was a darkness that could be touched.

The physical cause of the darkness is open for discussion. *Adam Clarke*, who must have been thinking of a very bad London fog, thinks it was caused by vapors. But *The Pulpit Commentary* attributes it to a natural phenomenon in Egypt, known as "the Khamsin, or Wind of the Desert." This would be a dense cloud of fine sand intercepting the sunlight. But the commentary admits that the darkness, such as described here goes far beyond anything that was ever produced by the Khamsin. The presence of fine sand particles would make this darkness palpable though.

The effect of the plague is, as we said above, that life in Egypt comes to a complete standstill. The oppressiveness was so great that at the end of three days the king could not stand it any longer, and he summoned Moses for his final interview. But the king still was not ready to yield. Once again he said he would allow the departure of the Israelites, but he changed the conditions. All the humans could leave, but the animals had to stay. This condition was even more ridiculous than any of the previous ones. Moses rejected it immediately, and the rejection kindled the anger of the king. Moses was chased away and threatened with death if he ever appeared again before the king. Evidently Pharaoh forgot that the last times Moses had come before him at Pharaoh's own bidding.

Obviously, this was the last audience, but most commentators believe that the words that are recorded in the following chapter verses 4-8 were actually pronounced at this time before Moses finally left. Clearly, in vs. 7 and 8 Moses still addressed Pharaoh. Pharaoh's anger was matched by Moses' anger, and Moses' anger is a reflection of the anger of the Lord. As a missionary of the Lord, Moses was superior to Pharaoh. Pharaoh could threaten Moses with death, but, as it turns out he could not have the power to put Moses to death. The death sentence pronounced on Pharaoh and his son was executed about two weeks later.

Governments are much more powerless than they think. It is true that Jesus was put to death by the Roman authorities, but, as Jesus said to Pilate: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."¹⁴⁰ Representatives of the Kingdom of Heaven have more power than all the powers of this world. That is why Spurgeon advises: "If God called you to be a missionary, do not stoop to be a king." Who is afraid of the government?!

Tenth Plague, the Passover and the Exodus Chapter 11-13.

In the chapters 11-13 the last plague is announced and executed and the meaning of it is expounded. Here the climax of the confrontation between light and darkness, between good and evil, between God and Satan is reached. God is the Victor.

One of the amazing features of this section is that history is made known before it is executed in time and space. From our finite, human perspective, we understand only the value and importance of history in retrospect. In these chapters God throws the light of eternity upon a scene before it happens. This is awesome to behold.

Not only does God have Moses announce to Pharaoh what will happen, but He tells Moses how generations of Israelites who will live centuries later are to commemorate God's deliverance. No part of the Bible gives us a better illustration of the interaction between eternity and time and the paradox between the two than the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The events prove that God is the God of history; that the Eternal One moves in time and space.

The first three verses of chapter 11 are obviously reaching back to an earlier communication of God with Moses. They provide the basis for Moses' announcement of the tenth plague during his last audience

¹³⁹ John 1:4

¹⁴⁰ John 19:11

with Pharaoh. As mentioned before, the verses 4-8 give the parting words of Moses during the conversation that is recorded in the previous chapter.

God had let Moses know that the tenth plague would be the last one. Whether this was communicated to him during the three days of darkness or at an earlier stage, we are not told. At this point the Israelites -- and especially Moses -- have made such a deep impression on the general populace of Egypt that the Israelites are given anything they ask for. The demand for gold and silver articles should be seen as a just reward due to the people of Israel for almost four centuries of free slave labor which they had performed.

God did not bring His people out of Egypt as a bunch of paupers. They were well provided for. They were not saved out of darkness and bondage "by the skin of their teeth." The Israelites had enough gold and silver, precious stones, and other valuables to build the tabernacle. And that was after they had squandered a large amount of gold to make the Golden Calf, which was crushed and flushed down the stream. How affluent the Israelites had become is clear from the offerings they made for the construction of the tabernacle. In ch. 36:5-7 we read that the builders said to Moses: "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.' And so the people were restrained from bringing more, Because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work."

In vs. 4-8 Moses announces to Pharaoh that the tenth plague will involve the death of all the first-born sons in Egypt as well as the first born of all the animals. Again, we have to emphasize that the announcement of the plague was an act of mercy. It left the door open to repentance. Even at this point Pharaoh could have surrendered. The massive killings that follow are ultimately his responsibility. But in his insanity the king had pushed himself beyond the point of return.

The first-born were important both to the Egyptians and to the Lord. *The Pulpit Commentary* says about the first-born: "The law of primogeniture prevailed in Egypt, as among most of the nations of antiquity. The monarchy (under the New Empire, at any rate) was hereditary, and the eldest son was known as *erpa saten sa*, or 'hereditary Crown Prince.' Estates descended to the eldest son, and in many cases high dignities also. No severer blow could have been sent on the nation, if it were not to be annihilated, than the loss in each house of the hope of the family - the parents' stay, the other children's guardian and protector."

The importance of the first-born to God becomes evident in chapter 13 where God says to Moses: "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal." Psalms 24:1 explains what this means: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." God's claim upon every first-born living being shows that everything that lives belongs to Him. The first-born becomes a token, a representation of the whole. He who has the first has everything.

The chapter ends with a recapitulation of the mystery of Pharaoh's hard heart. He had separated Himself from reality, which is the essence of sin. Sin is rooted in a lie, that is in that which is not true, which is not real. Pharaoh could no longer react reasonably or logically to facts. He had made a fool of himself; his degeneration had started slowly with relatively harmless signs. The transformation of sticks into snakes and of water into blood did not kill anybody. At that point Pharaoh still maintained some hold on reality by basing his decisions on the assurances given to him by the magicians. But when they failed and the proofs of God's existence and majesty become irrefutable he did not change his mind. He may have seemed an honest agnostic in the beginning, but when hard evidence accumulated, he proved to be a hardened sinner who chose death above life.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Tenth Plague - Death of the First-born and the Passover chapter 12

This chapter describes the turning point in Israel's history. Israel changed from a herd of slaves into a nation of free people. From a group of defeated human wrecks, they became the army of the Lord. From a despised minority, they became the most important nation in the world. Their association with God made the a bridge between earth and heaven.

In vs. 1-20 God explained to Moses what was involved in the Passover and the eating of unleavened bread.

In vs. 20-28 Moses passed on to the people the instructions the Lord had given him.

In vs. 29-39 we read what happened during the night: the killing of all the first-born and the expulsion of Israel from Egypt.

Vs. 40-42 give the historic perspective of the event.

Vs. 43-49 probably retell what God communicated to Moses before the actual Passover took place. These verses contain stipulations regarding who will be allowed to participate; leaving the door open for non-Israelites to be saved from destruction.

Vs. 50-51 tell us that the people actually left Egypt.

God started a new calendar. "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year" (vs. 2). Israel still counts its years from the exodus in Egypt, which puts them ahead some 2000 years of the Christians who reset their calendar with the birth of Christ. That the calculation of Christ's birth turned out to be erroneous does not change the principle that redemption marks the beginning of a new era.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on this: "The Israelite year would seem to have hitherto commenced with the autumnal equinox (Ex. xxiii. 16), or at any rate with the month Tisri (or Ethanim), which corresponded to our October. Henceforth two reckonings were employed, one for sacred, the other for civil purposes, the first months of each year, sacred or civil, being the seventh month of the other. Abib, the month of ears' - our April, nearly - became now the first month of the ecclesiastical year, while Tisri became its seventh or sabbatical month."

God's rearrangement of the calendar is an anticipation of the day when all things will be made new. The old calendar is based on the first creation. We calculate our hours and days and months in terms of the relationship of our planet with other celestial bodies, mainly the sun and the moon. The new calendar is based on our relationship with celestial beings, mainly the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Paul says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"¹⁴¹ New creations need new calendars.

The calculation of the calendar of our Christian era was done in retrospect. It wasn't until centuries later that people started to figure back to the approximate date of Christ's birth. Here God sets the new calendar before anything happens in time and space. The wonder of this point should not escape us.

Redemption begins with the choosing of a lamb. The Hebrew word for lamb covers a much wider range than its equivalent in English. The Hebrew term is used for both sheep and goats, and it is not even limited to younger animals. In Egypt the choice was up to the Israelites as to which animal to choose, as long as they adhered to the guidelines. This was the picture of the reality to come. For the ultimate redemption God does the choosing. Jesus is called "The Lamb of God."

The Israelites had to figure out approximately how much lamb would be needed for a household. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, which quotes Josephus, "Usage in course of time fixed the minimum number at ten."

The only stipulation in choosing the lamb was that it must be a one year-old male without defect, and it must be kept apart for a little over three days. The animal was to be chosen on the tenth of the month and killed on the fourteenth. Those days roughly reflect the period of Jesus' ministry of three and a half years on earth. The Passover lamb was in every respect a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in His death on the cross.

The time of the killing which is translated "at twilight" or "in the evening" is literally "between the two evenings." There are various interpretations of this expression. The practice in the temple in Jerusalem was to start the sacrifices about three o'clock in the afternoon, which is about the hour when Jesus died on the cross. But Jesus and His disciples had already celebrated the Passover feast the evening before. One of our problems is that, as Westerners, we take our clocks very seriously. We go by the minute. Our meetings and church services start when the clock strikes. It is part of the frustration of the life of a missionary that not every culture understands the importance of punctuality. In Asia people look at the sun to determine when to start certain activities. The Indonesians use an expression which means that time can be stretched like a piece of rubber.¹⁴² One hour more or less does not make any difference. A Friday noon service at the mosque does not start at 12 sharp. People come drifting in any time between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M. Having observed this, I have been wondering if "between the two

¹⁴¹ II Cor. 5:17

¹⁴² Jam karet

evenings” could not literally have meant any time between 6 P.M. one day and 6 P.M. the next. I can hardly imagine that the Israelites of old would have been slaves of their watches as we modern Westerners are.

At the original Passover celebration time was, a much more important factor, because of the hurried departure than it would have been at later commemorations of the Exodus.

There were two important requirements that had to be accomplished when the lamb was killed. The blood had to be applied to the doorpost, and the lamb had to be roasted and eaten. The two actions exemplified protection and sustenance. The element of hurry was extremely important. Moses and the elders had warned them that the angel of death would enter through the door in order to kill the first-born son who was inside. If there was blood at the doorpost, he would pass that house because the killing had already taken place. We should not take this to mean that the angel was fooled by the blood, but he knew the law of substitution, and he realized that he could not go in and kill twice.

The Lord Himself takes full responsibility for the killing of the first-born, just as He took full responsibility for the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart. For us who know the love of God, it is hard to understand that God is a God Who kills. We have to understand, however, that God does not cause death. Death is the result of severance from God. Death is as much God’s enemy as it is ours. We should, therefore, not see the angel of death as the angel of the Lord. This is an evil creature who does the killing, but he only kills because God allows him to. That is why God presented it to the Israelites as if He Himself went through the land of Egypt. The devil did the dirty work, but he was not able to boast about it. He was only the instrument of God’s wrath. It is hard for us to understand this, but, unless we make the distinction, we see God as a mixture of good and evil. How it is possible that God uses sin and death for His own glory goes above my comprehension.

We should not forget either that the judgment was in the first place “on all the gods of Egypt.” The fact that humans died was not the main issue; it was the defeat of the powers of darkness that was at the heart of this Passover. The first-born that were killed had been dead for years.

The application of the blood was, of course, full of spiritual significance. In much the same way as the Israelites were covered by the blood of the lamb so that the wrath of God would not touch them, so are we covered by the blood of Jesus. Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”¹⁴³ Or, as the RSV translates it: “he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” Paul says: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴⁴ The Exodus shows us the importance of being covered by the blood of Jesus. That means that we have asked for forgiveness of our sins on the basis of His death on the cross.

The amazing feature of this chapter is that the application of the blood occupies so little space in it. The bulk of the text deals with the nourishment derived from the meat of the lamb. There is never any question as to whether the Israelites would apply the blood or not. That seems to be a foregone conclusion. God considers them in principle as redeemed people. The important part is that they feed themselves enough and that they are aware of the emergency of their situation, so they are ready to leave on a moment’s notice.

Time was short. The lamb could not be boiled, as most sacrificial animals meant for human consumption were. Also there was no time to bake leavened bread. The meat had to be roasted over fire and the bread had to be baked without yeast. The urgency emphasized two very special truths: the fire was an image of the suffering Christ underwent at the cross and the lack of yeast symbolized the absence of sin in the life of the person who partook. The addition of herbs has been variously interpreted as making the meal tasty or making it bitter. I suppose we can’t have both; although one may acquire a taste for bitter things.

Another feature that amazes us is that after Israel had been in Egypt for 430 years, according to ch. 12:41, and after a prolonged period of probably one whole year, during which the Lord poured out the ten plagues upon the country, all of a sudden they have to leave within the space of a few hours. God’s patience spans the centuries, but He acts with the speed of lightning. The command is: “Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.” The Israelites had to be ready to move while they were eating a feast. Vs. 11 says: “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand.”

¹⁴³ John 5:24

¹⁴⁴ Rom. 8:1

Jesus identified Himself clearly with this Passover lamb when He said to the people of His time: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him."¹⁴⁵ But during the celebration of Jesus' last Passover, He identifies Himself with the bread and the wine. In Matthew we read: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"¹⁴⁶

The partaking of the lamb was a hurried event, but the eating of the unleavened bread was done during a whole week. The two were closely linked: we are redeemed once for all by the death of the Lamb of God, and we eat Him only once, so to speak. The living of a life that is pure and unpolluted by sin takes a life-time on earth and an eternity in heaven. Evidently, when Jesus died on the cross the eating of the meat of the lamb lost its significance. For us the consequences of His death are the living of a life of purity and avoidance of sin, as expressed in the communion service we celebrate.

While the Israelites were safe under the protection of the blood of the lamb, outside their houses a carnage of a magnitude, unknown before, went on. The angel of death killed all the first-born of man and animal. Nobody was exempt. It was God's judgment upon "all the gods of Egypt." They were the ones who had tried to keep Israel in bondage. Pharaoh had been little more than their puppet. Then as now, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."¹⁴⁷ The killing of all the first-born was ultimately the defeat of Satan. It is to him that God says: "I am the LORD."

At the end of time God's people will be sealed in much the same way as the Israelites were in Egypt; we read in Revelation: "Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.'"¹⁴⁸ This seal consists of the blood of Christ that covers us and the Holy Spirit Who indwells us.

In the verses 14-20 God puts the events of that night in an historic perspective. The difference between time and eternity, between finite man and the infinite God, becomes obvious here. Not only would no man be able to see over the limitations of the hour, but although the Israelites surely must have sensed that something great was happening to them, they would have been unable to evaluate it in the light of history, even less in the light of eternity. God did this for them. He told them that what they were doing that night and in the week following would be celebrated throughout the centuries. Generations to come would commemorate this particular event.

Even less would anybody at that point in time have been able to see the typical significance of the Passover. They may have understood that the lamb died in the place of man, but how could they fathom that this represented the fact that God would become man and die in our place? As the apostle Paul charged: "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast; as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."¹⁴⁹ Paul's commentary shows the eternal significance of that night of the Exodus. Not just generations on earth would remember it, but throughout eternity in heaven we will celebrate the Festival!

The celebration of the feast was to last seven days. *The Pulpit Commentary* believes that the Egyptians did not know the division of days in sections of seven. It suggests that Abraham may have brought the concept from Babylonia. If this is true, it would mean that a great deal of the creation story, as we read it in the first chapters of Genesis, would have been lost in Egypt at that time. The Israelites kept the Sabbath and at least that fact would have been known in Egypt.

The week-long celebration symbolized a lifetime of eating bread without yeast, that is a life without malice and wickedness and with sincerity and truth. The unleavened bread was the fruit of the killing and

¹⁴⁵ John 6:53-56

¹⁴⁶ Matt. 26:26-28

¹⁴⁷ Eph. 6:12

¹⁴⁸ Rev. 7:2,3

¹⁴⁹ I Cor. 5:7,8

eating of the lamb. It was because Israel had been redeemed and was protected by the blood of the lamb from the powers of darkness that they were able to live the life God wanted them to live.

We have seen already that God made the day of the Passover to be the first day of the new year. The feast was not only to be celebrated a whole life, but it was the celebration of the New Year, the new dispensation, in anticipation of the time when all would be new.

Also, it was to be a celebration together. Nobody is a Christian by himself. The celebration begins and ends with a sacred assembly. We celebrate in fellowship with one another as part of the feast. The Sabbath feature of the first and the last day indicates a lifting of the curse. As result of sin God said to Adam: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground."¹⁵⁰ During the feast no one was allowed to toil and sweat; they were to rest, since God had done the work for them. The most basic principle of the Christian life is to enter into God's Sabbath. We read in Hebrews: "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."¹⁵¹

Anyone who played with yeast, so to speak, was no longer part of Israel. Vs. 19 says: "And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born." "Cut off" does not stand for being lost, but for a severing of the bond of fellowship.

Beginning with vs. 21 Moses repeats God's instructions to the elders of the people and through them to the whole congregation. This address must have taken place on the tenth day of the month, for Moses tells them to select their lambs for the Passover that very day.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In verses 1-16, we find a more detailed explanation of the role the firstborn played in the exodus and of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Verses 1 and 2 go together with verses 11-16. It seems that the material in these last chapters is arranged rather randomly and the subjects are repeated. We find the mention of the actual exodus several times and also of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Evidently, the Lord wanted to emphasize that all the parts fit together. There would be no exodus without the death of a firstborn or his substitute and an exodus without the Feast of Unleavened Bread would be senseless. The three are like members of one body; they interact and feed one another; they are interdependent.

In vs. 1, God makes the statement that all the firstborn belong to Him, both of man and animal. The obvious meaning is that, as Creator, God had a claim on every living being. As we read in the Psalms: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."¹⁵² In claiming all that is firstborn, God claims it all. Since man separated himself from God and drew the whole of creation with him when he fell, this consecration of firstborn contains a meaning of return and surrender.

The tenth plague had not been a random punishment. It penetrated to the core of the problem, that man had separated himself from God by declaring himself independent and by stopping to obey God. This sin did not start with man but with angelic beings, with gods who dragged humans with them in their fall and used them as puppets to infiltrate and desecrate God's creation. That is the reason God had announced that the tenth plague was a "judgment on all the gods of Egypt."¹⁵³

The basic principle of the Passover was, in the first place, God's punishment upon the disobedience of man and angels, a capital punishment; and, secondly, it emphasized the principle of substitution. The latter was not new; it had been introduced immediately upon the appearance of sin on earth. The day Adam and Eve sinned, God covered them with the skin of an animal that died in their place. In the Passover night this substitution grew from a protection of persons to the redemption of a nation.

Later in this chapter, beginning with vs. 11, this basic principle will be put in historic perspective and incorporated into daily life. In these first two verses, God speaks to Moses.

¹⁵⁰ Gen. 3:17-19

¹⁵¹ Hebr. 4:10

¹⁵² Ps. 24:1

¹⁵³ ch. 12:12

In verses 3-16, Moses addresses the people of Israel on the very day of the exodus. We have to remember that the Jewish day began and ended at 6 o'clock in the evening. So all the events of the evening and the following morning took place on the same day. The Passover lamb was slain, the blood was applied, the feast was celebrated and the people left Egypt.

This day ended almost four centuries of slavery for the Israelites. It was the birthday of a nation, similar but much more dramatic than Israel's declaration of independence in 1948. This first day of the new Jewish year, God brought His people out with a mighty hand. On this day, the strong man was bound and his possessions were carried off, to use Jesus' words.¹⁵⁴ This day was the dawn of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The way to celebrate this event was to eat bread without yeast, which means to live a life without sin.

The day the Israelites were leaving, the fourteenth day of their New Year, God gave them a glimpse of the whole picture. They were not only leaving Egypt, the land of slavery, they were going to Canaan, the Promised Land, the land of freedom and abundance, the land flowing with milk and honey. In Egypt they had been slaves, in Canaan they would be the masters. In Egypt they were the victims of the powers of darkness, in Canaan they would be the judges over nations that had filled the measure of their iniquity to the brim. Egypt had basically been a desert place that was kept alive by the flooding of the River Nile. Canaan was naturally fertile. It had lush pastures for cattle and an abundant flora. The cattle would produce more milk than man needed and the bees would suck honey in abundance from a world of color and aroma. Thus they were given the full picture of God's plan of salvation. This picture was framed in the oath God had sworn to the patriarchs. The frame was as precious as the picture itself. God's promise guarantees freedom, dignity and rich sustenance. But God also knew how short of memory man can be. That is the reason the facts of salvation must be commemorated and fed upon.

There is also in vs. 5 a suggestion of victory. The mention of the five nations that inhabit Canaan indicates that those who occupy the land will have to be conquered before Israel can live there. This victory is the result of the Passover celebration. The author of Hebrews states that the death of Jesus destroyed the power of Satan and makes those who are redeemed victors over death.¹⁵⁵ Israel's slavery in Egypt was maintained by the fear of death that the enemy inspired. The people of Canaan lived in bondage of fear and had therefore surrendered themselves to the occult. The victory over the inhabitants of Canaan was just as much the result of the blood of the lamb as the exodus was.

Eating of the unleavened bread was not meant to be an exercise in ascetics and privation. The emphasis was not on the absence of yeast but on the Lord. A life of purity and sincerity does not consist in a series of negatives. It begins and ends with a festival to the Lord. It is the Lord's feast to which we are invited. God wants us to participate in His joy. In the world of sin, death, and corruption, the joy of the Lord is our refuge, as Ezra and Nehemiah stated.¹⁵⁶ The idea that sin means to have fun is satanic propaganda. The joy of the Lord surpasses all human joy.

Vs. 8 continues the line that started in the previous chapter. We read there: "And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?'"¹⁵⁷... and here "On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" The memory cannot be kept alive merely by the observance and explanation of the ceremony. Unless the eating of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is backed up by a life that demonstrates the values that are represented in the ceremony, the passing on of the tradition will be meaningless.

Children will ask questions on the basis of what they see. And children have a good intuitive sense for discrepancies. God intends this father-son dialogue to be for the benefit of both. Not only does the son need to understand the foundation for his father's life of purity and sincerity, but an impure and insincere father will have a hard time facing the questioning eyes of his child. As fathers, we have to keep the memory alive, both for ourselves as well as for the sake of our children.

This question and answer session is part of the theme of this chapter which is the Lord's command: "Consecrate to me every firstborn male." Only a father who is consecrated himself can truly consecrate his son. And a son will only be effectively consecrated if he has a clear role model.

¹⁵⁴ See Matt. 12:29

¹⁵⁵ See Heb. 2:14,15

¹⁵⁶ See Neh. 8:10^a

¹⁵⁷ ch. 12:26

Unfortunately, the history of Israel does not bear this out. Some sons were even consecrated as burnt offerings to Moloch.

The way Moses expresses it in vs. 8, he fully expected the men who were leaving Egypt to be the ones that would enter Canaan. If the Pentateuch were the product of some post-captivity Levite author, as the Higher Criticism supposes, it would be hard to imagine that this verse would have been written in this way. These must, therefore, be the very words Moses spoke as the Israelites were in the process of leaving Egypt. He wanted the men who were leaving to be aware of the historical importance of the moment.

Unless salvation is a conscious, living experience for us, there will be little stimulus for obedience in our lives. At this point the Israelites had seen little yet of God's love. God's judgment over Egypt must have made a deeper impression on them than anything else. The mighty hand of God was visible to them. But although the love of God could be deduced from the fact that He had spared them, the word "love" had not yet been used. Later in the Old Testament God reveals His deep emotional involvement with Israel. Jeremiah, for instance, prophesied: "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.'" ¹⁵⁸ Jesus emphasizes the fact that love is the basis for obedience. In John's Gospel, He says: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." ¹⁵⁹

The image of the sign upon the hand and on the forehead is used more often in the Pentateuch. In Numbers, the tassel on the garment is added as an exterior reminder of the spiritual condition that is required. ¹⁶⁰ But in this chapter, Moses speaks figuratively. Here the Israelites were not required to literally tie the tephillin and phylacteries on their hands and foreheads. They were to obey as if they had a constant reminder before their eyes. About forty years later, Moses repeated those words to those who had survived the journey through the desert. We read in Deuteronomy: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." ¹⁶¹ The orthodox Jews have taken this literally and they still walk around with miniature scripture verses in little containers tied to their hands and forehead. It is doubtful that Moses intended his words to be taken that literally and it is certain that he never meant them to substitute outward ornaments for wholehearted obedience.

The images that are used speak of the three-fold character of obedience. The hand carries out the command; the head consents to it and the lips testify about it. If we reverse the order, the hand will often be left out. Obedience does not even start with the head. Since sin disturbed the harmony of our being, we have to act out God's commands even before we understand them. We learn the wisdom of God in doing what He demands. The fact that the head follows the hand doesn't mean that our brain is left out. It is a popular misunderstanding that religion excludes intellect. It is true that fellowship with God is not dependant upon our IQ, but having communion with the source of all wisdom and knowledge is the most intelligent thing a person can do.

Moses used the word "reminder" in this context. An old lady in the church we belonged to used to say: "My brain is the thing I forget with!" We are forgetful people. Even if we have gone through experiences that have turned our lives around, we tend to lose sight of them. Sin erases memories or distorts them. Unless we tie the Word of God on our forehead, we forget from where we came, where we are, and where we are going. It is important that we keep the facts of salvation straight. If Israel in the desert had remembered where they came from and how they had left Egypt, they would never have uttered the nonsense about the Lord leading them into the desert to die. If the Word of God is not on our forehead, we will be deceived by the propaganda of the devil who bombards us with "the hard facts of daily life."

The fruit of our lips grows in the soil of obedience and remembrance. There is a danger of counterfeit in our speaking. Some people can bore us to death by quoting Scripture. The difference between what is genuine and what is fake is in obedience. If we don't see the difference ourselves, our son, to whom we are supposed to tell these things, will.

¹⁵⁸ Jer. 31:3

¹⁵⁹ John 14:21,23

¹⁶⁰ See Num. 15:37-40

¹⁶¹ Deut. 6:6-9

The repetitions in this chapter give to it a poetic character. Moses does not simply repeat himself, because every time a theme is stated twice, a new thought is added, or it is combined with a theme that was given before. In verses 11-13, the promise of Canaan is combined with the consecration of the firstborn. There is in the word “firstborn” an allusion to our Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrection. There is a parallel between the firstborn of the first creation and the firstborn of the new creation. The first creation ends in death for all living beings; the new creation begins with the resurrection of the dead. The link between the two is the death of the Lamb of God. It is through the substitution of His death for ours that we become redeemed people: the firstborn of a new creation. If we share in His death, we also share in His resurrection. That is the reason Paul calls Jesus: “the firstborn from among the dead.”¹⁶²

It is interesting to observe that, from all the animals, Moses singles out the donkey. The donkey was a ritually impure animal that was specifically designated to carry burdens. The verse suggests that we redeem our donkeys. God, evidently, does not want us to carry our own burdens.

Another repetition is the projected dialogue between a father and his son. In the previous chapter we read: “And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’”¹⁶³ And here we read: “In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’” Ever since God created man, children have asked their parents questions. That is, evidently, the way God made children and that is why God gave them parents. We are to answer our children’s questions about life and most of their question will be generated by what they see us do. In all this we are to be God’s representatives. Through us, our children are to learn what God is like. Our fatherhood is modeled on His fatherhood. He is the real Father and we are fathers who derive our fatherhood from Him. In the same way, motherhood is an image of His life-giving and tender loving character.

The lesson the son must learn from his father was, in the first place, that redemption from slavery is brought about by substitution. When God’s judgment passed over Egypt, those who were not included in the judgment that killed the lamb, died. Those to whom the blood was applied stayed alive. The son had to understand that he was alive because someone else had died in his place. Every time a firstborn animal was sacrificed to the Lord, he was reminded of this fact: death for him means life for me.

The real Passover took place at Golgotha. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ will keep us in the judgment to come.¹⁶⁴ Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”¹⁶⁵

There are applications of the blood of Christ to our life, other than salvation from judgment; those are elaborated upon in the Book of Leviticus. Redemption means much more than not dying. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have become “man” in the full sense of the word: bearers of the image of God, eternal, glorious beings.

In vs. 16, Moses uses again the expression of the sign on the hand and on the forehead, but this time in the context of the father-son dialogue. It is the son who has to learn obedience and gain understanding because of the fact that he too was saved by the blood of the lamb, just as his father was. He may not have been alive yet when God’s judgment passed over Egypt, but judgment is not limited to one particular phase of world history. The apostle Paul says: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...”¹⁶⁶ The wrath of God is just as much an eternal attribute as is His love. It is not bound to space and time. We all need continuous protection from it. Disobedience means that we withdraw ourselves from this protection.

Verses 17-22 are actually part of the narrative of chapter fourteen. The verses describe the tactical maneuver God lets the Israelites carry out, both for their own benefit as well as for the defeat of the enemy. There is a shortcut from Egypt to Canaan, which most of us are not allowed to take. Very few people are saved and taken up to glory on the same day. Most of us are kept on earth for years and decades to fulfill the specific purpose God has for our lives. He wants to use us to defeat the enemy. Since Satan insulted God through man, God uses man to crush him. War, however, has to be learned. Nobody is born a hero.

The first reason that God told the people to go in the direction of the Red Sea instead of straight to the country of the Philistines was so that they would learn to conquer their fears. The first victory God wants us to gain is over ourselves. The NIV states that the Israelites went out of Egypt “armed for battle.”

¹⁶² Col. 1:18

¹⁶³ ch. 12:26

¹⁶⁴ See I Thess. 1:10

¹⁶⁵ John 5:24

¹⁶⁶ Rom. 1:18

The KJV uses the word: “harnessed.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The word here translated ‘harnessed,’ is generally thought to mean either ‘with their loins girded.’ or ‘in military order’ ... Ewald, who inclines to the latter of these two senses, suggests that, strictly, it means ‘in five divisions’ — viz., van, center, two wings, and rearguard. The word is, apparently, a derivative from *khamesh*, five.’ ”

It sounds contradictory that Israel would march out of Egypt like an army geared for battle and that, at the same time, they would be afraid to fight. But if we understand anything about the human soul, we have to admit that we are not often what we seem to be. We may be harnessed on the outside and trembling on the inside. The important thing is how we act, not how we feel. God knows all this. That is the reason He made His people deviate from the straight line to Canaan in order to attend His festival in the desert. If we let the Holy Spirit work in us, we will eventually become what we are meant to be. If we place this verse next to Paul’s description of the armor of God¹⁶⁷, we see that the outward parts have become spiritual elements. Truth, righteousness, readiness and all the other values are part of God’s character that cover and protect us. Ultimately, we will become what we appear to be outwardly. We should, therefore, not be too concerned about our fears and feelings of inadequacy. Eventually they will catch up with God’s reality in our lives.

Vs. 19 states that Moses took the bones of Joseph with him when Israel left Egypt, in accordance with Joseph’s last wishes. We read in Genesis: “And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, ‘God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.’”¹⁶⁸ The last verse of the Book of Genesis states that Joseph was embalmed and laid in a coffin. So it must have been Joseph’s mummy which was carried out of Egypt. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* assumes that the embalmed bodies of Israel’s other sons were carried out at the same time. He bases this thought on Stephen’s word in Acts, where we read: “Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.”¹⁶⁹ But in the Book of Joshua, we only read about Joseph’s burial.¹⁷⁰ How the other brothers were buried in Shechem is one of the unsolved mysteries of the Bible.

Joseph’s prophecy about the exodus had, evidently, been preserved as part of Israel’s heritage throughout the centuries of slavery. At the time of Joseph’s death, return to Canaan had, probably, no longer been an option for Jacob’s descendants. Either their position in Egypt had already worsened to the point where Pharaoh’s hold on them prevented their departure, or the people had settled so comfortably in Goshen that the idea of pulling up their roots did not even occur to them. Whatever the circumstances, Joseph’s last will and prophecy must have come as a bombshell. It did not fit in the circumstances of that time. It took four centuries of hardship and oppression to make the people see that God’s Word was relevant after all. Whenever the matter of the relevancy of the Word of God comes up, as it does in every century, we have to remember that God speaks to us out of eternity. To think that God’s Word would be irrelevant to us, because we cannot see beyond the limitations of today is the dumbest conclusion a man can draw. The exodus was part of God’s eternal plan of redemption. A long chain of promises and prophecies to the patriarchs proves this.

From the very beginning of the journey till the very end, the people receive a token of God’s presence with them. A visible cloud, which turns into a pillar of fire when it gets dark, goes with them for their guidance and protection. This physical evidence of God’s presence is called “the angel of God” in ch. 14:19. The pillar of cloud and fire is mentioned several times in the Old Testament.¹⁷¹ When Israel was not traveling, the pillar rested upon the tabernacle.

It is not easy to determine where Etham, the first encampment of the people on their journey to Canaan, is located. The first verse of the next chapter states that God orders the people to turn back toward the Red Sea. But we are also told that God did not lead them on the road through Philistine country. This would mean that they did not initially move in a northeastern direction. It could be that vs. 20 simply repeats what was said in vs. 17 and 18 and that there was no double turn but just a move in the direction that would be considered the wrong way by anyone who know the way. The purpose of this false maneuver

¹⁶⁷ See Eph. 6:10-18

¹⁶⁸ Gen. 50:25

¹⁶⁹ Acts 7:16

¹⁷⁰ Josh. 24:32

¹⁷¹ See Ex. 16:10; 33:9; 40:36; Num. 9:17; 10:11; 12:5; 16:42; Deut. 1:33; 31:15; Neh. 9:12; Ps. 78:14; 105:39; Isa. 4:5

was to draw Pharaoh out to the place of his destruction. So Etham was probably somewhere between Ramses and the Red Sea.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The location of the next encampment of the Israelites, near Pi Hahiroth between Migdon and the sea, is hard to pinpoint. Some scholars take the sea to be the Mediterranean. *The Pulpit Commentary* places the camp close to the Bitter Lakes. It is clear that the place was so chosen to make Pharaoh think that the Israelites had lost their way. The choosing of this route defied all human logic. God brought the Israelites purposely in a situation that was desperate from a human viewpoint, a situation from which they could only be saved by a miracle.

The purpose of the plan was two-fold: God set a trap for Pharaoh and He wanted to demonstrate to Israel that the mode of their journey through the desert would be supernatural. As far as Pharaoh was concerned, God's plan was one hundred percent successful. With the Israelites, the Lord was less successful. This is the tragedy of the book of Exodus and of the whole Old Testament: those who had seen God's miracles and experienced His delivery, were the least open for it.

Nothing is as trying to the human mind as to have to depend on a miracle. No matter how many proofs of God's power and faithfulness we receive, we feel extremely uncomfortable with the supernatural.

We say that it is unpleasant to have to depend on a miracle, but we should not forget that God informed Israel ahead of time of what would happen. The only surprise element was God's method. Our situation differs from the one in which Israel found itself only in that we have more of the Word of God than they did; we have as much trouble adjusting to a walk with God in a supernatural way as they did: maybe even more.

When Pharaoh was informed about the apparently erratic way Israel wandered around, he reacted exactly the way God wanted him to. Spiritually, he was beyond the point of return. His master, Satan, wanted to destroy him and he cooperated wholeheartedly. Pharaoh realized that he had consented at the spur of the moment during the Passover night, but he had recovered sufficiently from the sudden death of his son to admit that had he acted foolishly in letting Israel go, and Pharaoh's officials agreed with him. They too had lost a son in the recent past, but in retrospect that seemed to be a small price for the convenience of the slave labor they had enjoyed. Above all, they still had no clear concept of YHWH, the God of glory who had struck them ten times.

So the Egyptian army was mobilized, as Pharaoh ordered the preparation of six hundred of the best chariots and an untold number of others. The king planned the recapture of his slaves in a scheme that would be comparable to a superpower in our present age. In comparison, the Israelites did not have a chance. The Bible tells us that they were "marching out boldly" (vs.8). The KJV reads: "the children of Israel went out with an high hand." It was not human courage, but the hand of the Lord that made them move. The opposing forces were not the Egyptian army and the people of Israel, but the powers of darkness versus God Almighty. The divisions of Egypt were a visible force of highly trained and well armed elite troops, while humanly assessed, the Israelites did not have a ghost of a chance. But the hand of the Lord was there to deliver them.

We read in the story of Elisha and his servant during the siege of Samaria: "When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. 'Oh, my lord, what shall we do?' the servant asked. 'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, 'O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.' Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."¹⁷² And Zechariah says: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."¹⁷³ In spite of the outward appearance, the Egyptians were doomed to lose: they faced the forces of Omnipotence.

Several days may have elapsed since the Passover night. After the departure for Succoth, the Israelites turned south and went toward the Red Sea. It would have taken a few days for word about Israel's erratic behavior to reach Pharaoh and again the mobilization of the Egyptian army would have taken time. Jewish tradition places the crossing of the Red Sea at the 21st day of Abib, which is one week after the Passover. The feast of unleavened bread would have just ended.

¹⁷² II Kings 6:15-17

¹⁷³ Zech. 4:6

Pharaoh's last campaign against Israel is attributed to the hardening of his heart by God. We have to remember, though, that this does not annul Pharaoh's personal responsibility for his acts. He had allowed himself to sink so deeply in his sin and obstinacy that a return to healthy thinking and normal behavior was out of the question. He must have intended to frighten the Israelites into surrender. He may have planned to kill some of the leaders as an example for the others, but what he wanted was a multitude of slaves, not two million dead bodies. Israel's fear that they would all be killed by the Egyptians was groundless. Their panic was even less rational because of God's prophecy to Moses about what would happen. They did the right thing in crying to the Lord, although they would have cried differently had they trusted Him and believed His Word. But we cannot always keep our emotions under control, and the wisest thing we can do under such circumstances is to cry to Him for help.

The Israelites' problem was that they blamed Moses for the situation. Vs. 11 and 12 say: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" They said in fact: "We didn't want to be saved. We are worse off now than we were in our slavery in Egypt." The fact that they could see the cloud of God's glory in front of them didn't seem to make the slightest difference. God was not more authentic to the Israelites than He was to the Egyptians. Actually, we can be in the presence of the Lord and be completely oblivious of it. The worst thing sin does to us is to make us blind and deaf. If we cannot see God in our circumstances and hear His voice, we are no better off than a person who is born deaf and blind. But even Helen Keller learned to communicate, so there is hope for us too. We can learn the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

In Revelation, those who had been victorious over the beast stood at the shore of the sea of glass and fire. They had not crossed that sea yet, and in terms of time and space the Antichrist was still alive and well on earth. They sang their song of victory before the events, not on the basis of their experience, but by faith. That is the difference between the two incidents. We should belong to those who sing the song of Moses, because for us it is the song of the Lamb. We shall see more about this when we get to chapter fifteen.

After the terrible accusations and complaints the newly redeemed Israelites bring to Moses, he initiates them in the life of faith. The first thing he says is: "Do not be afraid." We find these very words twenty-three times in the Bible. Every time a human being has an encounter with God, he is afraid because of his sin. Adam says to God: "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."¹⁷⁴ It wasn't until Adam had been covered by the skin of the animal that died in his place that his fear could subside.

The responsibility of the Israelites in this last battle was three-fold: they had to conquer their fears, they had to stand firm, and they had to keep quiet. As we have seen, fear can be conquered only on the basis of reconciliation; it is related to our fellowship with God. John says: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."¹⁷⁵ The Israelites had not yet learned to love God.

The second requirement was to stand firm. The Egyptians expected the Israelites to surrender and to give up the freedom they had gained. However, God had placed them in a position of freedom, and they were not allowed to give up one inch of this. In application, we learn that it is not up to us to gain ground but to hold on to what God has given us. Paul explains in the epistle to the Ephesians that the purpose of the armor God puts at our disposal equips us to be able to stand our ground and to stand firm.¹⁷⁶ The enemy will never be able to take what God has given us, but he could intimidate us to the point where we draw back.

The third requirement was to be still. This was the hardest of all. To be still means, in the first place, that we refrain from negative sentiments. The Israelites accused Moses of bring them to die in the desert, and complain that they preferred their slavery in Egypt. This kind of talk had to be cut out.

But being still before God has a positive meaning that goes far beyond all that is negative. There is a silence of intimacy that has to be learned and practiced. David says: "But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me."¹⁷⁷ And God says:

¹⁷⁴ Gen. 3:10

¹⁷⁵ I John 4:18

¹⁷⁶ See Eph. 6:10-18

¹⁷⁷ Ps. 131:2

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”¹⁷⁸ The principle of being quiet and seeing the Lord’s victory is also evinced in Jehoshaphat’s victory over Moab and Ammon.¹⁷⁹ Silence can be the most eloquent expression of confidence and worship.

When God said to Moses in vs. 15, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on,” He did not necessarily imply that Moses lacked faith. The crying out referred to the people. They would never have said those words if they had had any confidence in God. Actually, they had not cried to God at all. They had demonstrated against Him. Vs. 11 says: “They said to Moses ...,” but they were accusing God of ulterior motives of the lowest kind – as if the whole exodus had been nothing but a plot to kill them!

The opposite of faith is suspicion. God is either perfectly good or totally bad; He cannot be a mixture, as humans are. We must affirm constantly what James says: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”¹⁸⁰

We might believe that the best thing the Israelites could have done in their panic was to pray, but God wanted them to act instead of pray. There are moments when God wants us to act on His promises and when prayer is a sign of unbelief. Most of the time our Lord shows an abundance of patience and understanding. In the case of Gideon, God went beyond the limits of patience to build up Gideon’s faith.¹⁸¹ And the writer to the Hebrews assures us that “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are; yet was without sin.”¹⁸² But there are also moment when God is amazed about our lack of faith. The Gospel of Mark says: “And he [Jesus] was amazed at their lack of faith.”¹⁸³ After all, the exodus with all the miracles that accompanied it was no small thing. The Israelites had seen enough evidence of God’s power to be convinced. It seems that the Egyptians had taken God more seriously than God’s own people.

God opened a way of escape where there was none. Mark the order of events: First, the Israelites had to move toward the sea and then Moses has to raise his staff to divide the water. They were to see the proof as they journeyed. It was only after they had made up their minds to go that God opened the way. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,”¹⁸⁴ says the author of the Hebrew epistle. But as we exercise faith, that is act upon it, the invisible will become visible. God promises that the path through the sea will become dry.

In vs. 21 we read that the miracle was brought about by a natural phenomenon, in a similar way that the miracles of most of the plagues in Egypt took place. God doesn’t use magic, but He uses the laws of nature. This should be reassuring to our western mind! The sea was driven back by a strong east wind which may have been a huge tornado that moved above the water and sucked it up so that a dry path occurred, flanked by two enormous walls of water. The fact that the people were not sucked up also, which would be the case with normal tornadoes, could be explained if the people moved in the eye of the storm, which could be several miles long. We do not read that they had to wrestle with the wind or that they were even aware of a storm. The most miraculous aspect of the miracle was the timing of it.

As soon as the mass of people was set in motion, the Lord explained to them what the reaction of the Egyptians would be. In their stupidity they would disregard the miracle and march toward their own death. Twice in this chapter the Lord described this with the words: “I will gain glory.” It may be hard for us to understand how death can glorify God since death is the result of a broken fellowship with God. Death is God’s last enemy. It belongs to the realm of Satan. The writer of Hebrews says: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death; that is, the devil.”¹⁸⁵ Since His resurrection, the key of death and its kingdom is in Jesus’ hands. We read that Jesus says: “And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”¹⁸⁶ The fact that human death can be glorifying to God is implied in John’s Gospel: “Jesus said this to indicate the

¹⁷⁸ Ps. 46:10

¹⁷⁹ See II Chr. 20:15-17

¹⁸⁰ James 1:17

¹⁸¹ See Judges 7:10-15

¹⁸² Hebr. 4:15

¹⁸³ Mark 6:6

¹⁸⁴ Heb. 11:1

¹⁸⁵ Hebr. 2:14

¹⁸⁶ Rev. 1:18

kind of death by which Peter would glorify God,"¹⁸⁷ and the psalmist says: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."¹⁸⁸ Since life is our most treasured possession, the sacrifice of it is to the glory of God. But we cannot say that Pharaoh and his army willingly gave their lives to the God of Israel. In this instance the glory consists in the fact that God uses Satan's own weapon against him to defeat him. God confirms this in the eradication of the whole army of Egypt "The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen" (vs. 18). The dead soldiers would instantly stand before the throne of judgment, and when the news of the disaster reached Egypt the whole nation would have to recognize that YHWH was not a local Israelite deity, but the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty God. Pharaoh's question in chapter 5:2: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go?" would be answered once and for all.

In vs. 19 we read that the glory of God moved from the front of the Israelite army to the rear. The dark side was turned toward the Egyptian army and the light toward Israel. This prevented the Egyptians to move forward during the night and made it possible for the Israelites to prepare themselves for the crossing of the sea.

The verse makes a distinction between the angel of the Lord and the pillar. I do not think this is important enough to build theories upon regarding the mode in which God manifests His glory. The importance is in the effect it has upon man. Whether we walk in God's light or in darkness depends on which side we are. If we belong to the people who have been redeemed from slavery, the light of God will shine upon us and protect us; if we are under the dominion of darkness, God's presence will be darkness for us also. Jesus says to His disciples: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."¹⁸⁹ Those words describe the condition in which Israel and Egypt found themselves at this point.

Israel must have started their crossing somewhere in the middle of the night, and, as the pillar of fire and darkness moved on, the Egyptians must have followed them into the sea. We read that the LORD looked down during the last watch of the night, which is about four o'clock in the morning, about two hours before daybreak, and threw the Egyptians into confusion. The bottom of the sea which had been hard enough to support people and cattle marching, proved to be too soft for the "tanks" of the Egyptians.

Adam Clarke quotes Ps. 77:17-20, which reads: "The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." If the psalmist gives a literal description of the crossing, it means that a tornado moved down to a lower level and started strafing the Egyptian army, which was thrown in utter confusion.

A Sunday School teacher of liberal persuasion tried to explain away the miracle of the crossing of the Red Sea by suggesting that the sea had no more than a few inches of water when Israel crossed it. One of the pupils raised his hand and asked the teacher to explain the miracle of the whole Egyptian army drowning in two inches of water.

Within minutes a whole army of several hundred thousand was exterminated. Previously, the Israelite baby boys had been drowned in the Nile to curb the population explosion, and now the murderers meet their nemesis in the kind of graves they had prepared for their slaves.

The Lord's victory over Israel's enemy was complete. They would never have to be afraid of the Egyptians again. They witnessed the events; they saw from a distance how the thunder and lightning came down upon the Egyptians when Moses stretched out his staff over the sea and how the tornado that had protected them moved away, making the water rush over the army. When the sun came up they saw the dead soldiers and their officers and probably Pharaoh himself washed ashore.

On this day, a part of God's prophecy to the serpent was being fulfilled: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."¹⁹⁰ The enemy got a foretaste of what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ would do to him. He must have shuddered.

¹⁸⁷ John 21:19

¹⁸⁸ Ps. 116:15

¹⁸⁹ John 11:9,10

¹⁹⁰ Gen. 3:15

The chapter concludes by saying: “And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” It sounds as if the people entered a new phase in their understanding of spiritual things. The evidence convinced them that God and Moses had always been right. Unfortunately, this conviction was not lasting. Their doubts were subdued for the moment; they were not eradicated.

Such is human nature. There are very few Bible characters who believed consistently. Joseph and Daniel are examples of this, but they too, probably, had doubts that were never recorded. The only perfect example of consistent faith is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The people feared the LORD and trusted Moses. The distinction is significant. This fear is the realization of who God is; the One Karl Barth called: “the totally different One.”¹⁹¹ God is beyond our human understanding. We cannot even conceive the extent and content of His eternal being. This fear is the experience of finite mortals in the presence of the Eternal and Immortal One.

But God revealed Himself to Israel also through Moses. Moses was the link of faith between Israel and YHWH. In this he was an image of Jesus Christ. The people trusted Moses, at least at that moment. Just as Israel approached God through Moses, and received God’s Word through Moses, we put our faith in God’s Son, Jesus. He said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”¹⁹² Peter and John testify about Him: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”¹⁹³

At the moment of victory, the whole congregation burst into a song of praise: the song of Moses.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The opening words of this chapter: “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD,” would indicate that Moses is the composer of this hymn. It is the first great hymn in the Bible, although not the first sample of poetry. The first preserved example is Lamech’s song of revenge.¹⁹⁴ Next to this we have the much more lofty blessing Jacob pronounced over his sons in Gen. 49. Lamech may have sung his abusive poem, but it is doubtful that Jacob’s words were put to music. Moses’ song leaves not doubt about the music or instrumentation. We may even say that it is the first specimen of a ballet in the Bible and probably in world literature.

In our Western, eclectic, world poetry and song are rarely spontaneous. Songs, “Lieder,” Opera and Oratorio are usually the fruit of arduous word and time consuming labour. In a certain way literacy clutters the mind and does some damage to the brain. In my experience with primitive, illiterate tribes in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, I have noticed that these people have a much sharper memory for words than do the readers of the Western world. They also have a much more developed gift of spontaneous poetry than we do. The mountain tribes we worked with could rise to any occasion and improvise chants and songs.

If we, therefore, doubt that Moses and the Israelites could have burst out spontaneously into a song like this hymn, we judge the situation from a world that is centuries removed from the facts. I believe that the Song of Moses was composed at the spur of the moment and performed without any rehearsal.

And, if we consider the fact that the Lord was present and the Holy Spirit was at work, we can say that Moses’ song was inspired in the highest sense of the word.

Poetry expresses reality to the core. It takes the facts and builds them into monuments. It places time in the light of eternity and reveals the true meaning of things and events. That is why the symbolism of the book of Revelation is poetry in its highest form. All real poetry is revelation, and real revelation is poetry.

The song of Moses is incorporated in the song of the Lamb,¹⁹⁵ as Revelations tells us, and thus it is preserved throughout eternity.

The Pulpit Commentary gives the following interesting division of Moses’ song: “The song divides itself primarily into two parts: - the first (vers. 1 - 12) retrospective, celebrating the recent deliverance; the second (verse. 13 - 18) prospective, describing the effects that would flow from the

¹⁹¹ Der ganz Andere

¹⁹² John 14:6

¹⁹³ Acts 4:12

¹⁹⁴ See Gen. 4:23, 24

¹⁹⁵ Rev. 15:3

deliverance in future time. The verbs indeed of the second part are at first grammatical preterits; but (as Kalisch observes) they are 'according to the sense, futures' - their past form denoting only that the prophet sees the events revealed to him as though they were already accomplished. Hence, after a time, he slides into the future (vs. 16). The second part is continuous, and has no marked break: the first subdivides into three unequal portions, each commencing with an address to Jehovah, and each terminating with a statement of the great fact, that the Egyptians were swallowed up. These three portions are: 1. verse. 2 - 5, 'The Lord is my strength,' to 'They sank into the bottom as a stone.' 2. verse. 6 - 10, 'Thy right hand, o Lord,' to 'They sank like lead in to mighty waters.' 3. verse. 11 - 12, 'Who is like unto Thee, O Lord,' to 'the earth swallowed them.' The first verse stands separate from the whole, as an introduction, and at the same time as the refrain. Moses and a chorus of men commenced their chant with it, and probably proceeded to the end of vs. 5, when Miriam, with the Hebrew women, interposed with a repetition of the refrain (see vs. 21). The chant of the males was resumed and carried to the close of vs. 10, when again the refrain came in. It was further repeated after vs. 12; and once more at the close of the whole 'song.' Similar refrains, or burdens are found in Egyptian melodies."

Vs. 1 states the theme and refrain, as *The Pulpit Commentary* remarks. The victory over the Egyptian army was obviously the Lord's doing. Moses had announced already in ch. 14:14 the battle was the Lord's; all Israel had to do was to be quiet.

The song is dedicated to the Lord. We read: "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD." The NIV reads: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted." The KJV and RSV translate it with: "He hath triumphed gloriously." Literally the text says: "He is gloriously glorious." The NIV is more correct, but since the context of the song is victory over the enemy I prefer the way the KJV renders it. "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea" (vs. 1). The hymn is put in the first person, as if the whole drama was a personal experience for Moses, or as if it was only Moses' experience that was important. In a certain way this was true. Paul puts it this way in First Corinthians, where he says: "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."¹⁹⁶ Not only did God look upon the whole people of Israel as one body, one person, but He treated them as one person in Moses. What happened to Moses, happened to the nation. Obviously, the picture points to Jesus Christ and to our relationship with God in Him. God considers that we died and rose, because He died and rose. We are accepted by God through Him.

In the same way are those who are lost, wrapped up in one man: "The horse and its rider ..." It is again the apostle Paul who understood this better than any of the writers in the Bible: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned"¹⁹⁷ God knows only two men: Christ and Adam. The whole of humanity is represented by those two. Adam was the first man of the old creation that fell; Christ was the last Adam and the first man of the new creation.

Adam Clarke remarks correctly: "And when it is considered that the whole of this transaction shadowed out the redemption of the human race from the thralldom and power of sin and iniquity by the Lord Jesus, and the final triumph of the Church of God over all its enemies, we may also join in the song and celebrate Him who triumphed so gloriously, having conquered death and opened the kingdom of Heaven to all believers."

At the end of the Bible, we find evil personified again in a horse and its rider, portraying the Antichrist. In Revelation John says: "I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest."¹⁹⁸ This man is hurled here into the sea. God's wrath reveals itself at last. For an extended period of time God had been very patient with Pharaoh, the man who had asked the question: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go." (ch. 5:2) God had shown His patience in dealing with Pharaoh, as we saw in ch. 9:15-17, where God tells the king: "For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. You still set yourself against my people and will not let them go." God takes Pharaoh with his horse, his whole army, and all the chariots, and hurls him into

¹⁹⁶ I Cor. 10:1,2

¹⁹⁷ Rom. 5:12

¹⁹⁸ Rev. 6:2

the sea. The Egyptians did not just drown; they were cast into a boiling pot of churning water, twisted around by a tornado, while peals of thunder and bolts of lightning crashed around them. This day of wrath came with an awesome display of divine power.

Vs. 2 expresses in a rich and poetical way different aspects of our relationship with God. Literally it says: "My strength is Jah ... He has been to me for salvation, I will build him a sanctuary."

This is the first time the name "Jah" occurs in the Bible. *The Pulpit Commentary* considers it to be an abbreviation of the name Jahweh. But *Adam Clarke* is of the opinion that it is a name with a meaning of its own. He says: "It is worthy of observation that the word which we translate Lord here is not Jehovah in the original, but Jah. Jah is several times joined with the name Jehovah, so that we may be sure that it is not, as some have supposed, a mere abbreviation of that word. See Isa. xii. 2; xxvi. 4." Then he goes on to explain that this is the name Jesus used in John 8:58 when He said: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" David uses the same thoughts and words as Moses in the Psalms: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"¹⁹⁹ Moses recognizes that it is the Lord who gained the victory over the Egyptians, but in calling the Lord "my strength" he makes the Lord's victory his own. "The Lord is my strength" is, at the same time, an admission of our own weakness and a claiming of His victory for ourselves. Salvation does not merely mean that we escaped the power of the enemy, but that we are victors over him. Or, as Paul puts it: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."²⁰⁰

Calling the Lord "our song" also means more than that we praise Him with our songs. It implies that we have no song in ourselves. If "Jah" stands for the person of Jesus Christ, it means that He is our means of praise before the throne of God. His sacrifice for us becomes our sacrifice of praise for God. Three of the five sacrifices prescribed in the first chapters of Leviticus were sacrifices of praise. They had nothing to do with sin that had to be atoned for. Yet, all the sacrifices in the Old Testament portrayed the death of Jesus on the cross. Evidently, He died not only to pay for our transgressions (and He did not only take our place in God's judgment over the human race), but He also, and foremost, became our praise before God. Our depravity becomes nowhere clearer than in the fact that we have nothing in ourselves to praise God, but at the same time it is the glory of our humanity that we praise Him with the highest gift that exists. Even angels do not have this gift. Our praise before the throne is richer than that of any other creature in heaven.

Just as with the song, where God is not just the theme to be sung or the content of the song but the song itself, so with salvation. Moses, and Israel with him, sing: "He has become my salvation." God does not merely save or give salvation. Salvation is not a thing but a Person. Our status of being saved cannot be detached from the Person of God. Albert B. Simpson discovered this principle and expressed it in his hymn: "Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord." Just as in a marriage all the material and emotional benefits for either spouse are part of the union between two persons, so it is with our fellowship with God. Paul says this also: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God; that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."²⁰¹

"He is my God" is a matter of choice; "my father's God" is a matter of heritage. Without the personal choice and the surrender that is implied in this the heritage would be useless. The personal choice makes the heritage the richer. In using the words "my father's God" Moses refers evidently to God's revelation to him at the burning bush. God had said to him: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (ch. 3:6).

The phrase "I will build Him a sanctuary" has baffled commentators. Some believe it refers to the coming encounter on Mount Sinai and the subsequent construction of the tabernacle, or even to the building of the temple when the people arrive in Canaan. The NIV and RSV circumvent the problem with the translation "I will exalt Him." There seems to be some question about the text. The Septuagint has "I will glorify Him"; at this place and several other old translations concur with this. There is no reason, though, for not taking this phrase literally. We should not forget that the choice of words is ultimately up to the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit of God knows that the only way to exalt God is to become God's dwelling place. The tabernacle and the temple were only outward expressions of a spiritual reality. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman: "A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will

¹⁹⁹ Ps. 27:1 (KJV)

²⁰⁰ Rom. 8:37

²⁰¹ I Cor. 1:30

worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”²⁰² And several times the apostle Paul emphasizes that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.²⁰³

But before we can build God a house with our lives, He has to build us one. This He did when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That is why God says to David, when David wanted to build the temple: “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you.”²⁰⁴

“The Lord is a warrior.” This phrase is not a designation of God’s character. When Gideon meets the Lord and receives his call to defeat the Midianites and Amalekites, he builds an altar which he calls “the LORD is peace.”²⁰⁵ The designation of God as a warrior does not drag God down into the realm of human strife either; however, it does mean, , that God resists attacks upon His glory and holiness.

Satan had insulted God through Pharaoh, and God’s response to this taunt was that He had hurled the horse and its rider into the sea. But this does not put God on the same level as the enemy. God’s power can never be compared to any human manifestation of power. It is ridiculous when people talk about the United States of America as “the strongest nation on earth,” or when we try to compare the strength of arms with the omnipotence of God. A nuclear explosion may wipe out part of mankind and of our planet, yet, next to the Word that created heaven and earth, it is like a “puff.”

Isaiah says: “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” Says the Holy One. ‘Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.’²⁰⁶ “The LORD is a warrior” is an understatement.

But Moses does not simply say that the Lord is a warrior; he connects this designation to the Name of God: LORD, Jehovah, YHWH. God is Israel’s protection against the power that wants to destroy her. The cloud and column of fire were an impenetrable shield. God’s people are beyond the reach of the gates of hell. When William of Orange was asked on whom he counted for assistance in the struggle of the Netherlands against the army of the king of Spain, he answered: “I have made an alliance with the Potentate of all potentates.” To this faith treaty Holland owes its independence till this very day.

Vs. 4 and 5 work out the theme of the hymn further: “The horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea” becomes “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.” This is the reaction of the Warrior to the aggression of the enemy. The tornado picked up the whole army and dropped them like a brick.

If *The Pulpit Commentary* is correct, it is at this point that the women join the praise under the direction of Miriam. They add to the hymn by introducing tambourines and dance. Vs. 20 tells us “Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.” Only four women in the Old Testament are called “prophetess”: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and the wife of the prophet Isaiah. We find no other utterances by Miriam, that would qualify as prophecy, besides in these verses. The implication seems to be that she was, at least in part, responsible for the composition of this hymn, and since here words are practically identical to what Moses and the men sang, it could be that she was the actual author. This is not the place to elaborate on the theme of “women in the ministry” but it is obvious that there is a place for women in the ministry. Often women carry the heavier burden in the functioning of the body of Christ.

Being a prophet or a prophetess means that the Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the person and that he or she becomes a vehicle of the Word of God. Miriam may not have been consistent in her fellowship with the Lord, as is understood from her criticism of Moses,²⁰⁷ but she played a vital role in this history of revelation. She was crucial in getting her little baby brother introduced to Pharaoh’s daughter and in the arrangement of having him nursed by his own mother. Moses would never have

²⁰² John 4:21,23,24

²⁰³ See I Cor. 3:16,17; 6:19; Eph. 2:21

²⁰⁴ II Sam. 7:11

²⁰⁵ Judges 6:24

²⁰⁶ Is. 40:25,26,28

²⁰⁷ See Numb. 12

become what he was without his older sister. Here she is, taking seemingly a second place, but probably playing the key role in the victory celebration.

This is the first time in the Bible that music and dance are introduced in the worship of God. They were probably part of the heathen celebrations in Egypt. Miriam teaches us that fellowship with God involves the whole person: body, soul and spirit. Miriam found a more excellent way to express the joy of victory than anybody else in Israel.

The verses 6 -10 give us the second stanza of the hymn. The thoughts are parallel to the first verses, but they are repeated poetically, with small changes and additions. The emphasis is on the right hand of God and on His breath, that is the hurricane or tornado that pushed the water up and later back.

The right hand of God is symbolic for His omnipotence, specifically in connection with redemption. This is, of course, an anthropomorphism, which is used here for the first time in the Bible. God does not need hands to do things as humans do. The image conveys the idea that, as a man uses his right hand to perform acts that require strength, so God shows His strength in the deliverance of His people. No offense is meant to left handed people here. As I am writing this I am drinking coffee from a mug with the inscription: "If the Right side of the body is controlled by the Left side of the brain, & the Left side of the body is controlled by the Right side of the brain, the LEFT HANDED people are the only ones in their RIGHT MINDS!!!" This is not the place to elaborate upon this century-old controversy and the jokes that are made about it. The discovery that left-handedness is not a handicap is only a recent one. Since the majority of people is right handed, this has been considered the normal thing for ages. Well, God is neither right or left handed; He is just omnipotent.

God's right hand is the same hand that is mentioned in ch. 13:3,9 where we read: "Then Moses said to the people, 'Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast.' " "This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

There are at least sixteen references to the right hand of God in the book of Psalms, all in connection with God's power to save. It has been said that the work of creation is attributed to the finger of God, as in the verse: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place"²⁰⁸ but the image used to describe salvation is "the right hand of God."

One of the most beautiful references to the miracle of the exodus is found in Isaiah: "Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people; where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them, Who sent his glorious arm of power to be at Moses' right hand, who divided the waters before them, to gain for himself everlasting renown, Who led them through the depths? Like a horse in open country, they did not stumble; Like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name."²⁰⁹

What happened at the crossing of the Red Sea is an image of the Day of Wrath which is to come at the end of time. The apostle John received a glimpse of this when he describes the day of judgment. In Revelations we read: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."²¹⁰ At that point too men and angels are thrown into "the lake of fire," which is called: "the second death."

Whether the boast of the enemy, as described in vs. 9, is really what the Egyptians thought or planned to do with Israel, or whether this expresses the fear of the Israelites, is not clear. It is doubtful, as we mentioned before, that the Egyptians would have massacred the Israelites. What they wanted was live slaves, not dead bodies.

Another element is introduced in vs. 7. Besides the water and the wind there is the fire of God's wrath which burns up the enemy like stubble. The image is a very vivid one, especially for people who had to work with straw to make bricks. Both the straw and the brick are present in this song. Throughout the years of their slave labor the Israelites may have held the bricks in their hands and, at some occasions, hurled them to the ground in their frustration. Here they see God hurl and crush the bricks He made. The people must have realized how much God had shared their anger and frustrations.

²⁰⁸ Ps. 8:3

²⁰⁹ Is. 63:11-14

²¹⁰ Rev. 20:11

In this third stanza, (vs. 11,12) which was probably preceded again by the repetition of the refrain by the women, Moses makes a comparison between God and other gods. This is the first time we find this thought in the Bible. Beginning here, it runs as a long thread through Israel's history, culminating in the beautiful and powerful language of the prophet Isaiah: "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" Says the Holy One.²¹¹ The judgment over the gods of Egypt, as announced in ch. 12:12, is completed here. Satan was made to understand at this point what was in store for him at the end of time.

Vs. 12 says: "You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them." If this is literally what happened, the storm and flood must have been accompanied by an earthquake. But since we read in ch. 14:30, "and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore," "The earth swallowed them" could be just a poetical way of describing the drowning. Or part of the army disappeared below the chasms of the earth during the quake, and the lighter part that did not wear metal harnesses was washed ashore.

The verses 13 - 18 comprise the second part of the ode. It describes prophetically the effect the recent events will have upon the nations, both in a positive and in a negative sense.

The stanza starts with the phrase "unfailing love," or, as the KJV translates is, "mercy," and the RSV "steadfast love." This is the *hesed*, the content of the covenant God made with His people. It is the essence of the relationship that is legally binding. God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and their resurrection from the dead, symbolized in the passing through the Red Sea, is part of God's covenant.

We have to remember that Israel was not saved and rehabilitated for her own benefit only. An important part of God's covenant with Abraham, maybe the most important part, was: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."²¹² This same principle was implied in the charge God gave His people at the foot of Mount Sinai, when He said: "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (ch. 19:6). Just in the same way as the apostle Paul saw his own conversion and salvation as an example for others, so God wanted to use the nation of Israel to show the world that He loves and saves. In Paul's words we read: "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."²¹³

Israel was to be the nation through whom God revealed Himself to the whole world. This revelation was not meant to be a condemnation. Jesus Himself said: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."²¹⁴ If Israel's salvation turns out to be a cause for the nations to tremble, it is not because God did not want to save them, but because they did not want to be saved. This is the basis of the fear of the surrounding nations which Moses' hymn speaks about.

The "holy dwelling" in vs. 13 is, primarily, the place of God's presence. This would include the revelation on Mount Sinai as well as the place God would choose later in Canaan. Although in the context of this hymn a certain locality was probably intended, the essence is the presence of the Lord and not the place. Any place on earth can be holy ground when God reveals Himself. The place of revelation loses its worth when the presence of the Lord departs. Ezekiel describes this in his prophecy when he sees the glory of the Lord leaving the temple and the city of Jerusalem, as the spirit leaves the body, leaving behind a dead body which decomposes. After this vision the Babylonian army comes and destroys the city and the temple.²¹⁵ Even heaven would be empty if it were not for the presence of God. As Asaph said: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you."²¹⁶

As the hymn approaches the end it increases in intensity and power. The nations mentioned: Philistea, Edom and the inhabitants of Canaan become representatives of the world that is in the power of the Evil One. God's children pass by under divine protection and enter into the promised land. Moses reaches beyond the boundaries of Canaan as he comes to the climax of the hymn. From a group of miserable slaves who are bought into freedom by the blood of a lamb, God's children become an army that marches into a glory which goes far beyond any earthly situation. They march out of time into eternity, out of earth into heaven where "the LORD will reign for ever and ever" (vs. 18). Canaan was only a picture of the mountain of God's inheritance.

²¹¹ Is. 40:25

²¹² Gen. 12:3

²¹³ I Tim. 1:16

²¹⁴ John 3:17

²¹⁵ See Ez. 8 - 11

²¹⁶ Ps. 73:25

“The LORD will reign for ever and ever.” The demonstration of God’s power over Pharaoh and over the powers of nature was a sample of what God could do in the Kingdom of Heaven. The experiences the Israelites went through put things into the right perspective for them. What looks overawing in the framework of time takes on different dimensions in the light of eternity. When we are oppressed by earthly powers, we seldom realize what is behind it. All power is derived from God. All oppressive power has lost sight of its source. That is the corruption of power. Lord Acton’s dictum was: “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This is not actually correct since it is the short short-sightedness of the one in power that makes him corrupt. Any man who constantly reminds himself of the fact that he received his power from an outside source, and that he will have to give account of what he did with it, will use his authority wisely. The corruption is not in power itself, but in the human heart.

The Israelites finally realized that the whole structure of human powers and kingdoms was a statue with feet of clay. The only true power is the LORD.

This section ends with a recapitulation of the events and the introduction of Miriam and her choir. As we have seen already, the women played probably a much more important role in all this than we would guess from the few words in vs. 21, 22.

The whole hymn is like the testimony of a person who recently received salvation in surrendering his life to Christ and is expressing the exuberant joy of the new-born Christian. It echoes the joy of the angels in heaven when one sinner returns home. Unfortunately, this joy does not continue as a constant experience; we find that the edge of it soon dulls when it has to cut through what we call “the hard realities of daily life.” But the facts never change. The only thing that changes is our emotions which are the least important part of our spiritual experience. Life on earth gives us a foretaste of heaven, but not heaven itself. Initially we begin with the song of Moses, and we will conclude with the song of Moses and of the Lamb, but for most of us there is a long, difficult road in between.

The last part of this chapter, from verse 22 through 27, would fit better in chapter 16 since it tells the beginning of the journey in the wilderness.

There are three sections to be observed:

- 1- The experience at “Marah” (vs. 22-25),
- 2- God’s admonition and promise (vs. 26), and
- 3- the arrival at Elim (vs. 27).

Soon after the euphoric outburst at the eastern border of the Red Sea, the Israelites enter the Desert of Shur, which is called Etham in the book of Numbers.²¹⁷ There they face the hard reality of daily life. The myth that life with the Lord is an endless string of joys and victories is shattered. They must have had some reserves of drinking water, but at the end of a three-day trek into the barren land this runs out. As *The Pulpit Commentary* points out, the reserves were probably barely sufficient for the humans, and at the end of the three days, some of the cattle may have already started to die. So the grumbling, which had been an ever-present factor, even in Egypt, raises its head again. It is directed at Moses, who is held responsible for everything even though it is beyond his control. The trust in Moses, recorded in ch. 14:31, has already evaporated. If Moses had staked his reputation upon public opinion polls, he would have been the most miserable man in the world. As a matter of fact, any man who lets his behavior be determined by opinion polls will be miserable. The important factor in our life is not what people think of us, but what God thinks.

Hunger and thirst were originally safeguards God built into our bodies to keep us functioning normally. Without hunger we could starve to death, and without thirst we would die even faster from dehydration. The Lord permitted Israel to experience on a physical level the importance of eating and drinking, of craving the most essential things in life, in order to teach them that the same laws govern spiritual life. Moses expresses this lesson in Deuteronomy where he says: “He [God] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”²¹⁸

The greatest hindrance to spiritual growth and increase in our fellowship with God is a lack of spiritual thirst and hunger. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”²¹⁹ And Jesus says:

²¹⁷ Num. 33:8

²¹⁸ Deut. 8:3

²¹⁹ Ps. 42:1,2

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”²²⁰ It is not God’s unwillingness to bless that is the obstacle, but our lack of interest. The psalmist says: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.”²²¹

The key issue in all this is faith, that is trusting God in the dark, knowing that God is reliable in spite of circumstantial evidence to the contrary. That seems to be the point of vs. 25. We read: “There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them.”

Even in our present day, there appear to be water holes in that area of the desert where the water is undrinkable because of its extremely bitter taste. Some commentators speculate about the kind of wood Moses was told to use in order to make the water palatable. But the kinds of wood that would have a natural ability to sweeten water do not grow there now. They are either extinct or they never were there and it would have taken tons of wood to sweeten the thousands of gallons of water needed to quench the thirst of two million people with their livestock. When we read: “Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet” (vs. 25); it seems that only one branch of a tree was used to perform the miracle.

God did not make the water bitter; that was the natural condition. He made it sweet and usable. It has been suggested that the piece of wood Moses used was an image of the cross of Christ. We have to be careful not to over-spiritualize this story, but the analogy is there. It is through the death of Christ on the cross that our thirst is quenched. There is, however, no magic in the wood, neither of the piece Moses threw into the water at Marah nor in the wood of the cross on which Jesus died.

What the Lord is saying to the Israelites at this point is that as He healed the water, so He will heal them. The Israelites had as much bitterness in their hearts as in their mouths. They came out of slavery that had robbed them of all their human dignity. They went through physical duress in their trek through the wilderness. They resented this. Bitterness makes a man sick. God promises them here that He will heal their emotions as well as their bodies. The way of healing is the way of obedience. As sickness and death came into this world through disobedience, so healing and life will come via obedience. The basis is the obedience of Christ. Paul says this in Romans: “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”²²² But individual healing is the result of personal obedience.

Bitterness and resentment implies blaming God for the world we are in, for the condition of our lives and for ourselves. It is the basis of all sickness. “If God is love, why?” God promises to heal. *Jehovah-Raffa*, “the LORD who heals you” will make us into a grateful person who gives thanks in everything. “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”²²³

Vs. 25 says specifically that the experience at Marah was a test for the Israelites. It would have been as easy for God to change the water before Israel arrived at that place as afterwards. But He waited to see what the reaction of the people would be. God is not subjected to our circumstances. He can change them at will, but He cannot change us without our consent. God wanted Israel to know that they failed the tests so that they would get a better understanding of their own inner condition. The important matter was not the bitter water or the arid desert, but the human heart. We tend to project our misery upon our circumstances, so the blame will not fall upon ourselves. It is true that we live in a desert and our drinking water is bitter, but our hearts are drier than desert and more bitter than the water of Marah. Unless we understand this and cry to the Lord as Moses did, we will not be changed.

God says to Israel in vs. 26: “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.” The emphasis, as far as our responsibility to God is concerned, is to listen and obey. Our eyes deceive us, but our ears do not. Faith is by hearing, not by seeing. Therefore, Paul says in Romans: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”²²⁴ And Jesus says to Thomas “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”²²⁵

²²⁰ Matt. 5:6

²²¹ Ps. 81:10

²²² Rom. 5:19

²²³ I Thes. 5:18

²²⁴ Rom. 10:17

²²⁵ John 20:29

Furthermore, that verse shows us that most of the healing is preventative. God will keep away from us the sickness that plagued the Egyptians. But most of all, the healing is in our relationship with God. The literal translation of *YHWH-Raffa* is not “I am the LORD, who heals you,” but, as the RSV translates it: “I am the LORD, your healer.” God does not give healing, He is healing.

As a foretaste of what such fellowship with God entails, God leads them to Elim with its twelve springs and seventy palm trees. Fellowship with God is like an oasis in the desert. It is like a feast in enemy country. As David said: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”²²⁶

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

When this chapter starts, the people of Israel have been on the road for exactly two months. The Passover feast had taken place on the fourteenth of the first month and they arrive at the desert of Sin on the fifteenth of the second month. Grumbling starts again. They could have commemorated their deliverance from Egypt, but they grumble instead. As a matter of fact, this time they make a comparison between the abundance of Egypt and the scarcity of life in the desert, and they come to the conclusion that slavery was much better than freedom. “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (vs. 3).

It is amazing how distorted their memory had become in such a short time. The execution of little children is never mentioned. The backbreaking labor is completely forgotten. The only thing they remember is those few minutes when they cooked and ate their food after laboring from sunrise till sunset. Evidently that is what they lived for. The vividness of this memory indicates that they probably had been starving. I remember the last year of World War II when we went through a period of severe starvation in Holland. I went to bed in the evening with the comforting thought that I would eat one slice of bread the next morning. “The pots of meat” were proof of their starvation.

The complaint suggests at the same time that the enemy takes better care of his victims than the Lord does of His children. There is no expectation that the Lord is going to provide. Even after the miraculous experience of Marah and the feast of abundance at Elim, the hand of God has not become a reality to them. They connect the hand of the Lord with the punishments that had rained down on the Egyptians, and they wished that they had fallen victim with their enemies. They had no inkling what the history of salvation was all about. Here is God leading them from Egypt to Canaan, and they mark their road with monuments of grumbling and resistance.

In Hebrews we read: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.”²²⁷ This verse shows that what God is doing with Israel is a picture of the way of salvation for us. God was leading His sons to glory, and this road was, by necessity, connected to suffering. The apostles and the Christians in the early church understood this quite well. We read in Acts that Paul and Barnabas went around, “Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith [Saying:] ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’”²²⁸ Israel never connected her hardship with the glory to come, and many Christians in the New Testament dispensation show an equal lack of understanding. Unless we keep our eyes on the glory to come, our suffering in the present will not make sense.

As usual, the problem is not what the Israelites think it is. They believe that the crisis is caused by a lack of bread. As it turns out, there was no lack of bread. For forty years the Lord would rain down on them enough bread to daily feed about two million people. Bread and meat were not the problem, the people were. The Lord says clearly that the point of it all was to test the people. The fact that their stomachs get filled in the meantime is incidental.

The implications of this principle are profound and far reaching. We tend to think that money or methods are the problems in the Lord’s work. The monuments of prayer of the nineteenth century built by George Mueller and Hudson Taylor and Albert Simpson prove the contrary. Where people melted before the Lord, the means kept coming. It is as A.M. Bounds says in one of his books on prayer: “Men

²²⁶ Ps. 23:5

²²⁷ Heb. 2:10

²²⁸ Acts 14:22

look for better methods; God looks for better men.” In order to become better men, God puts us to the test. Our reaction is grumbling. But James says: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”²²⁹

The purpose of the testing in connection with the manna the Lord would provide was two-fold: God wanted the people to trust Him for the Sabbath, and He wanted them to understand that bread was not all there was for them.

When the manna started coming down, the people started gathering it in an opportunistic manner. They did not trust the promise of God that there would be manna again the next day; so many kept some for tomorrow, and they found out that yesterday’s manna stunk. Then they did not trust the Lord that the manna of the day before the Sabbath would keep and that there would be no manna on the Sabbath. They only trusted their eyes. They did not know what hope means. Paul says: “We live by faith, not by sight.”²³⁰ And in Romans we read: “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”²³¹

Our trouble is always with tomorrow. Even if God takes care of us today, we tend to put away reserves for tomorrow, “because you never know!” The hardest thing for us is to put our trust in the Word of God. Hence the warning of the writer to the Hebrews: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”²³²

The second point the Lord wanted His people to understand is expressed by Moses in Deuteronomy, where he says about the incident we are studying: “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”²³³ Without hunger the people would never have appreciated the miracle of the manna, and without the manna as a picture of eternal things, we would never have known that real life is supernatural.

Here we come to some of the most profound statements of our Lord Jesus Christ in His discourse in John. The meaning of the manna is nowhere better explained and put in its right perspective than in Jesus’ sermon in John. Jesus calls the manna “food that spoils.”²³⁴ He also says that the real manna is not a thing, but a person: “For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”²³⁵ Finally, Jesus presents the sin question and the atonement that is necessary when He refers to His death. It is in appropriating to ourselves His sacrifice for our sin that we live eternally and that our mortal bodies will be raised. This is implied in statements such as “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”²³⁶

It is obvious that these truths would have been far beyond the comprehension of the Israelites in the desert. Because of their disobedience, they could not even understand the basic truths of what was happening to them; but even if their obedience had been perfect, they would still have been unable to grasp God’s total plan of salvation. The mystery of God becoming Man dying for the sins of the world was still hidden beyond the horizon of time. This Gospel is ours today.

²²⁹ James 1:2-4

²³⁰ II Cor. 5:7

²³¹ Rom. 8:24-25

²³² Heb. 13:5,6

²³³ Deut. 8:3

²³⁴ John 6:27

²³⁵ John 6:33, 35

²³⁶ John 6:53-58

After having said all this, let us have a closer look at chapter 16. The people grumbled because they were hungry (vs. 1-3). God promised them bread (and meat) and He told Moses that the purpose of the experience was not physical satisfaction, but spiritual obedience. (vs. 4,5). Vs. 6-9 give us a condensation of several communications. Moses and Aaron spoke to the people, Moses gave instructions to Aaron, and Aaron addresses the nation. In vs. 10-12 we read that the Lord appears personally and speaks to Moses, announcing that not only bread, but also meat will be given to the Israelites. Vs. 13 and 14 describe the miracle of the quail that invaded the camp, enough to feed the whole nation and of the manna that appeared in the morning. Vs. 15-31 describe the reaction of the Israelites to the manna, and we read the instructions that were given to them as to how and when to gather it. Vs. 32-34 tell us that a jar of manna was kept in front of the tabernacle, as a reminder to future generations of the miracle that kept the Israelites alive.

The last two verses, 35 and 36 are obviously an editorial addition, since they mention the time after Moses' departure and they give an explanation regarding the "omer" which was probably no longer used as a measurement in later centuries.

Now we shall go back to the beginning: Vs. 1-3. The grumbling of the people was directed against Moses and Aaron, as if they were to be held personally responsible for what happened to the nation. At the moment of deliverance at the shore of the Red Sea the whole nation joined in to praise the Lord. But when trouble came God faded out of the picture completely. Evidently, the supernatural was only connected to pleasant experiences. It never dawned on the people that some supernatural experiences may not be pleasant to mortals at all. They forgot that to the Egyptians, God's supernatural intervention was fatal.

Later prophets suffered severely because of the Word of the Lord that was communicated to them. We read about Jeremiah's emotional struggle because of the Word of God. Ezekiel suffered depression and paralysis because of the Word. Daniel fainted in an encounter with the angel Gabriel, and John said: "When I saw Him I fell at His feet as though dead."²³⁷ The idea that suffering is part and parcel of the Gospel of salvation is still foreign to us.

On the other hand, this grumbling must have been very hard on Moses and Aaron. They were being held personally responsible for the suffering of the people, as if the exodus had been their doing. We do not read about any personal crisis the two brothers went through, but from Moses' words in vs. 6: "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt," indicate that the criticism had affected them deeply.

We tend to equate serving the Lord with success. If church attendance goes down the pastor is blamed. Statistics should show growth. Paul had his most successful ministry in prison. The churches he planted have disappeared, but his epistles have emitted blessing throughout the centuries. As servants of the Lord, we have to constantly cast our burdens upon Him, our burdens of success or of the lack of it.

In vs. 4 and 5 God told Moses that He would give bread and that He would use the blessing as a test of obedience. Obviously, the test consisted of the promise that the provision would be on a daily basis and that there would be no gathering on the Sabbath.

We do not know what the manna was. There is no record of its appearing anywhere else in the world or that it can still be found in the Sinai peninsula in our time. It was God's surprise provision for His people for the time they crossed the desert.

In giving the manna, God suspended the curse of sin which Adam had incurred upon himself and the human race, which is recorded in Genesis: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."²³⁸

There is probably no more God-forsaken place on earth than a desert. The curse has come to its end there. Even "by the sweat of [his] brow" man cannot grow and eat food there. It is at this place of death which Moses called "the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions,"²³⁹ that God blesses with life sustaining elements in a supernatural way. This life out of death foreshadows the resurrection from the dead.

²³⁷ Rev. 1:17

²³⁸ Gen 3:17-19

²³⁹ Deut. 8:15

The Israelites were amazed at the sight of the miracle, but, for some of them at least, it did not increase their confidence in God. They wanted to build up some reserves, so they need not worry about tomorrow and they did not have to trust the Lord. God is a daily provider. In the Lord's prayer "Give us today our daily bread," the emphasis is on daily. The Lord says in the same context specifically: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."²⁴⁰ I am not arguing against savings accounts and other kinds of provisions for the future. The point is whether we trust in the Lord or in something else. We have God's promise that He will take care of us. That means He wants to use for that purpose is up to Him.

The second testing concerns the Sabbath. On the sixth day the people were to gather twice as much manna as normal, and on the seventh day they were to rest. On the Sabbath the curse is broken completely. The Lord Jesus says that the Father works on the Sabbath. When the Jews accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath by performing a miracle of healing, He answers: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."²⁴¹ It is true that, after completing creation, God rested on the seventh day, according to Genesis.²⁴² But, evidently, when man fell into sin, God immediately started to work on the process of salvation. But here, in instituting the Sabbath, God wants His people to go back to the original condition before the fall and enjoy creation and life in fellowship with Him to the full. So on the Sabbath the curse was lifted twice.

Apparently in vs. 6-8, Moses and Aaron are addressing representatives of the people, because in the following verses Aaron speaks to the whole nation of Israel. The point is that the exodus was not the work of a human agency, but of God. From our perspective it seems hard to understand that the Israelites would not have comprehended this. How could the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea be explained as natural phenomena? By leaving God out of the picture life could not have made sense for them.

Yet, the Israelites were not doing anything worse than what modern man is doing. Looking back over my life and my time on the mission field, I could say that I have been lucky and successful up to a point. But, unless I see the hand of the Lord in recurring miracles for which I find no natural explanation, my life would not make sense. The problem with Israel, as we have seen already, was that, in grumbling against Moses and Aaron, they "barked up the wrong tree." Their grumbling and complaining was directed to God, the One whom they had left out of the picture. And griping to God is serious business. Only people who have no inkling of Who God is would dare to grumble against Him. Once we stand before the great white throne and see the One from Whose presence earth and sky flee and no place is found for them to hide,²⁴³ we will have no inclination whatsoever to grumble or mutter.

The first miracle was the coming of the quail. There is another account about an invasion by quail in Numbers.²⁴⁴ That occurrence took place one generation later. It seems, therefore, that the quail did not come on a daily basis as the manna did, but that this was a treat that was given to the people once, or maybe a few times and then stopped.

As Aaron addressed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all (vs. 9-10). The presence of the Lord had always been visible in the pillar of fire and the cloud. But, just as in ch. 14:19, a distinction is made between the cloud and the presence of the Lord. We are given no details as to what the Israelites actually saw, but it must have been obvious to them that they were in the presence of God Himself.

The Lord confirmed what Moses had said already, that the grumbling of the people had been misdirected. It was God at Whom they had been angry, not man. It is strange that man hardly knows himself and understands very little of his own actions. Much of our anger against other people is anger with ourselves or with God. We do have a right to be angry about sin and unrighteousness, and we should be angry with ourselves about the fact that we are sinners, but we should not blame God for our condition or for our own actions.

In vs. 12 we read that the feeding of the nation should bring about the knowledge of God. God says: "Then you will know that I am the LORD your God." The statement is meant positively. God reveals Himself to the people, not as One who is angry about their grumbling, but as their Provider. But

²⁴⁰ Matt. 6:34

²⁴¹ John 5:17

²⁴² Gen. 2:2,3

²⁴³ Rev. 20:11

²⁴⁴ Num. 11:31,32

at the same time, this blessing should bring Israel to their senses and give them reason to bow their head in shame. It is primarily the goodness of the Lord that brings man to repentance and not the fear of hell.

There could be given a natural explanation to the phenomena of the quail. But, if the first arrival of the birds equaled the second feeding, as described in Numbers, the sheer quantity of birds would exclude the theory of a coincidence in the realm of the laws of nature. Vs. 31 says: "It brought them down all around the camp to about three feet above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction." That is not normal!

As far as the manna is concerned, there is no indication where that came from, or what it could have been. In his book *Worlds in Collision*, Veliskowsky proposes a theory about Venus coming into our solar system as a comet and that the sweeping of Venus' tail over the surface of the earth would account for some of the phenomena described in the Pentateuch and Joshua. There is, however, no way to prove this. Even if Veliskowsky is correct, it would be miraculous that the manna fell only in the desert where the Israelites happened to be travelling. On the other hand, I do not believe in magic. God works with the laws He established Himself. With some we are familiar; we call them laws of nature, others belong to the miraculous, as far as we are concerned. But none of them are magic.

So, the fact that six days of the week the manna would spoil if it was kept till the next day, but on the Sabbath it would not, defies human logic.

Evidently the very word "manna" means "what?" The Hebrew word is *mahn*. Moses answers the question with: "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat." The Israelites are told to go and gather the manna at the rate of about one "omer" per person. The NIV says in a footnote: "That is, probably about 2 quarts (about 2 liters)," which is a large quantity of food for one person. It means that the Israelites were not going hungry. Then the food is measured after each person has done his gathering. We are not told exactly how this worked, but from an interesting quotation by the apostle Paul, we understand that every person who did the gathering contributed his harvest to a larger pool from which it was redistributed. The way Paul inserts the quote it in II Corinthians, there was not a miraculous increase for those who had not gathered enough, nor a miraculous decrease for those who had too much, but a fair redistribution. We read: "At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, As it is written: 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little.'"²⁴⁵

Vs. 19-21 deal with the daily gathering of the manna. As we mentioned above, this made God the focus of their security instead of the reserve of manna. Having one's security in God instead of in material things means that we make ourselves dependent upon a miracle. In the natural this is the most unpleasant experience we can have. It takes a lot of spiritual maturity to rejoice in such a condition, that is, before the miracle happens. This attitude towards life was the key of the work of George Mueller, who built this monument of faith by caring for five orphanages simply by daily praying for the needs of the day. These verses suggest that God expects us to have this kind of attitude toward Him as a part of the normal Christian life.

What is true of the sustenance of physical life is true, too, of our spiritual relationship with God. God wants to feed us spiritually on a daily basis. Yesterday's blessings will stink if we try to feed upon them for today. Moses was angry with the Israelites when they tried to keep the manna overnight. We should understand that God wants us to take His blessings on a daily basis. As a child that is drinking his mother's milk does not get yesterday's supply in a bottle, but drinks it directly from the mother in this most wonderful physical contact between mother and child, so we should daily "taste and see that the Lord is good!"²⁴⁶ In the darkest moment of history Jeremiah says: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."²⁴⁷

Vs. 22-30 deal with the gathering before the Sabbath. The people started gathering double portions the day before the Sabbath, and this fact is reported to Moses by the leaders of the people. It is not clear why the leaders reported this. It almost sounds as if the people knew more than their leaders did, but that is not very likely.

The word "Sabbath" is used for the first time in this chapter. Previously, the Bible only spoke once about the "seventh day" in Genesis.²⁴⁸ There is no indication that God meant the patriarchs to

²⁴⁵ II Cor. 8:14,15

²⁴⁶ Ps. 34:8

²⁴⁷ Lam. 3:22-23

²⁴⁸ Gen. 2:2,3

observe this day and there is no record of it that they ever did. So the first time the Sabbath is mentioned as a day of rest is in connection with the gathering of the manna. This connection between the supernatural feeding of the people of Israel and the first mention of the Sabbath gives a great depth to this episode. The writer to the Hebrews works this out quite extensively in ch. 4:1-13. God wanted His people, not only to feed on Him daily, but also to enter into His Sabbath rest. He wants us to fellowship with Him and enter into His joy.

Whether this means that the Sabbath was not observed till that time we, do not know. There are many points that are stated in the Ten Commandments that were, obviously, practices long before they were written down. So it could very well be that the observance of the Sabbath had been part of the Jewish tradition long before the law was given on Mount Sinai.

It isn't until the journey in the wilderness starts, however, that God reaches out beyond the problem of sin and redemption toward His perfect rest and invites His children to join Him in the rest and joy He experienced when creation was young and perfect.

One amazing feature of the Sabbath is also that the law of corruption is conquered. The manna did not stink on the Sabbath. Bodies decompose in the absence of life. It is the presence of life that keeps decomposition away. God's life is present in the Sabbath and that is why the manna keeps.

We read in vs. 27, "Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none." Those people were like the women who went to Jesus' grave on the morning of His resurrection to whom the angel said: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?"²⁴⁹ Those people incur God's wrath. We read in vs. 28 and 29, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.' " And so for some of the Israelites the Sabbath became a day of confinement, instead of a day of joyful rest. They act as if they preferred to labor by the sweat of their brow.

One of the main objections by the Jews of His time against Jesus' ministry was that He did not observe the Sabbath. There are numerous references in the Gospels about healings Jesus performed on the Sabbath. Jesus introduced a concept of the Sabbath that was completely new to the people. In Matthew's Gospel He says: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."²⁵⁰ In Mark He explains: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."²⁵¹ Luke states that the Sabbath should be the day "par excellence" when people would be freed from all the consequences of sin. When He heals the woman with the bent back he says: "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"²⁵²

In the desert God wanted the Israelites to look back to what the world was like before sin came. In the Gospels Jesus wants us to look forward to what the world will be like when sin is done away through His death on the cross and when the consequences of sin are conquered. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and the rest He gives is the real Sabbath rest.

Vs. 31 says: "The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey." We find some further information about the manna in Numbers: "The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down."²⁵³ But at that point the miracle had lost its novelty, and the people even complained about it. Later we read, "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost; also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!' "²⁵⁴

What can we say about such a fickle attitude toward the miracles God pours out upon us? The danger that we get used to the miracle and do not experience God's grace as something new every day can kill all traces of spiritual life within us. It is no sin to enjoy good food, but to complain about the food God

²⁴⁹ Luke 24:5

²⁵⁰ Matt. 12:8

²⁵¹ Mark 2:27

²⁵² Luke 13:16

²⁵³ Num. 11:7-9

²⁵⁴ Num. 11:4-6

gives us opens the door to all kinds of spiritual dangers. The proverb says that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. It seems that the devil knows that way also and uses it frequently.

But there are all kinds of miracles we can get used to. Imagine that God who sits on the throne says to us: "I am making everything new!"²⁵⁵ and we answer: "Déjà vu!"

Vs. 31-34 tell us that a jar of manna was gathered and kept as a memorial for future generations of the miracle God had performed. It was placed "in front of the Testimony" which, obviously at that point, meant in front of the two Stone Tablets. But later it was placed in the ark. According to Hebrews the jar in which the manna was kept was a gold jar.²⁵⁶ Whether this jar was preserved through the centuries and only disappeared when the ark disappeared, we do not know. Who knows! if ever the ark turns up again, the jar of manna may also be found.

Ch. 16:35 says: "The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan." As mentioned before, Moses, who died before the people witnessed the end of the miracle, cannot have written this verse.

It is hard to imagine the sheer magnitude of this miracle. The feeding of a multitude of over two million people takes a mammoth human organization. The Lord took this whole organization upon Himself as if it were the easiest thing in the world. And for God it was. God wants us to understand that our food and clothing are the least of His problems. Jesus says: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"²⁵⁷ God's own real problem is our unwillingness to let Him save our souls. We have the awesome power to resist.

²⁵⁵ Rev. 21:5

²⁵⁶ Heb. 9:4

²⁵⁷ Mat. 6:25

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In this chapter we are given two dramatic accounts of God's dealing with Israel. Vs. 1-7 tells us about the water provision from a rock and vs. 8-16 about the victory over Amalek.

The story of the water from the rock has a special significance for me because the Lord used it to encourage me at a particularly difficult moment in my work on the mission field.

There are moments in our lives when we run into difficulty because of our disobedience. Israel's experience at Rephidim shows us that there can be moments when we face severe difficulties because of our obedience to the Lord. Vs. 1 tells us specifically that Israel's coming to Rephidim was a result of their obeying the command of the Lord. This point is of the utmost importance in our understanding of this Scripture portion.

Very often we misunderstand the nature of our problems. The Israelites thought that the problem was a lack of water. This turned out to be wrong. There was an abundance of water under the rock, but they were not aware of it. The real problem was that they doubted the presence of the Lord. We read in vs. 17, "they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'" Most of our frustrations and problems are related to this kind of doubt. Jesus expressed the essence of sin on the cross when He cried: "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'"-- Which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' "²⁵⁸ Sin has robbed us of our perception of reality. Jesus' experience of being forsaken by the Father happened when He carried away the sin of the world.

When we speak about the Lord's presence with us, we mean something different from God's omnipresence. In an objective way, God's presence fills the universe. But there is a sense in which we experience the presence of the Lord subjectively and enter into fellowship with Him. This presupposes a certain condition on our part, which has to do with the pardon of our sins and our being protected from the enemy. Israel had been under the protection of the blood of the Passover lamb ever since they left Egypt. When they tested the Lord in saying: "Is the Lord among us or not?" they tested this protection. They were actually at the point of withdrawing themselves from this protection. This may be the reason that the enemy could attack them in the rear, as we read in the second part of this chapter.

So what do you do when you find yourself without water as a result of your obedience to the Lord? The people of Israel took it out on Moses. We read that they quarreled with Moses. The KJV uses the word "chide" and the RSV says: "They found fault with Moses." Moses received the blame for this situation. God still had not re-entered the field of their vision. It wasn't even God's fault, it was Moses' fault. Moses' life was in danger because the people were at the point of wanting to stone him, according to vs. 4.

Withdrawing from God's protection through the blood of Jesus Christ over our lives severely damages human relationships. When the enemy gets his foot in the door, the unity is gone. If Israel had been aware of the presence of the Lord, they would have turned to Him to ask Him what the purpose of this test was.

We have seen before that God purposely brought the people into difficult circumstances to try them and to change their character. The impossible situation prior to the crossing of the Red Sea was one of those tests. The water at Marah was another test, and so was the hunger that preceded the provision of manna and quail. Israel could have gotten the point long ago had their eyes been open to the reality of their situation. But they did not know themselves; they did not know where they came from and where they were going.

The dialogue between the people and Moses should strike us as strange. We read in vs. 2: "So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?'" On the surface it seems that the request of the people is reasonable and that Moses shirks his responsibility by saying that it isn't his fault. Obviously, the argument is condensed and many more words were spoken than we read here. Moses must have reminded the people that God had taken care of them before in what were, seemingly, emergency situations. Therefore, they should turn to the Lord and ask Him for water instead of asking Moses. Moses' advice was rejected, and the people turned against him, at which Moses said: "You are putting the Lord to the test."

Again, the people uttered that horrible thought that it would have been better for them to stay in Egypt. They said to God, their Redeemer, that they never wanted to be redeemed; God forced them into it. God had given them life, but they could only see death.

²⁵⁸ Matt. 27:46

As an answer to Moses' prayer, God ordered him to give the people water in a way that becomes an object lesson. We read in vs. 5 that the Lord answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go." First of all, the miracle would be performed in the presence of witnesses. Some of the elders of the people were taken along. Then Moses had to walk ahead of the people in a rather demonstrative way; as if God is saying to Moses: "You are responsible! You are the leader of this nation." And finally he has to take with him the staff with which he struck the Nile. This is the staff that was called in ch. 4:20 "the staff of God."

The question arises why God singles out the striking of the Nile, which made the water turn to blood. Moses performed many other miracles with this staff, some of them more sensational. There must be a relationship between the bloody water of the Nile and the striking of the rock. The whole performance is heavy with symbolism. God could have let the water seep out of the rock without any striking, or just let the water run above the ground. It was important, though, that the rock be struck.

God said clearly to Moses: "I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." In striking the rock, Moses actually struck God Himself. It is through the striking of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is through His crucifixion, that we may drink and receive the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul says in I Corinthians: "And [they all] drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."²⁵⁹ When Jesus says to the Jews: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."²⁶⁰ He stands in the shadow of the cross. The living water, the Holy Spirit, could only flow out of Him because He gave His life for us on the cross. And again Paul links the crucifixion to the coming of the Holy Spirit when he says: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."²⁶¹

The striking of the rock elevates the whole incident of the people's thirst and their grumbling against God to the level of God's eternal plan of salvation. Israel's attitude is symbolic of man's attitude toward God. Man shakes his fist in God's face. God's answer is: "Strike Me." And in being struck, He saves us.

Israel's real thirst was not a thirst for water. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"²⁶² Just as man does not live by bread alone so he does not live by water alone. The real food is the Word of God and the real thirst quencher is the Holy Spirit. We only realize what we thirsted for when we learn to drink from His reality.

Moses' attitude here is quite different from the incident when history repeated itself almost forty years later. When Moses stands again before the rock, the feeling of awe he must have had the first time had left him. He thought, erroneously, that the power to produce water from the rock was his own. We read in Numbers, "He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?'"²⁶³ We should never lose sight of the cross. If God pours His power into our lives by the Holy Spirit, we must remind ourselves over and over again that it is because Jesus died for us.

The place where Moses struck the rock is called "Massah" and "Meribah," meaning "strife" and "testing." As we saw above, the Israelites put God to the test, but, also God put Israel to the test at the same time. We read: "In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah."²⁶⁴

The incidents, both this one and the one in Numbers are referred to several times in Scripture. Moses reminds the people of them in his farewell speech in Deuteronomy. In the Psalms God says through David: "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert."²⁶⁵

²⁵⁹ I Cor. 10:4

²⁶⁰ John 7:37,38

²⁶¹ Gal. 3:13-14

²⁶² Ps. 41:1,2

²⁶³ Num. 20:10

²⁶⁴ Ps. 81:7

²⁶⁵ Ps. 95:8; see also Ps. 106:32

But one of the most moving references is in the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet describes his vision of the water that trickles out of the sanctuary and becomes a large river of life giving water. He says: "On the south side it will run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah Kadesh, then along the Wadi to the Great Sea. This will be the south boundary."²⁶⁶ The water from the rock in the desert becomes the River of the Water of Life that flows from the throne of God. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb."²⁶⁷

Actually, the great miracle during the forty years Israel wandered in the desert is that there were only two times they were out of water. They must have found, most of the time, a water supply large enough to keep about two million people alive. Often, the greatest miracles are hidden in what we take for granted.

In the second part of the chapter, vs. 8-16, we read the account of the war with Amalek. This was the first war Israel ever fought. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau. According to Genesis, "Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek."²⁶⁸ So the Amalekites were distantly related to Israel, both being the descendants of Isaac.

The account of the attack is rather sketchy in the book of Exodus. When Moses retells the history to the next generation in Deuteronomy, we get a clearer picture of what actually happened. He says there: "Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!"²⁶⁹

So, Israel must have started to move again at Rephidim, since Amalek attacked in the rear and cut off the people who were going slowly; probably the elderly ones among the people. It must have been a sly and treacherous attack. The Amalekites did not confront Israel because they were infringing on their territory. Their plan to prey on the weak ones explains why the Israelites were so furious and why God's reaction was so severe. When, years later, Israel arrived at the borders of Edom and they are refused passage, they respected the objection of the Edomites and circumvented their territory. Evidently, such was not the case with Amalek.

Amalek is the image of Satan, who attacks the children of God in the back, in the area where they are unprotected.

Presumably, the Amalekites took prisoners from among the Israelites. We do not read that they actually killed people. Israel seems to have been completely unprepared for this kind of war. It took them a day to mobilize their army. The instructions Moses gives to Joshua are for the next day. There seems to have been a naive attitude among the people, as if an attack like this could not happen to them. They marched through enemy territory, expecting to be able to go unopposed. It was in the desert the devil had perfected his policy of scourged earth. Hardly any life was possible and the creatures that lived there were poisonous, as we have seen. Israel's attitude parallels that of a young Christian who thinks that his way to glory will be a bed of roses and who is completely taken by surprise when the enemy strikes back.

The task to mobilize an army is given to Joshua. This is the first time Joshua is mentioned in the Bible. In ch. 33:11 he is called Moses' young aid. Originally his name was Hoshea,²⁷⁰ he was from the tribe of Ephraim. When Israel approached the borders of Canaan for the first time, about two years later, Joshua was among the twelve spies who were sent to survey the land. At that point we read that Moses changed his name from Hoshea to Joshua.²⁷¹ He must have been a very bright and promising young man, who was deeply devoted to Moses, and who loved the Lord with all his heart. We read in ch. 33:11 that "Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent." The name Joshua, or Jehoshua, means "Yahweh saves," or "Yahweh is salvation."

The story of the victory over Amalek is an object lesson on prayer. While Joshua and his army fought the enemy in the valley, Moses climbed the hill to pray together with Aaron and Hur. This prayer consists in the symbolic gesture of lifting up the staff of the Lord toward heaven. Vs. 11 tells us: "As long

²⁶⁶ Ezek. 47:19

²⁶⁷ Rev. 22:1

²⁶⁸ Gen. 36:12

²⁶⁹ Deut. 25:17-19

²⁷⁰ Num. 13:8

²⁷¹ See Num. 13:16

as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.” God could, of course, have wiped out Amalek without this prayer and without the use of any human agency, but He chose to use men to defeat the enemy. Had Moses not persisted in prayer Amalek would have won the war.

Prayer is one of the mysteries of the universe. We hardly understand how it works, and we often underestimate its importance. Prayer is our lifeline with God, and it is our weapon against the enemy. A sinner on earth receives salvation through prayer, and a saint in heaven glorifies God through it. Nothing happens without prayer.

This passage shows us that prayer can be teamwork. Moses was an old man in his eighties. Lifting up our hands above our head is one of the most tiring exercises we can perform. Within minutes the arms will start to tremble and weaken. How long Moses kept his hands up we do not know, but he must have started to weaken, since we read in vs. 11 that there were moments when Amalek was winning because Moses had lowered his hands. We learn from this that prayer is not a magic formula. Victory did not come automatically and instantaneously. It was persistent prayer that made the Israelites in the valley victorious. It was also not true that the army did not have to fight, but it wasn't their fighting that was decisive. Without the prayer of Moses there would have been no victory.

But why only Moses' prayer? Aaron and Hur probably knew how to pray also. But when Moses' hands grew weak, they did not take over his staff and continue his prayer; they supported Moses' arms. This makes Moses the ultimate prayer warrior and as such he becomes an image of the Lord Jesus Christ “[Who] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”²⁷² This leads us deeper into the mystery of prayer. Prayer is ultimately the work of God. The only prayer that ascends to the throne of God is the prayer of Jesus Christ and prayers spoken in His Name. And it is the Holy Spirit who prays in and through us. As we pray we are mainly channels of the Spirit of God. The apostle Paul says: “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”²⁷³

Moses' prayer also shows us that victories on earth are won in heaven. In the book of Daniel we are given a glimpse of the power struggle that goes on in the heavenly realms. The angel Gabriel tells Daniel what happened when Daniel prayed for three weeks: “The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come.”²⁷⁴

Joshua gains a complete victory over the Amalekites. The RSV states it most dramatically in vs. 13, “And Joshua mowed down Am'alek and his people with the edge of the sword.”

Then the Lord gives Moses instructions to document the incident. This is the first time in the Bible any written document is mentioned. God wanted future generations to know that the people of Amalek would be completely exterminated because of the attack on Israel. It took centuries before this written prophecy was fulfilled. When Saul became king of Israel, Samuel reminded him of the document. Evidently, during the times of the Judges, the document had been forgotten. Yet, we read of three incidents in the book of Judges when Amalek harassed Israel (ch. 3, 6 and 10).

The half-hearted way Saul went about the command to wipe out the memory of Amalek became his undoing. Samuel gives a dramatic account of the way Saul disobeyed the command in that he kept the king of Amalek alive and spared the best of the livestock. Samuel announces to him: “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”²⁷⁵

It is difficult to evaluate the wars with Amalek from our human perspective. It is evident, though, that from God's viewpoint Amalek was more than a group of wild people who attacked the Israelites. Amalek was the personification of evil, an image of Satan himself. And the short war in the desert was a shadow of the cosmic struggle between light and darkness, such as the apostle John describes in Revelations. The fact that God uses human agencies in this struggle is amazing beyond comprehension. But John indicates that the victory over Satan is brought about by human beings. We read: “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so

²⁷² Heb. 7:25

²⁷³ Rom. 8:26

²⁷⁴ Dan. 10:13,20

²⁷⁵ I Sam. 15:23

much as to shrink from death.”²⁷⁶ That is why Saul’s disobedience was so serious. Saul had no idea what he was doing because he did not have the cause of the Lord on his heart. He was only concerned about himself and his image. In his reply to Samuel, Saul answers: “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God.”²⁷⁷

In vs. 15 we read: “Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.” The KJV renders the Hebrew without translation, saying: “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi.” The building of an altar implies that a sacrifice was brought. This is the first time an altar is mentioned in the context of Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. The bringing of a sacrifice against the background of this victory indicates that the war was won on the basis of the blood of the animal that was killed. Moses had lifted up his staff and acted out the prayer before the throne of God because one of God’s creatures had died in the place of the people of Israel. The shedding of the blood brought about the victory. This links the event to John’s commentary: “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.”

Moses called the altar *Jehovah-nissi* which means, “The LORD is my Banner.” If we try to picture the scene, we see a man sitting on a stone with a staff he lifts up to heaven. Of this simple stick he says: “The LORD is my Banner.” Banners are ornate symbols of the honor of an army. In ancient conventional wars the loss of a banner meant the loss of honor. Nobody would think of using a staff and call it a banner. That would sound like a mockery. Moses’ banner was an image of the cross and its shame. The cross was a mockery, but it was God’s mockery of man’s honor. God used a simple piece of wood to defeat His most powerful enemy. In the death of Jesus Christ on the cross God has become our Banner, our shame and our honor: Jehovah-nissi.

Guido Gezelle, the Flemish poet has written this beautiful short poem about God’s banner:

“Life means carrying the banner of war which maybe torn,
soiled, almost slipping from our hands,
forward with courage through good and bad days.
Life is not peace or asking for a truce.

Life is carrying the banner of the cross into the hands of God.”

The last verse of this chapter (vs. 17) is, evidently, hard to translate; the NIV renders it: “He [Moses] said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’ ” The KJV translates it: “For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” And the RSV again: “Saying, ‘A hand upon the banner of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Am’alek from generation to generation.’ ” According to *The Interlinear Bible*, the literal text is: “A hand (is) on the throne of Jah war (is) to Jehovah with Amalek from generation to generation.” Quoting the KJV, *Adam Clarke* comments on this verse: “This is no translation of the words *ki yad al kes yah milckamah*, which have been variously rendered by different translators and critics, the most rational version of which is the following: ‘Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of God, therefore will I have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’ ”

The main point of the verse is clear; that is that the LORD has declared war on Amalek and that this will carry on over several generations. As we have seen above, this war is an image of the cosmic war between God and Satan which is fought out in the lives of human beings. The different translations hinge upon the words “hands” and “banner.” Since it was Moses who lifted up his hands toward heaven during the war, it would be logical to Moses’ hand in this verse. Also, since the banner is an image of the throne we could probably use both words to translate the Hebrew *kes*.

There is always a danger that we read too much into verses that are not immediately clear. But, without wanting to press the point, we could say that if the banner of Moses, that is the staff of God, was an image of the cross of Christ, the cross and the throne are identical. The defeat of Amalek came ultimately through the death of Jesus Christ, that is through the blood of the Lamb.

It may not be clear whether it was the hand of Moses that held the banner up, as the KJV interprets it, that the hand of the LORD was lifted up in an oath, but, here again, the two would complement each other in one truth, that it is God’s eternal immutable plan to eliminate sin from His creation and that He has

²⁷⁶ Rev. 12:11

²⁷⁷ I Sam. 15:30

chosen to use men in this process; men who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and who testify to this by the word of their mouth and who are willing to give their lives for their Lord.²⁷⁸

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

This chapter describes the visit of Jethro and his advice to Moses regarding Moses' workload. Several pieces of information turn up that had been withheld before. It had never been told that Zipporah and Moses' two sons had returned to Midian, nor when they returned. Also, the name of Moses' second son, Eliezer, had never been mentioned before. He was probably the one Zipporah circumcised in ch. 4:25, which would indicate that he was still a very young boy at that time.

In all translations Jethro is called the father-in-law of Moses. As we mentioned in chapter 2 the change of name from Reuel to Jethro does not necessarily mean that we are dealing with two different persons. But the word *chothen*, which is translated with father-in-law has a rather extended meaning. According to *Adam Clarke* it simply means a "relative by marriage."

Clarke says about this chapter: "There are several reasons to induce us to believe that the fact related here is out of its due chronological order, and that Jethro did not come to Moses till the beginning of the second year of the Exodus (see Num. x. 11), some time after the Tabernacle had been erected, and the Hebrew commonwealth established, both in things civil and ecclesiastical." Then he proceeds to give six reasons for this opinion, none of which are very convincing to me.

A more pertinent question would be why the visit of Jethro and his advice to Moses is recorded at all. One of the reasons may be to indicate that not all the Midianites were involved in the trap that the Balak, the king of Moab, and the elders of Midian tried to lay for Israel when they invited the prophet Balaam to come and curse the Israelites. This is recorded in Num. 22, and Israel's revenge upon Midian in Num. 31. At this stage there were people in Midian, such as Jethro, who knew God. Also, Moses' two sons were half Midianites, and they became fully integrated in the nation of Israel. In Chronicles, we read about the sons of Moses: "The sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer. The descendants of Gershom: Shubael was the first. The descendants of Eliezer: Rehabiah was the first. Eliezer had no other sons, but the sons of Rehabiah were very numerous."²⁷⁹

The second reason for this insert is, obviously, to show that Moses had trouble to delegate authority and to describe how the judicial system of Israel became organized. One of the dictums new missionaries are taught on the mission field is, "If you want something done and you want it done well, do it yourself!" Evidently this piece of advice dates from the time of Moses, or maybe it even pre-dates it. Delegating authority is a very difficult thing for some people in power. People who combine power with a deep personal fellowship with God find delegating power even harder. The devil will certainly manipulate this weakness. If we find ourselves unable to delegate authority, we show a lack of confidence in others and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nobody was more able to perform His task on earth than our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, we read in Matthew: "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness."²⁸⁰ We are called upon to function as members of one body. In the physical body the head delegates power to each of the members according to the functions assigned to it. Moses may not have had any equal as a servant in the house of the Lord, but he was not the head of the house. God says about him: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."²⁸¹

The fact that this chapter is inserted in the record of Exodus could be seen as a confession of Moses. He recognized his weakness and humbly complied with Jethro's advice.

We read in vs. 1 that Jethro "heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt." How this news reached him we do not know. Moses could have sent a message, but it is more likely that the word went around the surrounding nations. After all, the defeat of the whole Egyptian army must have been received with satisfaction by Egypt's

²⁷⁸ See Rev. 12:11

²⁷⁹ I Chron. 23:15-17

²⁸⁰ Matt. 10:1

²⁸¹ Num. 12:6-8

neighbors. If it is true that the rumor was spread via the grapevine, Amalek's challenge to Israel's God was the more daring.

When Israel reached the area where Mount Sinai is located they were not far from the place where the Lord revealed Himself to Moses. In ch. 3:1 we read: "Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God." So Jethro did not have to travel too far to meet with his son-in-law. The respect Moses showed for Jethro would indicate that he was indeed his father-in-law rather than a brother-in-law. Anyhow, the reunion is warm. No word is said about Moses' greeting his wife and sons. In the culture of those days, the mention of such an intimate relationship would have been very embarrassing. The tribal people we worked with in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, would have understood this very well.

Moses reports to Jethro in detail what he must have heard already in outline of what the Lord had done: the defeat of Pharaoh and the Egyptians and the deliverances in the desert. Jethro must have known the desert and its hazards just as well as Moses. He realized that, humanly speaking, it was impossible for a people of more than two million to cross this desert and stay alive. There was no food and the water supply would have been barely enough for a small group of people. The fact that God provided for this nation in a supernatural way must have filled him with awe.

When Jethro exclaimed: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly" (vs. 11). It does not necessarily mean that, previously, he had put God on the same level as the heathen idols. We should not take Jethro's words as an indication of his conversion. He knew God and he was called "the priest of Midian." Our faith deepens when we see the acts of God in the lives of others and in our own life. I prefer the KJV and RSV in their translation of vs. 9, "Jethro rejoiced..." instead of "Jethro was delighted."

He typifies the attitude of Pharaoh and of Pharaoh's master, the devil, very well with the word "arrogant." The KJV uses the word "pride." Isaiah describes the pride of Satan in his lament over the king of Babylon. In Isaiah we read what Satan must have said when he rebelled against God in heaven and fell: "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'"²⁸² It was this same arrogance that was found in the heart of the master which prompted Pharaoh to shake his fist in God's face and refuse to let God's people go. We should never lose sight of the fact that when God saves us He pries us out of the hand of the Prince of darkness. He did this for Moses personally and He did it for Israel as a nation. Jethro makes a distinction between Moses' deliverance and that of the people. He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians" (vs. 10). He knew, of course, about Moses' experience when he first fled from Egypt and arrived in Midian. Then Jethro must have been apprehensive when Moses returned to Egypt forty years later to lead Israel out of Egypt. Now he recognizes the hand of God in a marvelous way in the redemption of Moses and the people.

Moses was uniquely qualified to lead Israel out of Egypt because he had experienced this kind of salvation in his own life. For this same reason, God uses people who have been saved from their sin to bring the Gospel of salvation to others. Angels who never sinned cannot effectively witness to lost people. But God uses sinners, saved by grace, to announce the Good News to other sinners.

Jethro's sacrifice is another unique feature in this chapter. Adam Clarke thinks that Jethro's visit took place after the Levitical priesthood had been ordained and the sacrifices had been prescribed, since it is said that Jethro brought a burnt offering. The fact, however, that a Midianite brought a burnt offering to the Lord would rather indicate that Aaron and his sons had not been appointed as priests yet. Jethro would not have been allowed to offer a sacrifice to the Lord in which some of the Israelites participated. The writer to the Hebrews elaborates the point that Christ became a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, who was not connected to the Levitical priesthood. Here, the first sacrifice that is actually described in the book of Exodus (the word is used elsewhere and sacrifices were implied) is brought by one who stands outside the covenant God made with Israel. This does not only validates Jethro's priesthood, it also indicates that salvation through the blood of the sacrifice was not limited to Israel alone. God so loved the whole world that He gave His Son to die for the sins of the whole world. So Jethro becomes a type of all mankind.

²⁸² Isa. 14:13;14

The second part of this chapter deals with Jethro's practical advice to Moses regarding his workload. As we mentioned above, this pertains to the problem of delegating authority. We know very little about Moses as a man. In his spiritual life he rose above all the others in the Old Testament, and as a leader he must have been larger than life. But it could be that he was not very practical in the mundane things of every day. When Jethro saw him carrying out his task as a judge and then saw him come home at night exhausted, he arrived at the conclusion that what this man did was ridiculous.

We wonder why God had not told Moses that he was trying to do too much. Evidently, there are things in life that God wants us to find out for ourselves. Also, He wants us to learn from others. Finally, He wants us to take our physical limitations into account. Physically, Moses was an unusually robust man. The editor of the book of Deuteronomy testifies at Moses' death: "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone."²⁸³ Yet, Moses himself says in the Psalm that bears his name: "The length of our days is seventy years; or eighty, if we have the strength."²⁸⁴ In spite of this unusual vigor, Moses' fatigue showed through at the end of a day of judging the people. So Jethro advised him to schedule his activities in such a way that he will not wear himself out.

It is not unspiritual, as some people think, to take our physical limitations into account. People who stay up late and rise early are not necessarily closer to God than those who need eight hours of sleep a night, or more. One wise man, I do not remember who it was, said: "God does not speak to over tired people."

Not only did Moses wear himself out, but he affected others. Jethro observes very correctly: "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out" (vs. 18). Some people are so energetic that they make others tired. This can be damaging to our testimony.

When Moses was confronted with the stress of his situation, he argued that the people needed him to find out what the will of God was for the problems of their lives. Jethro's answer contains the suggestion that not all matters in life need a divine revelation. Every man may not be a prophet of God, but there are many things in life that can be decided on the basis of some common sense, with or without the advice of others. It is good to share our daily plans with God. Solomon tells us: "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."²⁸⁵ But this does not mean that we have to share all of our problems in minute details with others and ask for prayer. A.W. Tozer tells the story of a lady who asked for prayer during a prayer meeting because her eyelids were twitching. Tozer's comment was: "Rub it, sister, rub it!" We should not lose sight of the forest because of the trees. Moses was in danger of doing this in the way he went about his task.

Yet, Moses was right in that the Lord had given him His Holy Spirit which was not on the common people. He had access to God in a way others did not have. In the Psalms we read: "He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel."²⁸⁶ The people saw what God was doing, but Moses saw the "how" and "why" of God's deeds. Later there came a point in Moses' life when he exclaimed: "I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"²⁸⁷

So Moses accepted his father-in-law's proposal. But Jethro wanted Moses to clear his suggestion by the Lord. In vs. 18 he says: "If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." This could also mean, however, that the cases that were brought to Moses would be taken to the Lord to receive His command.

We do not know how long the arrangement worked. In Numbers Moses is, obviously, at the point of collapse, when he says to the Lord: "I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me."²⁸⁸ That is barely two years later. Of course, the issue there was a general uprising because the people were hungry for meat. That is the occasion where the Lord takes the Spirit that was on Moses and shared it with seventy other leaders in Israel. One of the problems may have been to find "capable men from all the people; men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain." On our mission field in Indonesia, dishonesty among church leaders was one of the greatest obstacles for spiritual growth. Many third world countries thrive on bribes. Also, the concept that there are funds that are consecrated to the

²⁸³ Deut. 34:7

²⁸⁴ Ps. 90:10

²⁸⁵ Prov. 3:6

²⁸⁶ Ps. 103:7

²⁸⁷ Num. 11:29

²⁸⁸ Num. 11:14

Lord which cannot be used for individual needs is foreign to many cultures where personal possession are for the benefit of all. Yet, the fact that Jethro mentioned these qualifications for judges among the people indicates that the Israelites, as well as the Midianites, knew that the fear of God and dishonesty were incompatible. But, probably, the leaders lost sight of this truth when they started enjoying their position of leadership and were corrupted by the power they had over others.

Jethro's proposal is interesting from a mathematical viewpoint also. The divisions of one thousand, one hundred, fifty and ten indicates that the metric system was known at that time. The break-up into small groups of ten suggests family units with individual heads. If we stick to the number of six hundred thousand for the army, as given in Numbers,²⁸⁹ there could be as many judges as seventy-eight thousand. Imagine that Moses had been trying to do the work of seventy eight thousand people!

Moses described his task as: "I ... inform them of God's decrees and laws" (vs. 16). And Jethro agreed with this description when he said in vs. 20, "Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform." Evidently, many of the laws that are written down in the books of the Pentateuch had already been revealed to Moses previously. This means that God's revelation came to Moses in the setting of the practical problems of daily life. In many cases, when God spoke to Moses directly, He confirmed what Moses had already known and experienced. This fact in no way deducts from the supernatural character of God's revelations to Moses. It merely confirms that supernatural revelations and practical daily life are compatible.

Jethro mentioned three things in vs. 20: God's laws, the way to live, and the duties to perform. The teaching of the law was a transmission of knowledge. The people had to know the will of God. But Moses also had to show them the way to live, that is he had to be an example himself and help them apply the Word of God to their daily lives. The duties they had to perform made them into responsible human beings who fulfilled the role that God had given to them.

So Moses became the Supreme Court for the nation. Only the cases that had gone through the four previous levels came to him, and he sought the will of the Lord about the problem. Some examples are given later on where this was done.²⁹⁰

We do not know how long Jethro stayed with the Israelites. He probably left before the revelation of God on Mount Sinai. His coming meant a personal blessing to Moses, and he left behind a judicial system for the people that would become the backbone and infrastructure of the new nation. Evidently, he returned home alone, leaving Zipporah and Moses' sons behind with Moses. Zipporah was probably the "Cushite wife" mentioned in Numbers.²⁹¹ Jethro's visit was the last positive contact Israel had with the Midianites. After his departure Midian and Moab turned against Israel. It wasn't until the time of the Judges and the coming of Ruth that another blessing came Israel's way from this heathen confederacy.

With the departure of Jethro the first section of this book is completed. In the next chapter Israel arrives at Mount Sinai, the place where God has chosen to reveal Himself to His people – the place of celebration that would become the place of apostasy.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

B. At Sinai Chapters 19-40

Here we arrive at the first goal God had set for His people: the encounter at Sinai. Here is to take place the "festival to YHWH in the desert," as God had Moses tell Pharaoh in ch. 5:1. Here God speaks to Israel in an unprecedented way and here He pitches His tent among us, which is the Old Testament image of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It is at this place also that Israel commits its most heinous sin of idolatry in erecting the image of the Gold Calf.

This chapter is one of the pinnacles of the whole Bible. Nowhere else did God reveal Himself in such an awesome manner, with such outward manifestations of His greatness as in this chapter. Yet, according to the writer of the Hebrew epistle, God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ surpasses this one. In Hebrews we read: "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; To a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, Because they could not bear what was commanded: 'If

²⁸⁹ See Num. 11:21

²⁹⁰ See Lev. 24:10-14, Num. 15:32-36 and 27:1-7

²⁹¹ Num. 12:1

even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.’ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, To the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”²⁹²

Israel arrives at Mount Sinai three months after their departure from Egypt. Vs. 1 tells us “on the very day.” The month is the month of Sivan on the Hebrew calendar. *Adam Clarke* writes about the wilderness of Sinai: “Mount Sinai is called by the Arabs Jibel Mousa or the Mount of Moses, or, by way of eminence, El Tor, The Mount. It is one hill, with two peaks or summits; one is called Horeb, the other Sinai. Horeb was probably its most ancient name, and might designate the whole mountain; but as the Lord had appeared to Moses on this mountain in a “bush,” seneh, chap. iii. 2, from this circumstance it might have received the name of Sinai.”

The Pulpit Commentary states concerning the opening verses of this chapter: “From Rephidim in the Wady Feiran, where they had discomfited Amalek (ch. xvii. 8-13), the Israelites moved towards Sinai, probably by the two passes known as Wady Solaf and Wady-esh-Sheikh, which gradually converge and meet at the entrance to the plain of Er-Rahah. This plain is generally allowed to be ‘the Desert of Sinai.’ It is ‘two miles long, and half-a-mile broad’, ... nearly flat, and dotted with tamarisk bushes. The mountains which enclose it have for the most part sloping sides and form a sort of natural amphitheater. The plain abuts at its south-eastern extremity on abrupt cliffs of granite rock rising from it nearly perpendicularly, and known as the Ras Sufsafeh.” Evidently, the place where God revealed Himself is like a cliff which rises like a huge altar, “visible against the sky in lonely grandeur from end to end of the whole plain.”

According to *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, there have been attempts by modern scholars to identify a mountainous region in the vicinity of Edom as the actual site of Mount Sinai, since that area shows signs of ancient volcanic activity. It is thought that God’s revelation to Israel was actually an eruption of a volcano. Although the outward signs of the manifestation of God’s presence are similar to the eruption of a volcano, there is no indication that there was lava coming down the slope of the mountain. The theophany may have looked like a volcanic eruption, but it was obviously much more than that.

Apparently, Moses ascended the mountain three times within the space of three days. We read in vs. 3 that Moses went up to God. Probably the Shekinah pillar of cloud and fire had moved to the top of the mountain at that time. In vs. 8 we read: “So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD,” which would indicate a second ascent. Then in vs. 20 we read: “The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up.” This happened on the third day, the day on which the glory of the Lord appeared to the whole congregation of Israel.

The first time Moses meets with the Lord on the top of the mountain, he is given a loving and tender invitation to pass on to the people. God addresses the whole nation when He says: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

The words describe in the first place what it means to be saved from the powers of darkness. In the next chapter God will introduce the Ten Commandments with the words: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Paul puts this in New Testament terms when he says in Colossians: “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.”²⁹³ Salvation begins with the defeat of the powers that held us captive.

It is very interesting that God calls His people by two different names: “The house of Jacob” and “the people of Israel.” The two terms are not completely synonymous. Jacob was the cheater, the deceiver. At Peniel he became Israel, the Prince of God, the overcomer. In addressing the people of Israel as “the house of Jacob,” God reminds them of their past. God sees them as a people who had gained the victory over their past of sinful plotting and deceit. This may not have been the actual experience of every individual, but it is their status before God. That their spiritual experiences remained well below their actual status is clear from their behavior. They constantly grumbled before the Lord.

The image of the eagle and its dealings with her young ones describes at the same time the tenderness and the discipline of God’s dealing with man. The eagle teaches her brood to fly. It seems

²⁹² Heb. 12:18-25

²⁹³ Col. 1:13

cruel to drop a young one from the nest and let it, apparently, fall to its death. But, if the young bird fails to spread its wings and bear itself up on the air currents, the strong wings of the mother are underneath it to save it and bring it back to the nest. The eagle knows that its young can fly, and she wants her offspring to discover their potential. God knows what it means that He created man in His image and He wants man to know it too. Isaiah says: “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”²⁹⁴

Moses, in his hymn in Deuteronomy, uses the same image God uses here. “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.”²⁹⁵ The four archangels that surround the throne of God show the head of an eagle, according to Ezekiel.²⁹⁶ And in Revelation the Apostle John describes them as follows: “The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.”²⁹⁷ So, God had, so to speak, the image before His eyes when He gave Moses the description of His dealing with His people. At the end of his life, Moses will capture again the image in words that relate to human relationships when he says: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”²⁹⁸

So, for Israel, Mount Sinai is God’s eagle’s nest. It is the place where they belong because God is there. Man is born to live there. We are used to living on the plains, where the horizon is invisible. But God made us to conquer our limitations. Looking back over his life, David says: “He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.”²⁹⁹ Living on earth, hemmed in by the limitations sin and mortality impose upon us, all this sounds scary and risky. But God intends us to live on the highest plain, not just on top of the mountain, but in Heaven itself.

In vs. 5 God explains His purpose for calling Israel unto Himself. He wants Israel to be His “treasured possession,” His *segullaw*, which means “a jewel.” The word has the connotation of something that is hidden. We should think of the treasure in Jesus’ parable where He says: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”³⁰⁰ God considered Israel as precious to Him. Sadly enough, this fact never penetrated the mind of the Israelites. They never accepted God’s eternal love for them. They were always suspicious of God’s motives, and so they shut themselves out of all the blessings that were in store for them. The generation to whom these words were addressed even forfeited the promised land.

God’s love is unconditional, but the experience of it depends on our obedience. *The Interlinear Bible* renders vs. 5 as follows: “And now if surely you will listen to My voice, and will keep My covenant, you shall become to Me a special treasure above all the nations, for to Me (is) all the earth.” The implication is that, actually, God would like to consider all the nations as precious to Himself. The reason that God created man was that He wanted to enjoy man. Fellowship with God and sharing His glory is man’s *raison d’être*. But since the majority of mankind has severed its relationship with God, God chose Israel as the means of healing; in order to reconcile the whole world with Himself. Evidently, the NIV misses the point when it renders the last sentence of this verse as: “Although the whole earth is mine.” It is not in spite of, but because of the fact that the whole world belongs to God that He chose Israel. He intends to repossess the whole field, not just the treasure. “The field is the world.”³⁰¹

The key to the execution of God’s plan was Israel’s obedience and the keeping of the covenant with God. The Hebrew word for covenant that is used here is “Beriyth” which comes from the word for cutting. The reference is to the custom of cutting up an animal in pieces and to the passing of the people who make the covenant between those pieces. It is the covenant God made with Abraham.³⁰² The Israelites must have understood that God was referring to this covenant. The story must have been part of their heritage.

²⁹⁴ Isa. 40:31

²⁹⁵ Deut. 32:11

²⁹⁶ Ezek. 1:10

²⁹⁷ Rev. 4:7

²⁹⁸ Deut. 33:27

²⁹⁹ Ps. 18:33

³⁰⁰ Matt. 13:44

³⁰¹ Matt. 13:38

³⁰² Gen. 15:9,10,17

That God's covenant with Israel, as with Abraham, is a covenant that will not only bless themselves, or that is not for themselves in the first place, becomes clear from the following verse, where we read: "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God had said to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."³⁰³ And here He says to Israel that they will be the link between Himself and the rest of the world.

Israel never fully understood this. They gloried in their election and they ended up believing that God considered them precious because they were so special themselves. Modern Judaism carries this to the extreme. In Herman Wouck's book *This Is My God*, he states that Judaists want to be left alone. They are not interested in converting the rest of the world. They want to be a kingdom, but they reject the priesthood.

In Israel's history we see very few examples of a priestly outreach to a lost world. Jonah was forced into going to Nineveh and he was very unhappy with the success his preaching achieved. One of the outstanding examples is the little Jewish slave girl in the story of Naaman. We read: "She said to her mistress, 'If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.'³⁰⁴ But she was exceptional. Israel never became the Kingdom of priests God intended it to be. There are some outreach themes in the psalms of David and in the prophets, but it wasn't until the glorified Jesus Christ sent down the Holy Spirit that the Jewish church caught the vision of "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth."

God's drawing Israel to Himself had the double purpose of introducing them to joyful fellowship with Himself and through living in this bond of fellowship, reaching out to a lost world to save it. This was an option for the whole nation. The only Jew to ever fully enter in to this plan was our Lord Jesus Christ.

John sums up the essence of the feast of YHWH in Revelation when he says: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father; to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." The redeemed in Christ are "a kingdom of priests."³⁰⁵

The Lord adds to this the designation "a holy nation." Ultimately, this means that God is planning to impart His holiness, that is the essence of His being, to His people. On the one hand we read God's demand in Leviticus: "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy."³⁰⁶ And on the other hand, God says: "Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy; I who make you holy."³⁰⁷ The holiness of Israel as a nation is a very dubious subject. They hardly ever demonstrated any inclination toward holiness. Very few of them even came to the point that they were willing to consecrate themselves in order to become holy by a creative act of God in their lives. But this takes away nothing of God's intent with man. He wants to make man holy. And, as we read in Revelation, His way of making us holy and a kingdom of priests is by washing us in the blood of Jesus Christ.

In vs. 7 and 8 Moses passes on the Word of God to the nation via the elders. These are probably the representatives, chosen in the previous chapter. They must have conveyed the message to the people whom they represented, and the answer of the people is transmitted to Moses. In vs. 8 we read: "The people all responded together, 'We will do everything the LORD has said.'" It has been said that the reaction of the people indicated that they did not understand the purpose of the law and the condition of their own heart. Both may be true, but this doesn't mean that their reaction to God's gracious invitation was insincere. Who, after all, understand the workings of God's grace? Very few people have an inkling of the seriousness of their own condition. At the moment of new birth, man may think that he is not what God wants him to be, but he intends to obey as best as he can. It takes time to come to the realization that our heart remains deceitful and that there would not even be the beginning of obedience in our lives without the help of the Holy Spirit. The same people who pledged obedience here, said a few weeks later "Come, make us gods who will go before us" (ch.32:1).

After Moses had given the answer of the people to God, the Lord announced that He would reveal Himself and that the people will hear the audible voice that speaks to Moses, so that his

³⁰³ Gen. 12:3

³⁰⁴ II Kings 5:3

³⁰⁵ Rev. 1:5,6

³⁰⁶ Lev. 11:44

³⁰⁷ Lev. 21:8

leadership will be confirmed once for all. God knew that both Moses and the people would need this kind of confirmation because of the trouble that lay ahead of them. They would be tempted to question Moses' leadership. As a matter of fact, they did, and although they went through the experience of hearing God speak to Moses, the memory did not linger long enough for them to keep the faith. Doubt and rebellion raised its head within days after this most awesome of demonstrations of God's glory. When God spoke twice publicly to Jesus Christ,³⁰⁸ it did not sway the mood of the people on the day of Christ's crucifixion either.

We gather from verse 10 that Moses ascended the mountain for the third time. It could be, though, that this verse fuses with the preceding ones and that Moses actually stayed on the mount until God had finished speaking to him. We find in Scripture that, at moments of dramatic height, the chronology of the report sometimes suffers. In the story of the raising of Lazarus, for instance, John cannot bring himself to an orderly account of the events. A trace of disorganization in the retelling often heightens the drama. And God's revelation of Himself on the mountain was certainly a most dramatic event. It left its impact upon Moses and many of the Israelites. On some of them it seems to have made hardly any impression at all.

God gave the Israelites three days to prepare themselves for the encounter with Him. It took Jesus three days to prepare Himself for the resurrection. We may see a parallel between the two events, because, in spite of the fact that Israel did not remain faithful to their pledge to obey the Lord, God intended them to enter upon a new life. The feast of YHWH was a feast of life. There had to be an outward preparation which symbolized the inner cleansing of sin. They had to wash their clothes. In expressing the reality of sanctification, the Bible often uses the image of new clothes being put on. The prodigal son was clothed in the best robe the father possessed.³⁰⁹ In Revelation we read how the souls under the altar in heaven are given a new robe, awaiting the day of their resurrection.³¹⁰ Sanctification means being clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when God tells Israel to wash their clothes, He means for them to be holy.

God's concern for the welfare of His people is clear in the warning He gives to them not to touch the mountain. When we see Mount Sinai rising up as an, almost, perpendicular wall, we understand how easy it would have been for man to touch it. It would have been the same as the modern Jews touching the wailing wall. The presence of God made the whole mountain a living sanctuary in the same way that it made the place of the burning bush a holy place when God revealed Himself to Moses for the first time. In ch. 3:5 God says to Moses: "Do not come any closer,... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Touching the mountain would have been the equivalent of touching a live wire. The difference here, though, is that the person who trespassed would not die automatically; he was to be executed by his peers. Evidently, the holiness of God would penetrate his body, while his soul was still unredeemed. A physical touch would transmit this condition to other people, which would make the incongruent condition spread like an infection. People would die slowly because their bodies were holy and their souls were not. That is why trespassers had to be executed without being touched by other hands to prevent the infection from spreading.

This is hard for us to understand, because we live no longer under the dispensation where the body can become holy and the soul remain untouched. Our sanctification is from the inside out. That is the blessing of the New Testament dispensation and the work of the Holy Spirit. If our soul is saved, our body will be renewed in the resurrection. If our bodies were raised from the dead and our souls remained in their corrupted condition, that would mean disaster. It would be the essence of hell.

We read in vs. 14 that Moses consecrated the people after he came down from the mountain. The KJV says: "He sanctified them." How he did this we are not told. It sounds as if, by the authority God had given him, he put the holiness of God upon the people to prepare them to see the Lord. It would have been impossible for them to see God without God sharing with them some of His holiness. The writer to the Hebrews says: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord."³¹¹ It is impossible for man to meet God if there is not some common basis. God provides this basis for us in Jesus Christ. We find common ground with the eternal God in the Incarnation. Some of this mystery was implied in Moses' consecration

³⁰⁸ Matt. 3:17, and John 12:28

³⁰⁹ Luke 15:22

³¹⁰ Rev. 6:11

³¹¹ Heb. 12:14

of the people. Although all this was expressed in outward symbols, yet the symbols stood for a spiritual reality.

God provides the basis Himself, but as human beings we have our share of responsibility. Moses consecrated the people, but they had to wash their clothes themselves. We read in Revelation about the people who came out of the great tribulation, that “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”³¹² God makes the provisions but we have to apply them to our lives. The people must have understood, though, that the washing of their clothes was more than a matter of water and soap, but that it had a spiritual dimension. Moses adds to this: “Abstain from sexual relations.” We do not find this injunction in the orders God gave to Moses and they may have been Moses’ own interpretation of God’s command. Adam Clarke believes that the question is not whether a man should approach a woman, but whether he should come close to fire. In my word study, I have been unable to find any reason for a different translation than woman. We should not see in this command an inference that sexual relations within marriage would be incompatible with spirituality.

On the third day the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai. This was the day of the “Feast of YHWH” which had been announced in the hearing of Pharaoh. For this very purpose God had brought His people out of Egypt. The appearance was, evidently, much more than the column of fire that had been guiding the people since their departure from Egypt. This was the glory of the Lord which came down from heaven to earth. The signs accompanying this revelation and thunder and lightning. In the book of Revelation, John mentions several times the phenomena of thunder and lightning in connection with the throne of God. In Revelation we read: “From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.”³¹³ And in a later chapter of the same book: “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”³¹⁴

On earth we know thunder and lightning as natural phenomena in connection with atmospheric conditions. What was seen at Mount Sinai had no connection with earthly conditions; the thunder and lightning indicated the presence of God. A severe thunderstorm would not have affected the people the way the appearance of God did here. We read in vs. 13 that everyone in the camp trembled. And vs. 18 tells us that the whole mountain trembled violently. The writer to the Hebrews tells us Moses’ reaction, which is not mentioned in the Exodus account: “The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with fear.’”³¹⁵

When God descended in the Old Testament the earth trembled. When God came down to earth in the New Testament, hardly anyone noticed. The coming of Jesus Christ was not accompanied by earth-shaking signs. He came almost unnoticed, except by a few. Yet, although God’s revelation at Sinai was much more overwhelming than the Incarnation, it did not change the human heart. Jesus’ coming to earth has shaken up this world to the core. The world hasn’t stopped shaking since. We sometimes tend to wish that we could have seen God’s revelation as the Old Testament people did. This indicates that we understand very little of what we possess in Jesus Christ. Going from Bethlehem and Golgotha to Mount Sinai would mean more than one step back. The apostle Paul catches the essence of the difference, when he says: “For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory.”³¹⁶

We can picture the procession as it is painted before our eyes in vs. 17, “Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.” What an awesome sight it must have been to see Sinai smoking like an erupting volcano with lightning flashing and the peals of thunder and more than two million people walking toward the mountain wall, with Moses leading them on. Again we see in Moses the image of our Lord Jesus Christ as He brings “many sons to glory.”³¹⁷ Then Moses lifts up his voice in prayer and God answers him and calls him up the mountain.

It is difficult to piece the chronology of the events together. Moses went up the mountain several times. Twice he stayed there for forty days. It is as if this chapter gives us a condensation of a series of events, or that it describes the beginning of God’s revelation, which continues in later chapters. The chapters 20 through 23 seem to be an insertion of commands that were given a few days later. It seems

³¹² Rev. 7:14

³¹³ Rev. 4:5

³¹⁴ Rev. 11:19

³¹⁵ Heb. 12:21

³¹⁶ II Cor. 3:10

³¹⁷ Heb. 2:10

that, actually, ch. 19 should run into ch. 24. Also, in ch. 24:3 we read the same words the people spoke as in ch. 19:8, “When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’” So it could be that chapters 19 and 24 describe the same event and the same day.

This day Moses ascended at least two times. Whether he reached the top the first time he went up, we don’t know. It seems that God sent him back before he arrived at the summit. God wanted Moses to go down and warn the people of the danger of curiosity. What follows is a strange dialogue. Moses argues with God that His warning is superfluous, since the mountain had been cordoned off and the people were told not to try to break through. Moses acts as if he knows better. But God overrules him and sends him back. He does not want that the people would perish because of some carnal curiosity and, evidently, this danger was much more real than Moses imagined.

Vs. 22 seems curiously out of context: “Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.” The priesthood of Aaron and his sons is not mentioned until chapter 28. The question arises what is meant with “the priests” in this verse. Since, evidently, no ordination to the priesthood had taken place yet, it is doubtful that Aaron and his sons were meant here. In vs. 6 God had called the whole nation of Israel a kingdom of priests. It could be, therefore, that God meant the elders of the people, or the heads of the various units that had been formed in the previous chapter. In vs. 14 we read that Moses consecrated the people. It could be that the priests felt that, since they were serving the Lord already, they did not have to comply with the special consecration to which the people were submitted and that some of them had refused to go through the rites of purification. It would make sense that God would send Moses back down, specifically for the purpose of warning those people that they were playing a dangerous game. Later, in Leviticus,³¹⁸ we read that Aaron’s sons Nathan and Abihu disregarded the warning of the Lord and paid for this with their lives. It could be that this kind of attitude was prevalent among the priests at that time.

Holiness is serious business. Every person who enters full-time Christian service runs the danger of becoming a “professional Christian.” Prayer becomes routine and the edge of spirituality dulls. We may not always be conscious of the Lord’s presence with us, and that does not really matter. But if we start taking the Lord’s presence for granted in our daily life, we lose the fear of holiness and we are on dangerous ground. If sin creeps in, and our conscience no longer warns us or condemn us, we act as if we can do as we please, because the Lord does not see it or He doesn’t mind. That is why Paul says: “Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God; I say this to your shame.”³¹⁹

It is obvious that ch. 24:1 and 2 pick up where ch. 19 ends. We read in ch. 19:24, “The LORD replied, ‘Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.’” So Moses went down to the people and told them.” And ch. 24:1-2 begin with: “Then he said to Moses, ‘Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, But Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.’” When we get to that chapter, we will see that this meeting was prior to Moses’ ascending into the cloud when he spent forty days in the presence of the Lord.

We are not told when the giving of the Ten Commandments, which are recorded in ch. 20:1-17, took place. Probably they were given at a later date but inserted at this point. Anyhow, even if they were given on the first day of God’s revelation, they would have been given orally. It wasn’t until Moses entered the cloud in which the Lord was present that he received the two tablets of stone on which the Commandments were inscribed. We read in ch. 24:12 “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.’”

As we mentioned before, the encounter with God on Mount Sinai must have been such an overwhelming experience that one could hardly expect to find an orderly chronological account of the events. The mixed-up order is an indication of the intensity of the drama that took place. We see the same kind of holy confusion in the account of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Those events are too great to be put down in neat little paragraphs in journalist fashion.

³¹⁸ Lev. 10

³¹⁹ I Cor. 15:34

CHAPTER TWENTY

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, at this point the Ten Commandments are given together with various laws relating to the relationship between man and God. In the following chapters, ch. 21-23, this is followed by laws governing man's relationship with fellow men. Evidently, it was done orally and in the present of all the people. It is not until later in ch. 24:12 that we read: "The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.'"

- Chapter twenty is divided into three sections: 1- The Ten Commandments (vs. 1-17).
 2- The reaction of the people to God's revelation (vs. 18-20).
 3- God's instructions to Moses regarding the way He should be worshipped (vs. 21-26).

1. The Ten Commandments vs. 1-17

This part of Scripture is among the most famous ones in the whole Bible. These commandments are repeated by Moses in Deuteronomy.³²⁰ The book Deuteronomy owes its name to the repetition of the Ten Commandments. The name is derived from the Latin words *deutero* = two and *nomium* = law. For some reason, though, the text in Exodus is more generally used than the one in Deuteronomy. The Exodus version is the one that was cut in stone by the finger of God, while in Deuteronomy Moses recites the words and even allows for some variations in the original text.

Supposedly the first stone tablet contained the introduction and the first four commandments, dealing with the relationship with God and the second tablet contained the fifth through the tenth commandment, pertaining to inter-human relationships.

Generally speaking, the Ten Commandments contain very little that is new. We may suppose that, especially as far as the second tablet is concerned, all the commandments had been known since the days of Noah. The first tablet may have contained the laws that had never been given clearly in such a form.

In our missionary work in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, we discovered the interesting phenomenon that the Stone Age people of the Me tribe were familiar with the fifth through the ninth commandment. They may have originally known the tenth also, but disregarded it to the point of oblivion, because it went so radically against the grain of their culture, which seemed to thrive upon covetousness. The fact that this kind of knowledge had been preserved throughout the centuries in which the tribe lived in isolation from the rest of mankind, would point to a time in world history well before the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, probably from before the dispersion of the human race from the tower of Babel. This would make us think that the content of the Ten Commandments may have been part of the knowledge Noah had and which he imparted to his sons and their offspring.

The Lord introduces the law by revealing Himself to His people as the One who redeemed them from slavery. In vs. 2 we read: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." Both the KJV and the RSV use the expression "the house of bondage." It seems that this realization of redemption was not too clear to the people in general. We have seen already that a few times the people expressed the opinion that it would have been better for them to stay in Egypt. The memory of the terror of oppression had, evidently, faded very rapidly.

It is important that we never forget from where came. We will never know where we are, nor where we are going, unless we know our starting point. Paul puts redemption in its New Testament context when he says: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."³²¹ The house of bondage was the dominion of darkness. God went into the house of the strong man and bound him in order to carry off what he held in his possession. Jesus says: "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house."³²²

One of the mysteries of this period of bondage is the fact that God knew that all this would happen. He says to Abraham: "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. In the fourth generation your

³²⁰ See Deut. 5:6-21

³²¹ Col. 1:13

³²² Matt. 12:29

descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."³²³ Both the bondage and the deliverance were part of God's eternal plan of salvation. This fact is hard to fathom. What the Israelites experienced went far beyond their own understanding; just as our own salvation is more than we can grasp.

The realization of freedom is part of our being created in the image of God. Separation from God inevitably leads to slavery and all slavery can be traced to Satan. It is only in a relationship with God and, eventually, in the sharing of His glory that we find true freedom. As Paul says: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."³²⁴

We may presume that the four centuries of slavery in Egypt, although God predicted it to Abraham, was not God's doing. He allowed Joseph to be sold to Egypt and the family of Jacob to migrate there in order to keep them alive during the famine. About the oppression of the following generations, we can only say that God allowed it to happen, not that He caused it to happen. The Pharaohs were puppets in the power of the Evil One. God wanted His people to be free and to appreciate their freedom. But the Israelites who left Egypt had grown up in slavery and had accepted their servitude as normal. They had lost the vision of what God wanted them to be. In His opening statement God wanted to impress upon the people that their relationship with God was identical with being free. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

All this does not explain the mystery of slavery and freedom, of sin and salvation and of death and life. But, looking at the end result, we will probably never come any closer than Augustine's exclamation: "O, blessed fall of Adam!"

The first command: "You shall have no other gods before me," is of crucial importance for people coming out of Egypt to keep them on the straight road. The air in Egypt had been polluted by demonic powers. The whole oppression of the people of Israel and the murderous effort to curb population growth by killing babies was clearly inspired by demons. People who accept other powers and put them on the same level as the almighty God cater to Satan. The Apostle Paul puts it clearly when he says: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."³²⁵ Paul indicates at the same time that the idol itself, the statue that is made by human hands, has no value whatsoever. But behind the idol hides a whole constellation of fallen stars: Satan and demons who do have real power. God wants to protect His people from the power of him who is, in Jesus' words, a murderer.

The only way to escape the power of Satan is by acknowledging God as the only supreme power in Heaven and earth and to surrender to Him. That is the essence of the first command. Nobody in his right mind, nobody who sees the reality of the spiritual world could come to the conclusion that any other power could ever approach the supremacy of God. He is the One, in Paul's words, "from whom all things came and for whom we live." Any other power or authority is created and delegated. Satan was created by God and, if God had not given him power, he would have none. So putting him on the same level as the Almighty is nonsense.

Recognition of God's supremacy is also the key to worship. The purpose of the whole creation is worship. "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD."³²⁶ We will begin to worship when we start to understand something of God's character. On a human level we may love fellow human beings because we appreciate their characteristics; even though every human character is flawed. How much more should we then love God and stand in awe before Him when we begin to distinguish His characteristics which are perfect, eternal, and absolute. Everything that is good and beautiful and worthy can be found in God without limit. God is the Perfect One we long for. Seeing Him means to live. God gives us this first commandment because He doesn't want us to miss what we were made for.

The second commandment is related to the first one. It is a safeguard, a fence that is put up so we would be kept on the right track. The command consists of two parts: a warning against the making and worshipping of idols and a warning of the consequences of idol worship. The underlying principle of the making of idols is the human effort to control life. We have power over what we make. An idol is a

³²³ Gen. 15:13,14,16

³²⁴ II Cor. 3:17

³²⁵ I Cor. 8:4-6

³²⁶ Ps. 150:6

thing we can control or, at least, a thing we think we control. Makers of idols deceive themselves, but that is beside the point here. Isaiah speaks with biting sarcasm about the man who makes idols: "He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, 'Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.' From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, 'Save me; you are my god.'"³²⁷

The man who bows down before an inanimate object or before a creature that is lower than himself is a fool. Even worship of heavenly creatures is foolish, because the Bible teaches that, in the order of creation, man is placed on a higher level than the angels. Man is created in the image of God. We don't read this about any other creature in the universe. That is why worship of Satan and demons is degrading to man. When John fell at the feet of the angel who led him through the book of Revelation, he answered: "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!"³²⁸ Man should only worship that which is higher than himself, that is the almighty, eternal God. When we worship God, His image becomes visible in us. When we worship things or creatures that are lower than we are, we will eventually bear the image of what we worship. In the psalms we read about idol worship: "But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."³²⁹

It has been suggested that this first commandment mainly prohibits man from making representations of God. It is true that Moses warns against this tendency in Deuteronomy, where he says: "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, So that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below."³³⁰ Evidently, the danger exists that man would turn his attention from the reality of the invisible God to the image he makes of God and substitute the one for the other. Great painters have depicted God the Father. Michelangelo and the brothers van Eyck have created masterpieces in which God is represented. I do not consider this sin, as long as it is understood that this is a fantasy, which has no relation to the ultimate reality of God. But, as soon as man begins to make the image, he will try to control it and thus he falls into a trap in which he easily becomes a prey of the evil one.

God knows that if a man worships idols he opens himself up for an invisible world of spiritual powers over which he has no control. Man may think that he can control what he makes himself, but he ends up being controlled by it. Behind every idol stands a demonic power which enters the heart of the idol worshipper. Demons will seem helpful and good to man when they enter initially, because they want to stabilize their power. Once they are entrenched in a human heart they are difficult to dislodge. They will never leave of their own free will. They will even remain in a family from one generation to another, unless the link with the preceding generation is cut off. That is why God says in vs. 5: "You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." It is not that God hates children because of the sins of their fathers, but demons will move from father to child and thus keep the family in their grip. A father who opens himself up to demonic powers destroys his own posterity.

It may seem strange that God takes responsibility for the work of demons in a family. In reality, it is not what God does, but what He permits. We have seen the same phenomenon before where God takes the blame, if we can use this expression, for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This is difficult for us to accept or explain, but it implies that God is in absolute control, even of events that we would consider to be disastrous. Our problem is, of course, that we cannot really imagine what omnipotence means.

³²⁷ Isa. 44:14-17

³²⁸ Rev. 19:10

³²⁹ Ps. 115:4-8

³³⁰ Deut. 4:15,16

We also have to remember that a person who enters into any relationship with demonic powers never does this innocently. God holds us responsible when we open the door for a world that is beyond our understanding. After all, He has warned us not to do it; just as He warned Adam and Eve of the consequences of disobedience. Any move we make in the direction of the powers of darkness is a demonstration of hatred toward God. Hatred is the opposite of love. We either love God or we hate Him. There is no in-between ground. There is no such thing as agnosticism. People who call themselves agnostics fool themselves.

Vs. 6 comes to us as a delightful breakthrough of light in this darkness. “But showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments.” The RSV translates the “love” of God as “steadfast love” which is the translation of the word “hesed,” the covenant love of God. This love is not just God’s sentiment toward us, but it is the love that is based on a legal relationship, such as in a marriage. This covenant love is unrestricted. It does not flow from one generation to the next as the punishment in the previous verse, but it is renewed in every generation. The tendency of a spiritual heritage is to grow weaker from generation to generation. Second generation Christians often have a less buoyant faith than their parents. Each generation needs its own spiritual revival, lest it loses its heritage. To those who love the Lord, God extends His arms in a wide embrace. We do well to claim our children for the Lord, but this does not mean that they will automatically come into the relationship with God that assures them of His love and blessing. They will have to turn to Him and love Him personally.

The third commandment reads: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” The Jews took this command so seriously that they avoided the mention of the Name YHWH completely. In reading the Scriptures, they would substitute the Name for Adonai, or use the vowel marks of Adonai in the Tetragrammaton, that is the four consonants of the name Yahweh. This, of course, was not the intent of the commandment. Merely pronouncing the Name of Yahweh was no sin. The least of all sins (if there is such a thing) would be to use the Name unthinkingly. Misuse of the Name of the Lord would be to do things in the Name of God that were clearly against His will and character. For instance, the crucifixion of Jesus was a violation of the third commandment.

The KJV renders this verse: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” The word “vain” implies a lack of meaning. A word without meaning is no word. The Greek word “logos” is usually translated with “word.” It also has the connotation of “meaning.” “In the beginning was the Word”³³¹ indicates that God is the ultimate meaning of all. The Apostle Paul sums this up in Romans: “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”³³² To attach the Name of the Lord to something that is meaningless means sinning against this commandment. This includes, of course, lying and using the Name of the Lord to swear a false oath. Truth and meaning are united in God’s character just as untruth and vanity belong to the devil.

Paul emphasizes the positive side of this prohibition when he says: “When I planned this, did I do it lightly? Or do I make my plans in a worldly manner so that in the same breath I say, ‘Yes, yes’ and ‘No, no’? But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not ‘Yes’ and ‘No.’ For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not ‘Yes’ and ‘No,’ but in him it has always been ‘Yes.’ For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”³³³ Not using the Name of the Lord in vain means to be reliable as God is reliable.

Jesus strongly condemns the teachers of the law and the Pharisees of His time, because of their teaching on swearing an oath.³³⁴ He calls them hypocrites because they tried to circumvent the third commandment by juggling the words of an oath, so that it sounded like an oath but it was not binding because the language was not legally correct. For example “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’”³³⁵

³³¹ John 1:1

³³² Rom. 11:36

³³³ II Cor. 1:17-20

³³⁴ Matt. 23:16-22

³³⁵ Matt. 23:16

But much more is involved in misusing the Name of the Lord than is contained in the above. The Name of the Lord stands for His Person, His character. The problem we face is that, in our day, names have lost their meaning. A name says nothing about the character of a person or about the circumstances of his birth and life. The Bible is full of stories of people who received names that were filled with meaning. From the first name given by Adam to the new name Jesus gives there is content and meaning in the name. We read in Genesis: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living."³³⁶ And in Revelation Jesus says: "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name."³³⁷

Our relationship to the Name of God is in the image of God we bear. Using the Name of the Lord in vain means making a caricature of God's image in us. That is the essence of sin. It is not in our speech but in our heart that the root of corruption lies. Therefore, the fact that Jesus will give us a new name in glory is such a wonderful expression of the fullness of redemption He provides for us.

The fourth commandment, which is the last one of the first tablet of the law reads: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (vs. 8-11).

It is interesting that, in repeating the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, Moses gives another reason for the Sabbath commandment.³³⁸ We read there: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." Evidently, the Sabbath commemorated both the completion of creation and the redemption of sin and its power. We have seen already that the word "Sabbath" was not used until Israel had entered the desert and was on its way to Canaan. It is in connection with the giving of the manna in ch. 16 that the Sabbath is first mentioned. The first Sabbath rest is recorded in ch. 16:30, "So the people rested on the seventh day."

Some "Higher Critics" maintain that this second reason for the Sabbath commandment, given in Deuteronomy, is an indication that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy. We will pass up this opinion without comment, except to say that we could hardly expect spiritual insight from the side of "Higher Criticism." The fact remains, though, that the old creation and the new creation meet in the Sabbath. This common ground is highlighted in John 5, where Jesus "breaks" the Sabbath by healing the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When, consequently, He is accused of breaking the Sabbath, He says: "My Father always breaks the Sabbath!" Literally, we read in John: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."³³⁹ Then Jesus proceeds to draw a parallel line from the first creation by the Father to the new creation by Himself. We read further on: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."³⁴⁰ The raising of the dead and the giving of life by the Father take place on the physical level, that is, on the level of the first creation; the life the Son gives is spiritual, it is eternal life which belongs to the new creation.

We have seen before, in connection with ch. 16, that the Sabbath had various depths of meaning. Since we find it on the first tablet of the law, it refers to our relationship with God. Yet it is not purely ceremonial. People who, for some reason or other, have come under our authority are also involved in our keeping of the Sabbath. Not only should we ourselves refrain from working, but also our son or daughter, or our manservant or maidservant, even our animals, and the alien within our gates. So, a whole group of people and even animals, are affected by whether or not we keep the Sabbath. Or, in other words, it makes a difference in the lives of others whether we serve the Lord or not. Even to our animals it makes a difference if we are Christians. Martin Luther, reportedly, once said that our dog and our cat should know whether we are Christians.

³³⁶ Gen. 3:20

³³⁷ Rev. 3:12

³³⁸ Deut. 5:6-21

³³⁹ John 5:17

³⁴⁰ John 5:21

The mention of animals is unique in this context. There is no parallel in ancient laws concerning the protection of animals such as is provided for in this law. The answer to Paul's rhetorical question: "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?"³⁴¹ should be answered with: "Yes, He is!" The KJV and RSV use the word "cattle" instead of "animal." And in the Deuteronomy version of the text, Moses elaborates on this phrase with: "your ox, your donkey or any of your animals." The intent is, obviously, that the animals that perform labor should be given time to relax and recuperate.

The Sabbath points both to the past and the future, as we have seen before. God rested on the Sabbath after He finished the work of creation. But the real Sabbath's rest, according to the epistle to the Hebrews, is still awaiting us. We read: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."³⁴² The Sabbath rest after creation was interrupted when man fell into sin. The Sabbath to come was introduced by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For the Jew, the breaking of the Sabbath command could be fatal. In Numbers we read that a man was stoned to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath.³⁴³ For us, New Testament Christians, the Old Testament Sabbath command is no longer applicable. It is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated in the New Testament. Christians have, erroneously, substituted the Sunday for the Sabbath. In the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands in which I grew up, one of the greatest sins was to buy an ice-cream cone on Sunday. This kind of Sabbath observance makes a parody of the original command and it completely obscures the meaning the Sabbath should have for us in the New Testament dispensation. There is no indication in the New Testament or in the history of the early church that the Sunday took the place of the Sabbath. The Sunday is the first day of the week, the day on which Christ rose from the dead. The Sabbath is the seventh day.

The importance of the Sunday is foreshadowed in the Old Testament in some places where the eighth day is mentioned. A boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day. And the day after the Sabbath at the feast of the first fruits of the harvest a sheaf of grain was symbolically presented to the Lord. This depicted the resurrection of Christ. We read in Leviticus: "He [the priest] is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath."³⁴⁴ The day of Pentecost also started on the eighth day. An offering of two loaves of bread baked with yeast was to be brought to the altar and burned, indicating the birth of the church of Jesus Christ. So the resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the church both happened on a Sunday.

The early church was so overwhelmed by the joy of Jesus' victory over death that the Sunday soon put the Sabbath in the shade. That is why Paul tells the church in Colosse that the Sabbath, together with all the other ritual observations, has lost its significance. We read: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day."³⁴⁵

Lets look again at the difference between the two endings of the fourth commandment. In ch. 20:11 we read: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." And in Deuteronomy: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."³⁴⁶

If we stick to the theory that the creation story in Gen. chapter 1 shows us how God created order in the chaos that was the result of the fall of Lucifer, the difference between the two endings is not significant. God undid in both cases the works of the devil. In creation He brought back light and life in the darkness and death the enemy had left behind. In the Exodus He brought about freedom and dignity to man who had been the slave of the devil. The similarity is striking. In the Sabbath man celebrates the miracle of his physical life and his spiritual life at the same time. Yes, we should observe the Sabbath, but not only on Saturday. We should enjoy daily the fact that we live and we should never forget that we were slaves and that we have been redeemed.

³⁴¹ I Cor. 9:9

³⁴² Heb. 4:9,10

³⁴³ Num. 15:32-36

³⁴⁴ Lev. 23:11

³⁴⁵ Col. 2:16

³⁴⁶ Deut. 5:15

With the fifth commandment we turn a page, or rather we go from the first tablet to the second. We enter the realm of human relations. As we saw already, the Sabbath built a bridge between our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow human beings. The two can never be separated. Our love for God will determine our love for our neighbor. And our love for our neighbor is an indication of the depth and reality of our love for God. The Apostle John says: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."³⁴⁷ This is also the point of Jesus' parable in Matthew. To the people who had compassion on their fellow men He says: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." And to those who lived only for themselves and had no compassion for the needs of others he said: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."³⁴⁸

The fifth commandment reads: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." The Deuteronomy version quotes the command literally, but with the addition: "So that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you." According to the Apostle Paul, this is the first commandment to which a promise is attached. He writes: " 'Honor your father and mother'-- which is the first commandment with a promise; that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."³⁴⁹ We could consider the addition to the second commandment, "But showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments," a promise also.

The principle that our human relationships are determined by our relationship with God is applied, in the first place, to the family. Parents should love their children and children their parents before they love their neighbor. The family is a microcosm of the spiritual reality. A father and mother are to their children what God is to man in general. God is our role model. He is our real Father, "the Father" as Jesus calls Him. Motherly love is a reflection of God's love. And just as the parents provide the security and environment of love in which a child can grow up into adulthood, so God is our security and our source of love, warmth, and affection.

But when Adam severed his relationship with God, human relationships were broken also. No parent is a perfect reflection of God in his relationship with his or her child. And no child responds to his parents as he should. Hence, this commandment, that a child should honor his parents, not because of his perfection, but in spite of the lack of it.

Since we are sinful human beings God wants us to learn to love and to forgive, first of all, within the framework of the family. It seems that Westerners have a harder time to understand the principle than Asians and Africans. The link with previous generations among, for instance, the Chinese is much stronger than in Europe. In many societies the elderly are provided for without question. Social Security is a typical Western phenomenon.

The fact that in the West so many children grow up in broken homes or as the offspring of single parents, makes the observance of this commandment especially difficult. Satan seems to be very successful in corrupting human society by breaking up the family.

Jesus points out the practical side of this commandment in Matthew. Evidently, the Jews understood the meaning of the word "honor" in the context in which Jesus used it. We have the tendency to give the word a meaning which has no link to practical support of parents. But Jesus says: "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' He is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition."³⁵⁰ God's intention was that in honoring our parents we would provide an honorable living for them. It should be the pride of a parent to live in such a way that it is easy for them to be honored. But even if parents do not live up to the standard that God has set, the children are under obligation to honor them.

³⁴⁷ I John 4:20,21

³⁴⁸ See Matt. 25:31-46

³⁴⁹ Eph. 6:2,3

³⁵⁰ Matt. 15:3-6

It seems that the Apostle Paul deviates from this rule when he writes to the Corinthians: "After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children."³⁵¹ If we distinguish the stages of life for a parent and a child we will understand that there are periods in which it is the parents' responsibility to provide for their children, that is when they are too young to provide for themselves; but it is the children's responsibility to provide for their parents when they become too old to take care of themselves.

The promise attached to this commandment is "that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." Or, as it is said in Deuteronomy "that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you."³⁵² Obviously, the first intent is that Israel, as a people, would permanently occupy the land of Canaan. But "living in the land" has a deeper meaning than just occupying the place. Psalm 37 makes this abundantly clear. After Israel has lived in Canaan for about five centuries the psalmist (probably David) writes: "For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land" (vs. 9). "But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." (vs. 11) "The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever" (vs. 18). "Those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off" (vs. 22). "Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever" (vs. 27). "The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever" (vs. 29). "Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it" (vs. 34).

The idea is the same as when the writer to the Hebrews speaks about the promise of entering His rest, which still stands.³⁵³ He says: "Now we who have believed enter that rest." It is when we obey the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves and apply this, first of all, to our immediate family, that God will make us share in the glory of His love above.

In honoring our father and our mother, we recognize God's hand in the creation of our own person. Our parents are the link that tie us to God's original creation of man. We can hardly expect an evolutionist to honor his parents. In honoring our parents, we respect the image of God in which we have been created. The honor we give to our parents is part of our self respect.

The sixth commandment, "You shall not murder," enlarges the sphere of our love from our parents to our fellow human beings. Murder is the extreme form of a lack of honor and respect. The Apostle John makes clear that the love for our brother is the immediate fruit of our love for God. He says: "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother."³⁵⁴ and "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."

There are various ways in which we can destroy human life. Murder does not only mean that we extinguish a life by shooting or stabbing. All hatred is murder. Actually, all indifference toward other humans amounts to murder. There is no neutral ground between love and hatred. If we are not moved with compassion in seeing the suffering and need of others, we carry in us all the basic elements of murder. We read about Jesus, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."³⁵⁵

"Murder" is a better translation than "kill." Both the KJV and RSV say: "You shall not kill (RSV). Murder is specifically limited to killing of humans. Killing of animals is not forbidden, but killing of men means the destruction of the image of God. That is why God says to Noah: "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."³⁵⁶

So, the commandment does not forbid capital punishment. As a matter of fact it sanctions it. A murderer should be executed, according to the Word of God, because he has destroyed the image of God.

³⁵¹ II Cor. 12:14

³⁵² Deut. 5:16

³⁵³ Heb. 4:1

³⁵⁴ I John 3:10, 15

³⁵⁵ Matt. 9:36

³⁵⁶ Gen.9:5,6

The essence of the command is love. In Leviticus we read: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”³⁵⁷ We are commanded to love instead of hate, because God is love.

The seventh commandment reads: “You shall not commit adultery (vs. 14). *The Webster Dictionary* defines adultery as, “Sexual relations between two persons either of whom is married to another person.” The difference between adultery and fornication is that in the latter case neither of the parties is married. The punishment for adultery was death, according to Leviticus: “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife; with the wife of his neighbor; both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”³⁵⁸ In a case of fornication, a distinction was made between girls who were virgins but were engaged to someone or girls who were single. In the case of an engaged girl, the girl would be considered guilty if she had not cried for help in an inhabited area. If the girl obviously consented to the act, she was as guilty as the man, and both were to be executed.

Consider the following Scripture verses: ch. 22:16, “If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife.” In Deuteronomy: “But if out in the country a man happens to meet a girl pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the girl; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders his neighbor. For the man found the girl out in the country, and though the betrothed girl screamed, there was no one to rescue her.”³⁵⁹

In Jesus’ days it seems that capital punishment had been abolished for adultery. Jesus doesn’t mention capital punishment at all. He says in Matthew: “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”³⁶⁰ In John’s Gospel, where the teachers of the law and the Pharisees bring to Jesus a woman who was caught in adultery, they says: “In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”³⁶¹ The obvious intent there was not to punish the woman, but to catch Jesus.

There is more in this commandment than the extra-marital act of sex between married people. The root of adultery is in man’s heart. Jesus says: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”³⁶² And elsewhere Jesus says: “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”³⁶³ Adultery is committed in the heart, before it is carried out in the flesh. Therefore, we can safely say that the seventh commandment governs, in the first place, our thought-life. Job said: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.”³⁶⁴ Such a covenant can be made only with the help of the Holy Spirit; surely everybody who calls on the Name of the Lord should make it.

For some reason, the people from the Me tribe in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, (and some of the other tribes as well) seem to think that adultery is the only real sin a man can commit. Or, at least it is considered the most serious of all offenses. We should not diminish the gravity of sin, but I believe that in God’s eyes this sin is the last one on the list. Because of the role our hormones play in sexual desire, we are more easily overwhelmed by this kind of desire than by any other. Sexual desire is probably the hardest one to bring under submission of our spirit. And it seems that the devil makes more of this problem than of any other one we may have.

It will be most helpful if we understand why God made us to be sexual beings. After all, sex is God’s invention and it is good within the framework in which He placed it. In sexual intercourse man and wife express the mystical union between Christ and the church. That is why the Apostle Paul says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery; but I am talking about Christ and the church.”³⁶⁵ In corrupting the most beautiful image of our fellowship with God, the devil succeeds in making us live a caricature. His intent is not primarily to fire up our lusts and desires, but to block our understanding of what our relationship with

³⁵⁷ Lev. 19:18

³⁵⁸ Lev. 20:10

³⁵⁹ Deut. 22:25-27

³⁶⁰ Matt. 19:9

³⁶¹ John 8:3-11

³⁶² Matt. 15:19

³⁶³ Matt. 5:28

³⁶⁴ Job 31:1

³⁶⁵ Eph. 5:31,32

God can be. The author of the Hebrew epistle describes the attitude a Christian should have. He says: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."³⁶⁶

The Bible calls idolatry adultery. Jeremiah represents Israel's idolatry as if the nation was having an extra-marital affair with idols instead of with God.³⁶⁷

And the prophet Ezekiel says: "For they have committed adultery and blood is on their hands. They committed adultery with their idols; they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to me, as food for them."³⁶⁸

The main theme of the book of Hosea is based on this image. Israel's rejection of God and their practice of idol worship is compared to an adulterous affair. We read: "When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him: "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD."³⁶⁹ So this seventh commandment runs parallel to the first and second one.

Any sexual relationship makes the partners "one flesh." That is why Paul says in I Corinthians: "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.'³⁷⁰ And he states: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."³⁷¹ These verses indicate that our sexuality has spiritual dimensions, and that we should handle our sexuality accordingly. Since sex is an image of a spiritual reality, people who remain single and abstain from sexual intercourse, do not miss out on the reality of life. They only bypass the picture. Some people are able to do this. This is probably what Jesus meant when He said: "For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."³⁷²

The eighth commandment, "You shall not steal" (vs. 15) presupposes the right to private property. Incidentally, in the Me culture, mentioned above, adultery is considered a form of stealing, the woman having been bought with a bride-price. Robbing people of the right to own is contrary to the image of God in us. The fact that some people are enormously rich and others poor does not deny this fact. Communism is not the solution to the problem of sin on earth. Even the community-life the first century Christians lived in Jerusalem did not negate the right to private property. Peter did not condemn Ananias and Sapphira because they had not given up everything they owned, but because they lied by giving the impression that they had sacrificed all, while they were keeping back a portion. Peter said to Ananias: "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."³⁷³

Basically, this commandment urges us to respect the image of God in our neighbor. We do not take something that belongs to someone else, because he is a person, created in the image of God. If we respect the person, we respect his property.

Stealing can adopt different forms. There is the taking away of things belonging to someone in a secretive way, which is what the burglar and the pick-pocket does. There is embezzlement, which nowadays can be done electronically. There is coercion and blackmail. There is psychological coercion, when a person uses his status in life to make people render services to him that cannot be refused. We can steal directly and indirectly.

We can also steal from God as well as from man. This kind of stealing is not limited only to the withholding of tithe money, but it is also the failing to recognize that all we have belongs to God. As we read in the psalms: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."³⁷⁴

³⁶⁶ Heb. 13:4

³⁶⁷ Jer. 3:6-9

³⁶⁸ Ezek. 23:37

³⁶⁹ Hos. 1:2

³⁷⁰ I Cor. 6:16

³⁷¹ I Cor. 6:14

³⁷² Matt. 19:12

³⁷³ Acts 5:3,4

³⁷⁴ Ps. 24:1

Everything we possess is borrowed. God loans us possessions while we are on earth in order to “use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”³⁷⁵ The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”³⁷⁶ God will judge us, not on the basis of what we have given away, but on what we have kept for ourselves. Jesus illustrates this clearly in the incident of the widow. “Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything; all she had to live on.’”

There seems to be contradiction between the fact that we are to respect our neighbor’s property and that we are to consider our own property as not really belonging to us. The key to the understanding of this problem is, of course, the fact that Jesus saved our life and that we owe Him everything. We are all thieves unless we are covered by the blood of Christ. Also, although we should treat our neighbor as we want to be treated ourselves this does not necessarily mean that we should treat ourselves the same way. We can treat our neighbor as a king and ourselves as a slave. This does not go against biblical precepts. It is a safe way to live and to stay away from temptation. Mark Jesus’ words: “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”³⁷⁷

The ninth commandment reads: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (vs. 16). The terminology places this commandment in a courtroom where people make statements under oath. The Israelite courts were, of course, different from our modern judicial procedures, but there is no difference in principle. The intent of the law is that we are not to make statements about other people that are untrue and that would consequently jeopardize them in society. As a safeguard against false incrimination, the law prescribed that more than one witness were needed to convict a man of a crime. In Deuteronomy we read: “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offence he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” The Apostle Paul corroborates this commandment when he writes to Timothy: “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.”³⁷⁸

But more is implied in the ninth commandment than lying in court only. If we belong to God, we are partakers of His truth, because God is the God of truth. David calls Him thus when he says: “Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.”³⁷⁹ All lies can be traced back to Satan. If we lie we belong to him. As Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees of His time: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”³⁸⁰ The Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, is the Spirit of truth.

Our problem is that our sinful nature makes us natural liars. It is easier for us to lie than to speak the truth, unless God has intervened in our lives. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”³⁸¹ If it is a fact that our heart is deceitful, it means that we deceive ourselves. We cannot trust ourselves. Even after we have become new creatures in Jesus Christ, we have to learn to speak the truth.

The tenth commandment reads: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (vs. 17). The ninth and tenth commandments deal with the heart of man. It is true that Jesus traces at least four of the ten commandments back to its roots in the human heart. In Matthew He says: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”³⁸² But, although God aims at the human heart in giving the Ten Commandments, most of the ten speak more of an act than an intent. Lying is more a sin of the heart than any of the previous commands on the second table of the law. It is not merely a sin of the tongue. The others condemn acts.

³⁷⁵ Lk. 16:9

³⁷⁶ Eph. 4:28

³⁷⁷ Luke 17:10

³⁷⁸ I Tim. 5:19

³⁷⁹ Ps. 31:5

³⁸⁰ John 8:44

³⁸¹ Jer. 17:9

³⁸² Matt. 15:19

Covetousness is different. There is no human law that punishes covetousness. The laws of state allow us to covet as much as we want as long as our thoughts are not converted into acts of stealing. In the tenth commandment, God lays a claim to our thoughts and intentions, not only to our behavior. That is why the law is wrapped up in this one statement: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."³⁸³

The tenth commandment defines into detail what the author of Proverbs says: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."³⁸⁴ God gives the tenth commandment because He wants us to have life and spiritual health. Covetousness is the root of evil. Sin came into the world because Satan succeeded in making man covet. "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."³⁸⁵

The devil manipulates our desires very cleverly. Desire itself is not wrong. We would never grow spiritually if we had no desires. But the enemy manages to let us dwell in a world of unreality, where we dream and toy with things we do not need; things that would destroy us. He draws our attention away from the present and from satisfaction with the present in order to let our mind roam in never-never land. "If I were rich ..." The Bible brings us back to earth. God wants us to be grateful for what we have now. He wants us to be realistic. "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'³⁸⁶ Paul says: "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."³⁸⁷

As we said above, covetousness is not recognized as sin by most people. Even the Apostle Paul admits: "I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'³⁸⁸

The opposite of covetousness is love. Paul, again, says in Romans: "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'³⁸⁹

And James shows us what to do with our wishes and desires. He says: "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God."³⁹⁰ Prayer robs desire of its sting. And Paul's advice is: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."³⁹¹ It is the attitude of gratitude that will keep us from trespassing. Hardships in life are the result of demonic activity, but they are God's tools to prepare us for glory. By praising God and thanking Him for everything that happens to us, we keep ourselves from falling into the devil's trap. Praise in the midst of little annoyances, as well as when great suffering comes over us will bring us out of prison. It was praise that set Paul and Silas free when they were chained in the prison of Philippi. It was the same praise that broke the chains of darkness in the heart of their jailer. Praise and gratitude in adversity makes God's light shine in the darkness. Covetousness makes life sour and dims our light.

2- The reaction of the people to God's revelation Vs. 18-21

³⁸³ Matt. 22:37-40

³⁸⁴ Prov. 4:23

³⁸⁵ Gen. 3:6

³⁸⁶ Heb. 13:5

³⁸⁷ I Tim. 6:9-11

³⁸⁸ Rom. 7:7

³⁸⁹ Rom. 13:9

³⁹⁰ James 4:2

³⁹¹ I Thes. 5:18

In vs. 18 we read the reaction of the people when they heard the voice of the Lord giving them the Ten Commandments. “When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance.”

There is a negative and a positive side in the reaction of the people to the hearing of the voice of God. Their trembling with fear indicates that their relationship with God was marred by sin. There is always a holy fear when a creature meets his Creator. But what the people experienced was more than holy fear. They felt condemned in the sight of God. Isaiah had this reaction when he saw God in the temple. In Isaiah we read: “ ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’ ”³⁹² Although this fear of God is caused by our sinful condition, it is also salutary. Unless we realize what we are before a holy God, we will never come to the point of confession and asking for forgiveness. We cannot be a Christian if we don’t start out by knowing we are lost.

The tragedy of this moment can hardly be exaggerated. Man is created to know God and have fellowship with Him. Israel, God’s own people, had come to their destination. They had arrived at the place God had invited them to for the feast of YHWH. And their reaction was fear and trembling. There was not a trace of the joy for which God had destined them. It becomes obvious how much damage sin has done to the human heart. The gap between God and man seems unbridgeable.

Of course, God was not so naïve as to think that there really was going to be a celebration. He knew from eternity what the reaction of the people would be. Before Satan was created and evil had appeared, God knew what damage evil would do. The purpose of the gathering at the foot of Mount Sinai was to draw the people out of their haze and fantasy into the reality of His presence. Knowledge of God comes only through forgiveness of sin and forgiveness is impossible without knowing of sin. We cannot know God without knowing ourselves and our lost condition. Paul declares: “Through the law we become conscious of sin.”³⁹³

The positive side of the people’s reaction is that they realize their need for a mediator. Moses plays this role here which will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The whole ceremonial part of the law accentuates the need that the gap between the holy God and sinful man be bridged. In the construction of the tabernacle, the establishment of the priesthood and the ritual of the sacrifices the stress is laid on the enormous precipice that separates us from God. On this first day of the feast at the foot of Mount Sinai, the people become aware of this. They realize that they will never be able to live the life God wants them to live unless somebody steps in between. God demands holiness and perfection which we will never be able to produce. It is even foolish to try. If we stop trying, however, and we confess our condition to God, we see the greatest miracle taking place in our own heart. Paul expresses this in the epistle to the Romans: “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”³⁹⁴ And again: “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”³⁹⁵ This is the secret of the spiritual life.

Moses’ reply to the people is: “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning” (vs. 20). This answer is only partly correct. It is true that God came to test the people and that the fear of God can be a helpful factor in keeping us from sinning. But Moses underestimated the power of sin in the human heart. We will read later, in chapter 32, that the people fell into the sin of idolatry, thus sinning against the very first command the Lord had given them. They were all spiritually very young, and the basis of their faith was not the Person of God but Moses. When Moses left them, they felt robbed of their security, and the fear of God vanished from their lives as a vapor. The Word of God had not taken a hold of them. The only thing that will effectively keep us from sinning is the Word of God in our hearts. The psalmist says: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”³⁹⁶

³⁹² Isa. 6:5

³⁹³ Rom. 3:20

³⁹⁴ Rom. 4:4,5

³⁹⁵ Rom. 8:3,4

³⁹⁶ Ps. 119:11

The coming of the mediator had been God's greatest secret since the beginning of creation. Immediately after the fall of man, God introduced the promise that the woman would have offspring and that "he will crush your [Satan's] head."³⁹⁷ And in Deuteronomy God promises Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him."³⁹⁸ But nowhere in the Old Testament does it become clear that this mediator will be God Himself who became man. Isaiah comes the closest to touch upon the secret when he says: "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him."³⁹⁹ John says it at clearest when he says: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."⁴⁰⁰

In the same way that God did not give a wife to Adam until the desire awoke in his heart, so God prepared the coming of His Son into the world by centuries of longing in the heart of His children. So, when Jesus was born, Simeon was ready to receive Him in his arms. We read: "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, Which you have prepared in the sight of all people, A light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'"⁴⁰¹

So we read in vs. 21: "The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was." It seems strange to us that He who is light, as the Apostle John says: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all,"⁴⁰² would wrap Himself in darkness when He appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai. The darkness here is, obviously, not an expression of God's character. The appearance is probably an object lesson which demonstrated to the Israelites that they were separated from God by darkness, that is their darkness, not His. When God appears to us as darkness, we have to understand that this is not the ultimate reality. Before the fall, Adam and Eve would never have seen God as darkness. When He appears to us in darkness it is with the purpose of stimulating our faith. We learn to trust God when we cannot see Him. Jesus said this to Thomas when He appeared to him after His resurrection: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."⁴⁰³

Moses approached the darkness because he knew that God was there. We may approach all darkness with the same confidence. When God appears to us in a form that is incongruent with His being He tests our faith.

In approaching the darkness Moses entered into another phase of his spiritual experience. God had revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush. There Moses heard the voice of the Lord and saw the fire, but he did not see God Himself. After that moment God communicated with him frequently, especially during the period of the plagues in Egypt and the Exodus. In ch. 33:18-34:7 we read that at Moses' request God showed part of His glory to Moses, in what is beyond doubt, the most moving portion of this book. From that time on, Moses communed with God as nobody had ever done before. We should see Moses' entering of the cloud in this context.

3. God's Instructions to Moses Regarding the Way He Should Be Worshipped Vs. 22-26

When reading the reaction of the people to God's revelation of Himself we have to realize how far removed they were from loving God. God created man for the purpose of having a relationship of love with Him. The great commandment, which is the essence of our existence, is: "Love the LORD your God

³⁹⁷ Gen. 3:15

³⁹⁸ Deut. 18:18

³⁹⁹ Isa. 59:16

⁴⁰⁰ John 1:14

⁴⁰¹ Luke 2:25-32

⁴⁰² I John 1:5

⁴⁰³ John 20:29

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”⁴⁰⁴ The people not only did not recognize God’s love for them and responded accordingly, they fled in fear from the One Who loved them. How deeply hurt must God have felt! This sounds like an expression that is too human for this purpose, but Scripture concurs with the thought that God longed for Israel’s love, even to the point of being jealous when they withheld this love from Him. In the giving of the second commandment God says: “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (vs. 5). God says to Jeremiah: “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”⁴⁰⁵ And in Isaiah God says: “All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.”⁴⁰⁶ In the expression of His feelings, God is not less than we are.

That is why, when Moses enters into the presence of God, God repeats the second commandment. The idea that Israel, the only people in the world to whom God has revealed His love, would turn away from Him and pledge allegiance to Satan, is unbearable to Him. One of the first things God says to Moses is: “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold’” (vs. 22,23).

We are reminded again of the fact that the revelation of God on Mount Sinai was unique. There is no moment in history where God showed Himself so openly to so many people. There is no parallel to this moment in the worldwide history of religion. Although, as we remarked before, some of the Ten commandments were probably common knowledge before God gave them to Israel, nothing as unique as the giving of the Ten Commandments ever occurred before or after. We should never detach the Ten Commandments from the background against which they were given. They are words of majesty and glory. Nothing can stand beside them. They are the greatest statement of faith ever made on earth, and they were made by the eternal God Himself, the Creator of Heaven and earth, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last verses of this chapter, vs. 24-26, God gives instructions concerning the way the people should fellowship with God. These are preliminary instructions which are supplanted by later ones when the tabernacle is constructed. The brass altar would take the place of the earthen or stone altar of these verses and the kinds of sacrifices to be used is specified in more detail. The emphasis in these verses is on every day fellowship, not on the more elaborate ceremonies of the Aaronite priesthood.

There is also no mention of any sin offerings. The only offerings mentioned are the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, which have no connection with atonement. This fact also points in the direction of the love relationship God wants His people to establish with Him.

The prohibition to dress or hew stones is probably related to the idol worship in which stones were used to carve images that were worshipped. Nothing but the most elementary constructions are to be made.

The last verse strikes us as strange: “And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it” (vs. 26). This is the only reference to sin we find in these verses. Adam and Eve translated their spiritual shame into a shame about their physical nakedness. God provided them with a cover of animal skin. The dead animal was an image of the atonement by the blood of Christ. God allows us to cover ourselves. He doesn’t put us to shame or allow us to feel ashamed, although we have behind us a whole load of sin we should be ashamed about. He loves us and love averts shame. Hence this stipulation not to come before Him with our nakedness. In the priestly service, a special provision was made for the priests to wear underpants. In ch. 28:42,43 we read: “Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

In this chapter and the following, we find more or less a repetition of the Ten Commandments in more elaborate form. The chapters read almost like a commentary on certain commandments. The

⁴⁰⁴ Deut. 6:5

⁴⁰⁵ Jer. 31:3

⁴⁰⁶ Isa. 65:2

commentary does not follow the commandments in chronological order, but seems to work from the top downwards, although not in a consistent way.

The commandments in this chapter pertain to the relationship between people. As in the last verses (22-26) of the last chapter, Moses finds himself inside the cloud while God is speaking to him. The content of this conversation covers the chapters 20:22 - 23:33. After that Moses is sent back down the mountain to call up the priests and the elders. We read in ch. 24:1, "Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel.'"

The section of vs. 2-11 deals with slavery involving Hebrew men and women. Vs. 2-6 deals with the men and vs. 7-11 with the women. The next section, from vs. 12-27 deals with hostile relationships among people. The last section of the chapter, from vs. 28-36, draws an animal into the picture, but the main theme is hostility among humans. Besides the practical regulations given in these verses, we find in them an object lesson of our relationship with God.

The subject of the verses 2-11 is slavery. It is obvious that slavery was not part of God's original plan of creation. Man, made in the image of God, is not born to be a slave. Before sin came into the world, there was not even any question of man ruling over other human beings. Adam was lord of the animal kingdom, not over Eve. After man had fallen into sin God said to Eve: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."⁴⁰⁷ There is, however, no divine ordinance which introduces slavery.

On the other hand, this law condones slavery, or, at least, accommodates to it. In this respect the law falls under the same heading as divorce, of which Jesus says: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."⁴⁰⁸ In a certain way, the whole law is an adaptation to man's sinful condition. Without sin, there would have been no need for law; without doubt about it that slavery is related to sin.

The slavery mentioned in the vs. 2-6 was probably the result of economic hardship. The Hebrew servant was a man who had incurred debts and sold his services in order to pay off his debts. In some cases a man would be sold if he had committed a crime for which he could not compensate. Ch. 22:3 says: "A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay for his theft."

Adam Clarke remarks: "Calmet enumerates six different ways in which a Hebrew might lose his liberty: (1) In extreme poverty he might sell his liberty, Lev. xxv. 39; 'If thy brother ... be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee.' (2) A father might sell his children. 'If a man sell his daughter to be a maidservant;' see v. 7. (3) Insolvent debtors became the slaves of their creditors. 'My husband is dead ... and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondsmen,' 2 Kings iv. 1. (4) A thief, if he had not money to pay the fine laid on him by the law, was to be sold for his profit whom he had robbed. 'If he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft,' chap. xxii. 3-4. (5) A Hebrew was liable to be taken prisoner of war, and so sold for a slave. (6) A Hebrew slave who had been ransomed from a Gentile by a Hebrew might be sold by him who ransomed him, to one of his own nation."

The law emphasized the rights of the slave, not his obligations. The law is primarily addressed to the man who bought him, not to the slave who sold himself.

We have to bear in mind that if sin had not come into the world, the situation described here would never have occurred. The law is meant to curb the influence of sin and thus to limit the power of Satan over man.

The law pertained to Hebrews, that is, members of the people of God. The implication is that a child of God could be poor. The fact that we belong to God does not guarantee wealth. Some of God's children run up debts. The Bible does nowhere teach a theology of "Green Power." The section does suggest, however, that if we do end up in the red we should seek an honorable way to get out of it. It is better to sell yourself as a slave than to make others pay for the cost of running your life. There is such a thing as honorable slavery.

On the other hand, and this is the significance of this law, a master was not allowed to take advantage of the misery of his servant. A business contract had to be drawn up, limiting the period of servant-hood, which was seven years. After this period, the servant automatically received his freedom. It seems only right to us that his wife and children would be set free at the same time. But it strikes us as strange that the wife he might have married during his period of service and the children that were born during that time, would remain the property of the master. This stipulation seems to violate the sacredness of marriage. We have to remember, though, that the servant knew this would happen at the time he

⁴⁰⁷ Gen. 3:16^b

⁴⁰⁸ Matt. 19:8

married the woman who, apparently, was also a slave of the same master. It is hard for us to bridge this gap, which was, obviously, a cultural one. It seems to have made sense to the people of that time.

In the parallel passage in Deuteronomy, the master was under obligation not only to restore freedom to his slave, but he also had to give him presents. We read there: "And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today."⁴⁰⁹ In that section there is no question about leaving his own family, or even of having married and children being born during the six years of slavery. The love expressed there is, primarily, for the master and his family.

If we see slavery as a symbol of sin, the admonition in Deuteronomy "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you," contains a beautiful lesson. As people who have been redeemed from sin, we should relate to others, not as saints but as redeemed sinners. Jesus makes this clear in the parable of the slave who had been pardoned, but refused to pardon his fellow man.⁴¹⁰

There is a clear connection between the time period the slave had to serve and his subsequent freedom and the Sabbath law. As there are six days of labor in a week and one day of rest, so in this arrangement there are to be six years of labor and then a Sabbath of freedom. This theme of six plus one runs through the whole of the Mosaic law. The seventh year is a year of rest for the farmer. The fiftieth year, that is the year after the seven times seventh year, is to be a year of general freedom from any kind of debt, a year of restoration.

That is why the Sabbath is connected, both to the seventh day of creation as well as to the liberation of the people from the slavery in Egypt, as we have already seen in a comparison between Exodus and Deuteronomy. And all this is a picture of the consummation of salvation, as is indicated in the epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: "Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it *Today*, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."⁴¹¹

There is a wealth of spiritual truth in these verses. The Hebrew man begins to serve his master because the master has paid his debt for him. That is understood, but he ends up serving the master because he loves him. We see in this a finger pointing from a situation on earth, in which a man has a debt he cannot pay, to man's spiritual condition. God has paid our debt for us. From this we draw the logical consequences that we owe Him our life. God has not paid our debt to make us slaves but to set us free. It is from this freedom that we can choose to love Him and to serve Him, not to pay Him back for His payment, but for His love. This becomes particularly relevant if we accept the fact that God has given us a wife and children. For women this would mean that God gives a husband and children. But it is, of course, just as pertinent for single people too.

We should pay attention to the sequence in the declaration of the servant. We read in vs. 5, "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free...'" The love for his family is preceded by his love for his master. We can only love our family if we love God first. No lasting love can exist outside the love of God. If we respond to His love by loving Him, He becomes for us the source of love. We may not give the love we owe to God to anybody else.

If the servant expresses clearly to his master that he does not want to go free, he has to repeat his statement in front of witnesses or judges. The Hebrew word here is *El haelohim* which, according to *Adam Clarke*, means "to the judgment of God" (or the gods, that is, the local authorities.) The obvious intent was to establish the fact that the slave willingly gave up his rights to freedom. The possibility would always exist that a master would force his slave to remain, if no public statement was required.

⁴⁰⁹ Deut. 15:13-15

⁴¹⁰ See Matt. 18:23-31

⁴¹¹ Heb. 4:3-11

The following ear-piercing ceremony probably took place at the house of the master. The man was literally nailed to the house to indicate that he belonged there. He became a permanent fixture. But the hole in the ear also symbolized obedience to the master.

In the passage in which David prophesies the death of Jesus on the cross he says: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require."⁴¹² And Isaiah describes Jesus' relationship with the Father with the words: "The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."⁴¹³

The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 40, but with a remarkable and profound difference. He says: "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am; it is written about me in the scroll; I have come to do your will, O God.'"⁴¹⁴ The difference between "my ears you have pierced" in the Psalms, and "a body you prepared for me," is derived from the fact that the author of the Hebrew epistle quotes the Greek text from the Septuagint.

This subtle difference in meaning suggests that the piercing of the ears is a picture of the sacrifice of Christ. We understand, of course, that the ear in this piercing ceremony stands for the whole body. In pledging total and lasting obedience, the slave surrendered his whole body to his master. It is Christ's obedience to the will of the Father that brought Him to the cross. The apostle Paul says the same: "He humbled himself and became obedient to death; even death on a cross!"⁴¹⁵

If we do not see the spiritual significance of these passages, we might wonder why God called Moses up the mountain for an audience with Him, to talk about laws that seem to have peripheral meaning only. It is true that neither Moses nor any of the Israelites of that time, were in a position to understand the importance of what God was saying here. But God knew what He was talking about. The Father always speaks about His Son in the whole of the Old Testament. In this He is not any different from any earthly father. And we are not that different from Him!

Finally, all slaves who surrendered themselves out of love to their masters were marked for life in a way that was obvious to everybody who saw them. The hole in the ear gave them away. Our surrender to the Master, although not marked by outward signs, should not be less visible.

The next section, from vs. 7-11 pertains to the sale of a daughter by her father. Our problem with these verses is that we are culturally so far removed from the world of those days that we have a hard time understanding the lesson of this Scripture portion. We might accept slavery in the form it was described in the preceding verses. If a man gets in debt and sells himself, he does something to exonerate himself. But for a father to sell his own daughter because of financial hardship is something that goes completely against the grain of our modern mindset. If such a thing would happen in our day, we would condemn it in the strongest terms. But if we carry this condemnation back to the times of Moses, we have lost sight of the historical perspective. In some respects we are farther removed from Moses' world than the East is from the West.

The idea is that of a marriage, and, not necessarily, a monogamous one. There is nothing to indicate that the man who would buy the girl was not already married. Although this is not mentioned specifically, the family of the girl is probably severely strapped financially. The father of the bride marries off his daughter to get himself out of debt. This is what connects these verses to the preceding ones. We read: "If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as manservants do." The intent is that the girl becomes the wife of the man who buys her and that this marriage cannot be annulled. These verses do not deal with slavery, as the preceding ones, but with marriage.

The positive point in this section is that the law protects the girl from the wiles of a man who wants to use her as he pleases. He cannot drop her like a rag when he does not want her any more. If he did desert her, the girl would regain her freedom automatically. The girl's rights are defined as: "food, clothing, and marital rights." This last term, according to *Strongs Definitions Definition*, refers to cohabitation.

Again, we ask ourselves the question why God brings up this subject in His conversation with Moses. It seems that there would be more important topics of revelation than this one. In this section too, God speaks about His Son. In the preceding verses the love of the slave portrayed the love and obedience

⁴¹² Ps. 40:6

⁴¹³ Isa. 50:4

⁴¹⁴ Heb. 10:5-7

⁴¹⁵ Phil. 2:8

of Christ. In these verses we read about the bride of Christ, for whom He paid the price and to whom He pledges allegiance. He will not break faith with her, as the man could do in vs. 8.

The girl came from a poor home. She grew up in misery and poverty and was sold to help pay the family debt. This symbol of human misery becomes one of the most glorious beings in the universe. The Apostle John describes in Revelation how the bride, the wife of the Lamb, shone with the glory of God.⁴¹⁶

What is so difficult for us to grasp is that God uses, not the image of an honorable, monogamous marriage, but that of polygamy to portray the status of the church as the bride of Christ. The same principle seems to be underlying the message of the book The Song of Solomon. Not only is this law an accommodation to human sinful tendency, that which Jesus describes as “the hardness of your hearts,” but it elevates this condition to the level of divine glory. Yet, polygamy was not part of God’s original plan for man. Paul’s directive to Timothy that the overseer must be “the husband of one wife”⁴¹⁷ makes clear what God’s paradigm for the church is.

We could say that, in His conversation with Moses, God approaches the present sinful condition in which He finds His children and issues commandments that limit the damage until the time that the foundation of salvation is complete, that is, the moment that Jesus died on the cross. Rather than seeing in these laws a condoning of sinful conditions, we should take them to be efforts to heal and restore. In this particular case, the law does not sanction what the father who sells does, or what the man who buys does, but it protects the girl who is the victim.

Vs. 12-14 deal with manslaughter and murder. We read in vs. 12, “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.” It becomes more and more obvious, as the giving of these commandments progresses that God does not condone sin. This law reaches back to the days of Noah when God told Noah: “From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of each of his fellow men. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”⁴¹⁸ The emphasis in these verses is on the place of refuge in vs. 13.

The first instance of murder is in Genesis, where Cain kills Abel. We read: “Now Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’ And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.”⁴¹⁹ In that case God did not take Cain’s blood in exchange for Abel’s as is demanded in ch. 21:12. But, according to Jesus’ warning to the people of His time, the whole human race will be held accountable for this first murder, and probably for all murders committed on earth. He says: “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”⁴²⁰ Although the Jews of the first century had not personally killed Abel or Zechariah, the blood of these people would be upon them. Consequently, it will be upon us too, unless our guilt is canceled by the blood of Christ. The writer to the Hebrews says that we can come “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”⁴²¹

We could say that the above shows us God’s basic attitude toward sin. By breaking relations with God, Adam did not only bring death into the world for himself and all of humanity, as Paul states in Romans,⁴²² but he made each individual personally responsible for each death on earth. God considers us to belong to a race of murderers, unless, that is, we are covered by the blood of Christ.

In the verse we are studying, however, it is not imputed guilt, but direct guilt that counts. Here is a man, who intentionally kills someone else. For such a person, capital punishment is demanded.

The point of this section is not intentional murder, but manslaughter. We read in vs. 13, “However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate.” The interesting phrase is, of course, “but God lets it happen.” The KJV gives the more literal translation: “but God deliver him into his hand.” The NIV gives, undoubtedly, the clearer meaning of the phrase. We could hardly suggest that God would hand a human being over to someone else, for the purpose of murdering him. What is meant is, what an Insurance Company calls, *an Act of God*.

⁴¹⁶ Rev. 21: 9,10

⁴¹⁷ I Tim. 3:2

⁴¹⁸ Gen. 9:5,6

⁴¹⁹ Gen. 4:8

⁴²⁰ Matt. 23:35

⁴²¹ Heb. 12:24

⁴²² Rom. 5:12

In the case of involuntary manslaughter the guilty one has “to flee to a place I will designate.” The book of Numbers elaborates on this point. God says there to Moses: “Select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge. Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge.”⁴²³

In Joshua these cities are identified. We read: “So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. On the east side of the Jordan of Jericho they designated Bezer in the desert on the plateau in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the tribe of Manasseh. Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.”⁴²⁴

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary records the following about refuge cities: “Judges controlled the entrance into the refuge cities. These were the cities where those who had committed accidental murder (manslaughter) could flee to safety. When the high priest of the nation died, refugees were free to go home without penalty <Ex. 21:12-14; Deut. 19:1-13>. Israel was responsible for keeping the roads to such cities as safe as possible so the fugitive could outrun the avenger-- the relative responsible for the fugitive's execution to repay the kinsman's death.”

The idea of the avenger is, of course, quite foreign to us. The Hebrew word is *ga'al*, which, according to *Strong's Definitions Definitions* means, “to redeem (according to the Oriental law of kinship), i.e. to be the next of kin (and as such to buy back a relative's property, marry his widow, etc.)” This, evidently included avenging the death of a next of kin. The Bible nowhere appoints avengers. They were there on the basis of what *Strong* calls “the Oriental law of kinship.” The fact that they existed and were able to carry out their avenging unpunished shows something of the raw life of ancient Biblical times. The intent of God's law here is to restrict “the law of the jungle.” The Israelites were hot-blooded Orientals, who acted on their emotions. This kind of character is difficult for a Westerner to understand. If we do recognize its existence, we come to a better understanding of the background against which Jesus could be crucified on such a short notice. This state of affairs is, obviously, eons removed from our present condition in which murderers wait on death row for years.

When God calls for capital punishment of murderers, however, He seems to have in mind an execution by lawfully appointed authority, not a privately carried out mission of revenge.

The Nave's Topical Bible sees in Hebrews the cities of refuge as a type of the asylum we have when we hide ourselves in our Lord Jesus Christ. The verse says: “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.”⁴²⁵

Nowhere in the Bible do we read of a law that defines the function of the horns of the altar as a place of refuge. Yet, the principle is clearly implied. It was probably an existing practice when the law was given on Mount Sinai. In vs.14 God says: “But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.”

The only instances recorded of people fleeing to the altar and grabbing the horns are found in I Kings: “But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar,”⁴²⁶ and, “When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the horns of the altar.”⁴²⁷ Both are, ironically, examples of people who were executed anyway. But this in no way takes away anything of the spiritual lesson implied in the act of fleeing to the altar for protection. The altar, being a picture of the cross of Christ, we should take a firm hold of the horns of this altar and cling to the old rugged cross for our protection and our very life. We are all guilty, and if we let go of the horns of the altar we will surely die. As in the days of the law, the *ga'al*, the next of kin, who is our Redeemer, will be the avenger for us, if we are not at the place where we are supposed to be. That is why “The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and

⁴²³ Num. 35:11-14

⁴²⁴ Josh. 20:7-9

⁴²⁵ Heb. 6:18

⁴²⁶ I Kings 1:50

⁴²⁷ I Kings 2:28

every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'⁴²⁸

Ch. 21:15 reads: "Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death." The word translated with "attack" is *nakah* which, according to *Strongs Definitions Definitions* means, "to strike (lightly or severely, literally or figuratively)." How severe the striking can be is clear from the fact that it is used of Moses killing the Egyptian in ch. 2:12.

The Pulpit Commentary says the following about this verse: "To 'smite' here is simply to 'strike' - to offer the indignity of a blow - not to kill, which had already been made capital (ver. 12), not in the case of parents only, but in every case. The severity of the law is very remarkable, and strongly emphasizes the dignity and authority of parents. There is no parallel to it in any other known code, though of course the *patria potestas* of the Roman father gave him the power of punishing a son who had struck him, capitally."

This law is the other side of the coin of the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."⁴²⁹

To our modern ears this commandment sounds unusually harsh. As a matter of fact, on our present day children can sue their parents if they receive corporal punishment, but there is no law against a child hitting his parent. Paul's admonition, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right,"⁴³⁰ is, of course, completely out of the picture. The whole concept that the family is an image of our relationship with God has gone out of the window. When Dan Quale, who was then Vice President of the USA, criticized the TV program *Murphy Brown* for exalting single parenthood, he was asked what planet he came from. We learn that God is our father and that we are His children within the framework of the family. Parenthood is a picture of the reality of God and so is the relationship between a child and his parents. So, in the eyes of God, a child who raises his hands against his parents, raises his hand against God.

The problem, however, is that there are no perfect parents and no ideal families. That is why Paul, after admonishing children to obey their parents, adds, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."⁴³¹ J.B. Phillips translates this verse as follows: "Father, do not overcorrect your children or make it difficult for them to obey the commandment. Bring them up with Christian teaching in Christian discipline."

The importance of this law for us is to recognize hatred toward parents as a sin. This does not mean that we have to accept parental authority without any questioning. This study is not the place to enter into the complex problems of psychological guilt an adult may struggle with because of faulty relationships with parents during childhood. It is true that the reality of our relationship with God can suffer severely because of faulty signals we received as a child from our parents, who were supposed to present a true picture of what God was like. This commandment gives us the framework of the relationship between parent and child. The relationship will only work in an atmosphere of unconditional love. Where that love is absent, the whole of reality is pulled out of whack.

This commandment should be linked to the one following in vs. 17. "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death." Here the connection between the image of the earthly relationship and the reality of the heavenly One becomes even more evident. A child who curses his parents uses the name of the Lord in order to jeopardize his salvation. The intent of the law may have been more the attitude of denial of such a relationship rather than an actual physical lifting up of a child's hand against his parents.

The family bond is meant to be an area of security. The strength of fatherly love and protection is needed to give a child a sense of being safe in a hostile world. A child without a father stands naked in the cold. The warmth of motherly love is meant to give a child the emotional security of feeling loved because of what he is. Both needs are indispensable in the healthy growth of a child into adulthood. When a child feels that the wall of protection is a limitation of his abilities and he wants to break out of it prematurely, he harms himself. There should come a point in the life of every young adult at which he feels he should leave his father and mother and become what he was meant to be. But, even then, the old fences should not be torn down, as if they never had any value. The Dutch poet, Herman Marsman, wrote: "I want to live grandiosely and impressively. Do you hear that, father, mother, house of dead bones?" The problem is, of

⁴²⁸ Rev. 6:15-17

⁴²⁹ Ex. 20:12

⁴³⁰ Eph. 6:1

⁴³¹ Eph 6:4

course, that some fences do enclose dead bones. Parental authority should not be extended beyond the limit or be used to crush instead of to invigorate. But even if parental authority is felt to be a yoke, it may be better to bear it than to shake it off prematurely. *Matthew Henry* astutely remarks: "What yoke will those bear that have shaken off this?" Modern psychology sometimes errs in this realm.

Between the verses on the negative side of family relationship, we find a verse on kidnapping. Vs. 16 reads: "Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death." The verse seems to be out of context as it is sandwiched between two verses regarding the relationship between a child and his parents. It could be, however, that the change of subject and then the coming back to the previous subject are meant to throw light on the other two. It is the attitude of deception of a man who lures his fellowman into a situation in which he loses his independence and liberty that may be the theme in the two surrounding verses also. Unhealthy family relations are a result of sin that came into the world. The devil breaks up families, and he conditions man for this break-up by propaganda that says that family bonds are no good to start with anyhow. That is the deception which is highlighted in these verses.

That all these wrong attitudes are a result of demonic propaganda does not absolve man of personal responsibility for his sins, of course.

The regulations in vs. 18 - 27 are regarding violent offenses that do not lead to death. They involve free people, slaves and pregnant women. The first one is between two men who get into an argument with one another and, when tempers flare up, one hits the other. "If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist..." is a typical scene of two people losing their temper. There was no pre-meditation. Both men just lost control of themselves. It is usually two who lose control. If only one does, the argument rarely becomes a physical struggle. The Holy Spirit is, obviously, absent. Paul tells us: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."⁴³² Where the Spirit of God is not present things get out of hand.

The intent of this paragraph is that not all quarreling precedes murder. In a certain way, all fights are murders. People who really love each other will not start to fight. The apostle John says: "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous."⁴³³ The child of God ought to be ready to give his life for his fellow man. Again, it is John who says: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."⁴³⁴ Love does not flare up and injure the other one. Love is rather injured than the cause of injury.

Bad temper, however, is not treated by God in the same way as murder or hatred. A man who does not control his temper is held responsible for his actions, but he is not treated as a murderer.

It is interesting to read that "the one who struck the blow must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed." Evidently, the concept that "time is money" is not merely a Western idea.

In vs. 20 a man who kills his slave is to be punished. The law does not spell out the punishment in this verse, but from the context we understand that the owner of the slave would have to be executed. Verses 23-25 say: "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." In vs. 22 we find the clause "whatever the court allows." This would indicate that there is a body of judges that hands out verdicts in all of the cases mentioned in these chapters.

The question remains as to why the Lord brought up this topic in His conversation with Moses. The main topic is, obviously, justice. In breaking the bond of fellowship with God, Adam ruined relationships among all human beings. God's pattern would have been a bond of love among all humans. The term "One Happy Family" has been used in a sarcastic sense, because in the reality of daily life there is very little unity and brotherly love.

David says, longingly:

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

⁴³² Gal. 5:22,23

⁴³³ I John 3:10-12

⁴³⁴ I John 3:16

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,
 running down on Aaron's beard,
 down upon the collar of his robes.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
 For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
 even life forevermore."⁴³⁵

And in his *Ode to Joy*, which Beethoven immortalized in his Ninth Symphony, Schiller wants "all men to become brethren" under the wings of the Greek goddesses of joy. But, even if Schiller and Beethoven may have missed the mark, this does not detract in any sense from God's purpose with men. In the Old Testament God tells His people: "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."⁴³⁶ This is followed in the New Testament by a multitude of exhortations, of which we only designate a few:

- "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."⁴³⁷
- "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."⁴³⁸
- "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."⁴³⁹
- "From Him [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."⁴⁴⁰
- "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."⁴⁴¹
- "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."⁴⁴²
- "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."⁴⁴³
- "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."⁴⁴⁴

We can see Moses on the mountain in the presence of God in a state of ecstasy. The mundane affairs of quarrels and fights must have been far from his mind. He is in the presence of Him, who is the essence and source of love. But God is a realist. He knows what is going on down below in the valley.

A parallel in Scripture is the contrast between the scene of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain and the father with the demon-possessed boy in the valley below. Even Jesus, as a man, had trouble adapting Himself to the darkness to which the enemy confines man in this world. When He hears that His disciples were unable to conquer the enemy He exclaims: "O unbelieving and perverse generation ... how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me."⁴⁴⁵

The laws God gave to Moses govern human behavior in a pragmatic way. In the various happenings, which we would call "accidents," He says to Moses: "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise" (Vs. 23-25).

It seems that Jesus overrules these commandments when He says: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."⁴⁴⁶ We have to make a distinction, however, between what God commands as a punishment for the perpetrator and what the victim may choose to do. Jesus penetrates to the core of the matter, by showing that all sinful behavior is backed

⁴³⁵ Ps. 133:1-3

⁴³⁶ Lev. 19:18

⁴³⁷ Rom. 12:9-10

⁴³⁸ Rom. 13:10

⁴³⁹ Gal. 5:13

⁴⁴⁰ Eph. 4:16

⁴⁴¹ James 2:8

⁴⁴² I Pet. 1:22

⁴⁴³ I Pet. 4:8

⁴⁴⁴ I John 3:11

⁴⁴⁵ Matt 17:17

⁴⁴⁶ Matt. 5:38-42

up by demonic activity. This does not mean that an evil doer is not responsible for his actions. We are responsible for our acts, but we did not create our own sinful nature. The victim of evil has the power to defeat the enemy by choosing not to take revenge. This is what the apostle Paul means when he says: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."⁴⁴⁷

None of the laws in this section condone the present sinful condition of this world. Slavery, as we have seen already, was not according to the will of God, nor was fighting and abortion. Even revenge, as the Bible in its complete message makes clear, is not according to the character of God. All these commandments are accommodations to the present evil situation. The intent is to limit the damage, not to sanction the condition. Even on the summit of Mount Sinai God intended to make a new heaven and a new earth.

It is also obvious that many of the rules that are spelled out here were already existing practices among the people. A man who caused an abortion in his neighbor's wife would have been held accountable by the husband, even before Sinai. The clause, "the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows," suggests that the woman's husband might have made excessive demands upon the man who caused the abortion. This law gave the perpetrator the right to appeal. Vs. 26 and 27 suggest that some masters were cruel in punishing their slaves. God protects the slaves from this kind of excessive punishment by ordering freedom for slaves who were subjected to heavy physical abuse.

The regulations in vs. 28 - 36 cover more than just the damage in human lives caused by a goring bull. It pertains to everything for which one human being can sue someone else. God draws a clear line between that for which we will be held responsible and that which is beyond our control. An Israelite could sue his neighbor for negligence, but not just for accidents of any kind. In our age in which law suits have grown to proportions that are ridiculous, this law of the goring bull and the uncovered pit is very relevant.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Exodus 22:1-31

Matthew Henry's Commentary gives the following outline of this chapter:

The laws of this chapter relate,

I. To the eighth commandment, concerning theft <v. 1-4>, trespass by cattle <v. 5>, damage by fire <v. 6>, trusts <v. 7-13>, borrowing cattle <v. 14-15>, or money <v. 25-27>.

II. To the seventh commandment. Against fornication <v. 16-17>, bestiality <v. 19>.

III. To the first table, forbidding witchcraft <v. 18>, idolatry <v. 20>. Commanding to offer the firstfruits <v. 29-30>.

IV. To the poor <v. 21-24>.

V. To the civil government <v. 28>.

VI. To the peculiarity of the Jewish nation <v. 31>.

This chapter is linked to the previous one by the subject of cattle. But, whereas chapter 21 mainly dealt with death and injury to humans, the first 27 verses of this chapter deal with theft. Sin has not only made us murderers, but also thieves. Honesty does not come naturally to sinful man. Sin and lying go together. The first thing Adam and Eve did after they fell into the sin of disobedience was to lie about it. Theft and lying are twin brothers.

We have to remember again under what conditions Moses heard God say these words. He was in the cloud in the very presence of the God of truth. Dishonesty in any form must have been far from Moses' mind. In the presence of the Lord everything is open and uncovered. For God all men are naked. But there is no such thing as a naked thief. Stealing means keeping the cover.

As we mentioned previously, God respects private property. It is part of man's dignity to own. Stealing, therefore, is more than taking what belongs to another, it is an insult to the image of God in man. God takes such insults very seriously. Jesus uses the parable of the sheep and the goats at the day of judgment to illustrate this point. He lets the King say: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," and "whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."⁴⁴⁸ When we steal from men, we actually steal from God. Our relationship to our

⁴⁴⁷ Rom. 12:21

⁴⁴⁸ Matt. 25:40,45

neighbor reflects in essence our relationship to God. Loving your neighbor means respecting his property. Love excludes stealing.

The primary intent of stealing is, of course, to increase one's own property. God's commandment to Moses denies this principle. A thief who is caught has, not only, to reimburse but also to compensate for the loss. Stealing makes the thief poorer, not richer. We could object, of course, that many thieves, if not most, never get caught. But then, we have to realize that our scope of vision is very limited. The farthest we can ever see is to the end of life on earth. We only have to imagine what God will do in eternity to withdraw our objection. Men will be held accountable throughout all eternity for all words spoken and all things stolen unless, that is, he has passed judgment through the cross of Christ. Jesus says in Matthew: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."⁴⁴⁹ If this pertains to careless speech, how much more will we have to account for deliberate lies and mischievous acts!

As far as life on earth is concerned, and in the event that the thief is caught, God wants him to make restitution. "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." *Adam Clark's Commentary* gives an interesting comment on this verse: "In our translation (that is the KJV) of this verse, by rendering different Hebrew words by the same term in English, we have greatly obscured the sense. I shall produce the verse with the original words which I think improperly translated, because one English term is used for two Hebrew words, which in this place certainly do not mean the same thing. *If a man shall steal an ox [shor], or a sheep [seh], and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen [bakar] for an ox [shor], and four sheep [tson] for a sheep [seh].* I think it must appear evident that the sacred writer did not intend that these words should be understood as above. A *shor* certainly is different from a *bakar*, and a *seh* from a *tson*. Where the difference in every case lies, wherever these words occur, it is difficult to say. The *shor* and the *bakar* are doubtless creatures of the beef kind, and are used in different parts of the sacred writings to signify the bull, the ox, the heifer, the steer, and the calf. The *seh* and the *tson* are used to signify the ram, the ewe, the lamb, the he-goat, the she-goat, and the kid. And the latter word *tson* seems frequently to signify the flock, composed of either of these lesser cattle, or both sorts conjoined. A *shor* is used, Job xxi. 10, for a 'bull,' probably it may mean so here. 'If a man steal a bull, he shall give five oxen for him,' which we may presume was no more than his real value, as very few bulls could be kept in a country destitute of horses, where oxen were so necessary to till the ground. *Tson* is used for a flock either of sheep or goats, and *seh* for an individual of either species. For every *seh*, four, taken indifferently from the *tson* or flock, must be given; i.e., a sheep stolen might be recompensed with four out of the 'flock,' whether of sheep or goats."

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, George Knight states that the Hebrew law knew no incarceration. The only time a man was held in prison was in preparation for his execution. In all other cases; when no capital punishment was demanded, justice consisting in corporal punishment or imposition of fines, was meted out swiftly. The fine for stealing and killing livestock is stated in the above quoted verse.

Nelson's Bible Dictionary has an article entitled "Restitution." We read: "The act of restoring to the rightful owner something that has been taken away, stolen, lost, or surrendered <Leviticus 6:1-7> gives the Mosaic Law of restitution; this law establishes the procedure to be followed in restoring stolen property. Full restitution of the property had to be made and an added 20 percent (one-fifth of its value) must be paid as compensation <Lev. 5:16>. If a man stole an ox or donkey or sheep, and the animal was recovered alive, the thief had to make restitution of double the value stolen <Ex. 22:4>. If the thief had killed or sold the animal, however, he had to make a fourfold (for a sheep) or a fivefold (for an ox) restitution <Ex. 22:1>. In the New Testament, the word restitution is not used, but the idea is expressed. Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, said to Jesus, 'If I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold' <Luke 19:8>."

The interesting feature in this law is that it defines what guilt actually is. Stealing was not considered to be just an act of taking someone else's property. The thief became guilty before the Lord and had to atone for his sin by bringing a guilt offering.

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus lets the youngest son say: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Matt. 12:36

⁴⁵⁰ Luke 15:21

The sacrifice to be brought is described in Leviticus: "And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty."⁴⁵¹ The stain of guilt is not taken away by only making restitution to the neighbor. It has to be expiated before the Lord with the shedding of blood. A thief forfeits his life and he has to lay his soul upon God's altar in the form of a sacrificial animal.

This is what Zacchaeus did when he was visited by the Lord Jesus and understood that his sins were being forgiven. We read that he said to Jesus: "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." And Jesus' answer to him is, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."⁴⁵²

Vs. 2 and 3 show that the owner of a house could not kill a thief in cold blood. We read: "If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed." This is not stated but, supposedly, if the owner of the house were attacked by the thief and acted in self defense, the matter would be different.

The verses 5 and 6 deal with negligence. At least, the way the NIV interprets vs. 5 could be interpreted as negligence. We read: "If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard and lets them stray and they graze in another man's field, he must make restitution from the best of his own field or vineyard." The KJV does not have this ambiguity. The text there says: "If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution." In the next verse, where it is fire which destroys, not cattle that grazes, there is no such ambiguity. The fire was accidental, or at least it was not started with the purpose of burning the neighbor's field. The intention was to clean a thorn bush off from the field. But the man on whose field the fire started was still held responsible.

This kind of negligence is the same as that of the man who digs a hole and does not cover it, in ch. 21:33,34. Negligence is the result of egocentric behavior. It is the attitude of a man who does not stop to think how his actions will affect his neighbor. It is ultimately a lack of love. God want us to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Scriptures say: "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."⁴⁵³

Ironically, the only two incidents cited of a fire catching on a neighbor's field were first that were set intentionally by Samson burned the fields of the Philistines as an act of revenge, and Absalom burned Joab's field to catch the general's attention.⁴⁵⁴

The next section (vs. 7-15) deals with goods of livestock entrusted to a neighbor for safekeeping. Actually, the whole section deals with the matter of trust. *Matthew Henry* comments on this: "If a man deliver goods, suppose to a carrier to be conveyed, or to a warehouse-keeper to be preserved, or cattle to a farmer to be fed, upon a valuable consideration, and if a special confidence be reposed in the person they are lodged with, in case these goods be stolen or lost, perish or be damaged, if it appear that it was not by any fault of the trustee, the owner must stand to the loss, otherwise he that has been false to this trust must be compelled to make satisfaction. The trustee must aver his innocence upon oath before the judges, if the case was such as afforded no other proof, and they were to determine the matter according as it appeared."

The Pulpit Commentary says here: "Deposition of property in the hands of a friend, to keep and guard, was a marked feature in the life of primitive societies, where investments were difficult, and bankers unknown. Persons about to travel, especially merchants, were wont to make such a disposition of the greater part of their movable property, which required some one to guard it in their absence. Refusals to return such deposits were rare; since ancient morality regarded such refusal as a crime of deep dye (Herd. vii.86). sometimes, however, they took place; and at Athens there was a special form of action which might be brought in such cases called *parakatathe dike*. The penalty, if a man were cast in the suit, was simple restitution, which is less satisfactory than the Mosaic enactment - 'He shall pay double.'"

These regulations seem to protect the man in whose custody things or animals were placed. In our modern society the tendency is more to hold the custodian responsible, whatever the cause of the disappearance. Certainly in business, a receipt given for goods entrusted would ensure restitution,

⁴⁵¹ Lev. 6:6-7

⁴⁵² Luke 19:8-10

⁴⁵³ Lev. 19:18

⁴⁵⁴ See Judges 15:4,5; II Sam. 14:30

regardless of the reason for non-delivery. An airline, for instance, would have to pay for luggage stolen or damaged, if a claim check were presented. That is why disclaimers are used. The law in this section could be seen as such a disclaimer.

In the last two verses of this section, the borrowing of animals was, obviously, for use in agriculture. We may suppose that the presence of the owner of the borrowed animal meant that the man was there to ensure the safety of his property. If the borrowed animal died under the man's very eyes, the borrower could not be held responsible. Borrowing a donkey or an ox would be the equivalent of borrowing heavy farm equipment in our day.

The second part of this chapter, vs. 16-17, runs parallel to the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (ch. 20:14). The case described, however, is fornication not adultery. It may be more appropriate to say that this section is a warning to man to keep sexual desire under control. God warns against giving in without restriction to natural desires and to unnatural ones, like in vs. 19. The word that is translated with "seduce" in vs. 16 is the Hebrew *pathah*. According to *Strongs Definitions Definition* this means "to open, i.e. be (causatively, make) roomy; usually figuratively (in a mental or moral sense) to be (causatively, make) simple or (in a sinister way) delude." The KJV translates it with, "allure, deceive, enlarge, entice, flatter, persuade, silly (one)." The intent is to break down the fences of moral restriction.

The fact that the girl is seduced suggests that she gave in to the man's approach. It is not a matter of rape. In Deuteronomy the difference between rape and consent is defined, also whether the girl was engaged to be married to someone else or not must be declared. The latter would be a ground for the death penalty for both the man and the girl. She is considered to have broken her vow, as if she had committed adultery. We read: "If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death-- the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you. But if out in the country a man happens to meet a girl pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the girl; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders his neighbor, for the man found the girl out in the country, and though the betrothed girl screamed, there was no one to rescue her."⁴⁵⁵

Human sexuality is one of the great mysteries in life. Most people experience it with greater or lesser intensity, but few people understand the meaning of it. Sexual unity is a physical expression of a spiritual reality. Unless we see this, sexuality becomes meaningless. It is obvious that God intended man to have sexual relations. He invented sex. Genesis tells us: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."⁴⁵⁶ We understand this to mean that sexuality is part of the image of God. When man fell into sin and his spirit died, he lost control over his own life. It seems that the devil caused more havoc in man's sexuality than in any other aspect of his life. Under the influence of demonic propaganda many people have come to believe that sex and sin are identical. Many of God's children consider their sex life to be something they have to live with, while feeling guilty.

The real meaning of sexual unity become clear in the New Testament. The apostle Paul penetrates to the core of the mystery when he says: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church."⁴⁵⁷ It will be clear that sexual unity will only be an expression of the relationship between Christ and the church within the bonds of marriage. That is why fornication and adultery are considered such serious sins; not because they are sexual but because they make a caricature of the image of God. If man breaks down the fences of moral restraint and uses his sex drives for his own sake, he demonstrates that he does not know what he is doing and he does not know who he is. Because there is a point of no return, if we give in to lust, the devil uses this part of our fallen nature even more cleverly than any other. In some heathen cultures he even managed to give it a religious insinuation. Prostitution was part of the cult in some Greek and Roman religious practices.

Vs. 18 deals with witchcraft. No further details are given here. We read more in Leviticus.⁴⁵⁸

At this point *The Pulpit Commentary* remarks that there does not seem to be any progression of thought in the various commandments given. We read: "It has been already observed that in the remainder

⁴⁵⁵ Deut. 22:23-27

⁴⁵⁶ Gen. 1:27

⁴⁵⁷ Eph. 5:31,32

⁴⁵⁸ See Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27.

of the Book of the Covenant there is a want of method, or logical sequence. Seduction, witchcraft, bestiality, worship of false gods, oppression, are sins as different from each other as can well be named, and seem to have no connecting link." The author of this excellent commentary seems to have forgotten that there is a common denominator in all sin, which is that it all comes from the same author. The shadow of the enemy hovers heavily over all the acts of perversion: seduction, witchcraft, bestiality, and idolatry.

Witchcraft is put on the same line as prostitution in Leviticus, where God says: "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to *prostitute* himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people."⁴⁵⁹ This verse suggests that the real meaning of adultery, fornication, and prostitution is spiritual. Just as we have seen that the real meaning of sexual intercourse is spiritual, a person who practices witchcraft is a professional who has intercourse with demonic powers. This is the ultimate sin a person can commit. The human body is meant to be given to the Lord. A person who, not only refuses to surrender himself to the Lord but instead surrenders himself to God's enemy, commits the foulest act possible and slaps God in the face. That is why Leviticus says: "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads."⁴⁶⁰

Witchcraft makes a profession of human intercourse with demons. In bestiality man lowers himself in giving his body to something that is lower than he. The apostle Paul says: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."⁴⁶¹ In having sexual intercourse with an animal, a human being makes a caricature of the image of God and thus of God Himself. In idolatry man attributes supremacy to God's enemy and denies God's supremacy. Not only is the object of worship completely opposite of God, but the worship itself is contrary to what worship is intended to be. We have seen already, in connection with the first and second of the Ten Commandments that in making idols man tries to control his own destiny. God knows, however, that when man makes an idol and prays to it, the devil answers his prayers. Idol worship is never an innocent occupation with wooden or metal statues; it is intercourse with demonic beings. In all idol worship, there comes a point where man realizes that he is talking to his enemy. So the act of worship becomes an act of self-defense. Idol worship is not a positive rejoicing in the presence of an idol, it is the appeasing of an evil being. Man fools himself into believing that when a spirit sees animal blood he will be satisfied. A demon wants the blood of the man who sacrifices and nothing else.

The next section, vs. 21-24, deals with love to the neighbor, or rather, the negative side of it. The subject recurs throughout the Pentateuch, both in negative and positive form,⁴⁶² and also in the later prophets.⁴⁶³

Matthew Henry says in his outline that these verses pertain to the poor. This is not literally true. The subject is the treatment of foreigners, widows and people who are in financial need. The point in question is that a man would use the disadvantage of other people to his own advantage. The first category in this section is the aliens. The KJV calls them strangers. They are people who are not of Jewish ancestry, but who have come to live among the people of Israel for one reason or another. The intent of the law seems to be that immigration should be encouraged. This is in accord with God's designation of Israel as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The presence of aliens would allow Israel to function as priests. God had entrusted them with His revelation so that they would pass it on.

The subject is very relevant in our day. In many developed countries foreigners come to work, but most nations do not see this as a God-given opportunity for the witness of the Gospel. In many situations it is considered to be a threat to the labor market and a cause of unemployment for the natives of the country itself. However legitimate such complaints may be, a Christian should look at those conditions from a Biblical perspective, not from an economic one.

God reminds Israel that they were foreigners themselves. When this law was given, only a few months had passed since they had come out of their own slavery. Evidently, some people had already forgotten this and had started to treat the aliens among them with hostility. This must have been the reason that this commandment was given at this point. The Israelites did not see themselves yet as "World Christians," to use a modern term.

⁴⁵⁹ Lev. 20:6

⁴⁶⁰ Lev. 20:27

⁴⁶¹ I Cor. 6:13

⁴⁶² See Ex. 23:9; Lev. 19:33; 25:35; Deut. 10:19

⁴⁶³ Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5

The next commandment is even closer to home. God warns the people, “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.”

There are many references in the Old Testament to show how God feels about widows and orphans. In Deuteronomy we read: “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.”⁴⁶⁴

David condemns people who mistreat the widows when he says: “They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. They say, ‘The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed.’”⁴⁶⁵ Elsewhere he states, “The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”⁴⁶⁶

The prophets repeatedly admonish the people on the point of caring for the disadvantaged. Isaiah says: “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”⁴⁶⁷ And in Zechariah we read: “Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.”⁴⁶⁸

God has a special place in His heart for widows and orphans. He is described as: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”⁴⁶⁹ George Mueller of Bristol built his work among the orphans upon the promise in this verse. By faith he claimed provisions from the Father of the fatherless for the orphanages he ran to the glory of God. And God allowed him to build a monument of faith that still stands one and a half century later.

Jesus praised the widow who gave to the Lord out of her poverty. Mark tells us: “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything-- all she had to live on.’”⁴⁷⁰

Since the Lord’s work often receives more support from poor widows than from rich people, God protects this class of people in a very special way. In our verse the Lord says to men who suppress the rights of widows: “I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.” We could say that if a man does not want to support the Lord’s work according to his means, or beyond, his widow will! We forfeit our lives if we disregard the Word of God.

Vs. 25 tells us: “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest.” This commandment pertains to the Jewish people. As God’s children, the Israelites were to exercise compassion toward each other. As in the preceding verses, the intent is that they do not take advantage of someone else’s misfortune. It is true that, in the body of Christ, we are not under the law; but this law should be a guideline for the relationships among Christians also. This does not mean that a Christian would not be allowed to rent anything to another Christian. There is no reason why someone else should take our money and use it to his own advantage alone and not let us share in the wealth. The case in point in this commandment is a man in need. The borrower needs the help to survive. At the same time, though, the New Testament warns against borrowing. The apostle Paul says: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”⁴⁷¹ The KJV is more forceful in saying: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” This warning is issued to the borrower, not to the lender. We each have our own responsibility toward God.

Adam Clarke distinguishes between “usury” and “simple interest.” He uses the words *neshech* and *tarbith*. But none of the other commentaries or dictionaries indicate that two different words are used. In

⁴⁶⁴ Deut. 24:19,20

⁴⁶⁵ Ps. 94:6,7

⁴⁶⁶ Ps. 146:9

⁴⁶⁷ Isa. 1:17

⁴⁶⁸ Zech. 7:10

⁴⁶⁹ Ps. 68:5

⁴⁷⁰ Mark 12:41-44

⁴⁷¹ Rom 13:8

Leviticus this is made even clearer: “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit.”⁴⁷²

Vs. 25-27 indicate that the Israelites were allowed to take a pledge against a loan, only certain articles were prohibited as items of pledge. In these verses it is the cloak; another one is a pair of mill stones, or even a single one. In Deuteronomy we read: “Do not take a pair of millstones-- not even the upper one-- as security for a debt, because that would be taking a man’s livelihood as security.”⁴⁷³ The implication is that compassion is not to be separated from responsibility. Giving money without holding the borrower accountable is not in essence an act of compassion.

“If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”

The Lord foresaw the evil intent of the loaner to bring the borrower under his dominion. By taking a poor man’s cloak as a security against a loan, the man would have no blanket for the night since, obviously, the cloak doubled up as a blanket. We are dealing with a society of poor people, who live on the edge of starvation. It seems that the practical impact of this law upon society was that the borrower would deposit his cloak at his creditor’s in the morning and pick it up again in the evening and then, again, return with it the next morning until the loan was paid off.

We live in a strange creation. On the one hand God has surrounded us with beauty beyond description. Describing the lilies of the field, Jesus says: “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”⁴⁷⁴ God is the God of beauty and abundance; yet at the same time, Jesus identified Himself with the poorest of the poor. He says: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”⁴⁷⁵ And at the crucifixion it became clear that His wardrobe did not consist of anything of real value. The fact that the undergarment was seamless does not necessarily mean that it was of high quality. And even if it was, it would have been a gift from one of His followers. On the cross Jesus died naked. The “cloak [which] is the only covering he has for his body,” was not even His. His cloak was taken from Him and not returned to Him by the evening. He was wrapped in a shroud provided by someone else. Paul says: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”⁴⁷⁶

The chapter ends with four verses pertaining again to our relationship with God. The NIV renders vs. 28 with: “Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.” The KJV says: “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.” Since the theme of this section is mainly about relationship with God, it seems more logical to translate “Elohim” with “God” than with “the gods.” *Strongs’* gives the following definition of *elohiym* as, “gods in the ordinary sense; but specifically used (in the plural thus, especially with the article) of the supreme God; occasionally applied by way of deference to magistrates; and sometimes as a superlative”

The verse draws a line of authority from God to men who have authority over others. The fact that human authority over fellow human beings exists is an indirect reference to the existence of sin. Before sin entered the world through the human race, man did not rule over man. It wasn’t till Adam and Eve fell into sin that God said to Eve: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”⁴⁷⁷ The divine pattern was, obviously, that each person would submit personally to the direct authority of God over him. That would eliminate the need for a chain of command. The chain was necessary to limit the damage sin would do to interpersonal relations.

It is important to recognize the source of human authority as well as the background of it. Paul defines human authority in Romans: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and

⁴⁷² Lev. 25:35-37

⁴⁷³ Deut. 24:6

⁴⁷⁴ Matt 6:28-29

⁴⁷⁵ Matt. 8:20

⁴⁷⁶ II Cor. 8:9

⁴⁷⁷ Gen. 3:16

those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”⁴⁷⁸ And again, in Titus he says: “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.”⁴⁷⁹

Peter agrees when he says: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”⁴⁸⁰

Jesus puts the matter in the right perspective, when He answers Pilate: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”⁴⁸¹

“Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.” The word blaspheme is *qalal* in Hebrew. *Strongs* defines this as “to make light,” in the sense of trifling or hold into contempt. It seems to refer to an attitude of carelessness. The KJV translates it in this verse as “revile.” To curse, on the other hand, is deliberate. The Hebrew word is *arar* which means to curse or, even, “to execrate.” It is the lowest thing human beings can do to each other. The Bible gives us no license to curse any of God’s creatures. Only God has the right to curse. We read in Genesis: “So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.’”⁴⁸² As far as we are concerned, we should follow Jude’s advice: “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’”⁴⁸³ Even Jesus never cursed Satan during His life on earth.

Vs. 29 and 30 show the opposite side of blasphemy. We honor God when we consecrate our sacrifices to Him. The book of Proverbs says: “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”⁴⁸⁴

Neglect of offerings means dishonor to God. As we read in Malachi, where God says to Israel: “‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’ You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible.”⁴⁸⁵

The commandment to consecrate the firstborn to God is first given in ch. 13:2 - “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.” The book of Numbers specifies that every firstborn son has to be redeemed. We read: “The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the LORD is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs.”⁴⁸⁶ Added to this, all the male members of the tribe of Levi were considered payment for the firstborn Israelite boys. We read in Numbers, “Take the Levites for me in place of all the firstborn of the Israelites, and the livestock of the Levites in place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites. I am the LORD.”⁴⁸⁷

There seems to be a difference between redemption, in the sense of being delivered from the punishment of sin, and redemption based on the value of a human life. God demands payment for our sin by death, but He also demands payment for the value of our soul. Evidently, man’s fall into sin devalued his life. With the atonement comes the restoration of our value as a human being. Jesus emphasizes this when He says: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁴⁸⁸ A human soul is worth more than the whole world!

⁴⁷⁸ Rom. 13:1-2

⁴⁷⁹ Titus 3:1

⁴⁸⁰ I Pet. 2:13-17

⁴⁸¹ John 19:11

⁴⁸² Gen. 3:14

⁴⁸³ Jude vs. 9

⁴⁸⁴ Prov. 3:9,10

⁴⁸⁵ Mal. 1:6,7

⁴⁸⁶ Num. 18:15, 16

⁴⁸⁷ Num. 3:41

⁴⁸⁸ Matt. 16:26

In claiming the first fruit and the firstborn, God indicates that everything belongs to Him. As we read in ch. 19:5-6, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The KJV puts it more correctly: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: *for* all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” God did not choose Israel although the whole earth belongs to Him, but because of it.

At the same time the commandments given in these verses cast their shadow ahead toward the resurrection from the dead. The first fruits of the harvest and the firstborn of the womb were an image of life out of death. Jesus is called “the firstborn from the dead.”⁴⁸⁹ This is also brought out in the stipulation that the presentation of the firstborn should take place on the eighth day. Circumcision was to take place on the eighth day and the firstborn animal should stay with his mother for eight days. The resurrection took place on the eighth day, the day after the Sabbath. There was, of course, also a humanitarian consideration in that an animal would suffer if its young were taken away from her immediately after birth. The mother would have to suck it for one week in order to get rid of her milk.

The last verse of this chapter reads: “You are to be my holy people. So do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs.” This is, what *Matthew Henry* calls, “The peculiarity of the Jewish nation.” In ch. 19:6 God had said to the people: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Now, for the first time this holiness is applied to daily living. There is a difference between the ritual killing of an animal and eating meat and the senseless killing that goes on in nature. The animal the people are forbidden to eat is one that was killed by a wild beast, but not eaten. Death did not exist in nature before man fell into sin. Nobody ate meat. The wolf lived with the lamb, the leopard lay down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling lived together in peace.⁴⁹⁰ When all the consequences of sin are wiped off the face of the earth this condition will exist again. But now animals eat each other and man eats meat of animals. But the torn animal of vs. 31 was not eaten; it was just killed by another animal, just for the sake of killing. This showed the consequences of sin at its worst. God calls His people to be holy, that is to distance themselves from this condition in which nature has fallen and not to profit from it. The expression “throw it to the dogs” is probably a metaphor of the condition of the world in which scavengers feed, although it could, of course, be taken literally.

The Pulpit Commentary states here: “The blood of such an animal would not be properly drained from it. Some would remain in the tissues, and thence the animal would be unclean; again, the carnivorous beast which ‘tore’ it would also be unclean, and by contact would impart of its uncleanness to the other.” This is, undoubtedly, true this does not exclude the deeper meaning. God was, certainly, not interested in mere ritual purity.

Deuteronomy gives a further addition to this commandment. “Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God.”⁴⁹¹ Whether we may see a link between the terms “throw it to the dogs” and “give it to an alien” or “sell it to a foreigner,” I don’t know. It could be that people linked the expressions in their mind and that, later, aliens and foreigner were referred to as dogs.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

We turn again to *Matthew Henry* for the outline of this chapter: “This chapter continues and concludes the acts that passed in the first session (if I may so call it) upon Mount Sinai. Here are I. Some laws of universal obligation, relating especially to the ninth commandment, against bearing false witness <v. 1>, and giving false judgment <v. 2-3, 6-8>. Also a law of doing good to our enemies <v. 4-5>, and not oppressing strangers <v. 9>. II. Some laws peculiar to the Jews. The sabbatical year <v. 10-11>, the three annual feasts <v. 14-17>, with some laws pertaining thereto. III. Gracious promises of the completing of the mercy God had begun for them, upon condition of their obedience. That God would conduct them

⁴⁸⁹ Rev. 1:5

⁴⁹⁰ See Isa. 11:6

⁴⁹¹ Deut. 14:21

through the wilderness <v. 20-24>, that he would prosper all they had <v. 25-26>, that he would put them in possession of Canaan <v. 27-31>. But they must not mingle themselves with the nations <v. 32-33>.”

I. Some laws of universal obligation vs. 1 - 9

These commandments elaborate upon the ninth commandment. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (ch. 20:16). The emphasis is not only upon the negative but also on the positive. Vs. 4, 5 state: “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.”

These commandments are given within the framework of the nation of Israel. After all, Israel had been ordered to exterminate the people who inhabited Canaan. I have searched for an Old Testament reference to the verse that Jesus quotes in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”⁴⁹² To my amazement I could not find any. There are some particular injunctions against the Amalekites and Ammonites because of their actions against Israel, but there are no general suggestions to hate. The book of Proverbs shows us what God wants our attitude to be toward our enemies. “Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice.” “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”⁴⁹³ From vs. 5 it is clear that the enemy is not someone you hate, but someone who hates you. The Hebrew word is *sane* which means “to hate, to be hateful.” The context of this section is judicial. The words “justice” and “lawsuit” are used frequently in these verses. God wants justice to be impartial and compassionate.

When God gave this commandment to Moses, He must have had in mind the greatest perversion of justice: the condemnation of His Son Jesus Christ. Vs. 2 says: “You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil” (NAS). Jesus was sentenced to death because the leaders of Israel played on the sentiments of the crowd. We read in Matthew: “But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.”⁴⁹⁴ And Luke tells us that Pilate tried to argue with the crowd but decided he could not win. We read: “‘What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.’ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand.”⁴⁹⁵ This shows us what peer pressure can lead to. Majority vote is not always the expression of the will of God. Democracy and the Kingdom of Heaven are not identical.

Having worked as a Western missionary among primitive tribal people in Irian Jaya, I have become acquainted with the Asian tendency to give priority to relationships over ethics. As Western Christians, we believe that morality is absolute: stealing, murder, adultery are always bad. We feel that a father should hand over his son to the police if he is a thief or a murderer. (Adultery is no longer a public offence in Western society). In most Asian cultures, and probably in Africa as well, offenses are dealt with within the tribe or clan. The clan relationship is given priority over the moral issue. That is why a murderer may be accepted and protected by his family. Relationships are more important than issues.

In Israel the tribal relationship was very strong. But in the verses we are studying the Lord indicates that ethical absolutes are to take priority over relationships. This is emphasized particularly in vs. 9: “Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.” Aliens, most of whom would have been Egyptians (!) would fall under the same justice as any other Israelite. At the time this commandment was given, the memory of the Israelites of justice in Egypt must have been very vivid. It is very doubtful that, in a court case, an Israelite would have received justice if his opponent was a Egyptian. I have seen examples in the Indonesian judicial system of citizens of Chinese extraction being denied justice on the basis of their ethnic background. The Bible teaches that absolute moral issues cut across cultural boundaries and clan relationships.

Another obstacle to the carrying out of justice is social standing. The most common tendency would be to deny justice to a poor man. There are examples in our modern society which would indicate that justice is not a matter of right or wrong but of the price paid to the lawyer. Vs. 6 says: “Do not deny

⁴⁹² Matt. 5:43

⁴⁹³ Prov. 24:17; 25:21,22

⁴⁹⁴ Matt. 27:20

⁴⁹⁵ Luke 23:22-24

justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.” But one can also get carried away by pity, as is indicated in vs. 3 - “do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.” God’s justice is absolute.

Several years ago I heard a very interesting sermon by a lady missionary working for Wycliff Bible Translators in the Philippines. She talked about the subject of the priority the Filipinos would give to tribal relationships over moral issues. She made the astute remark that we, as Westerners, should not be too quick to pronounce judgment, because our justification was also on the basis of a relationship with another Person and not on the grounds of the morality of our acts. We are justified by our relationship with Christ. We should not forget, however, that in this relationship justice has not been bypassed, but our justification is based on the legal payment Christ made for us in His death on the cross.

Vs. 7 implies that final justice reaches beyond the boundaries of life on earth. We read: “Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.” The fact that man may escape punishment on earth does not mean that he will escape for good. There is the awesome picture John paints for us in Revelation of “a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”⁴⁹⁶ There is no flight from the presence of God and His justice.

Vs. 8 says: “Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.” The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about bribes. We read in Proverbs about the righteous man: “He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.”⁴⁹⁷ Also, “A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds.” “A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice.”⁴⁹⁸ And: “A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath.”⁴⁹⁹

Bribes appeal to man’s greed, and greed is a defense against the feeling of insecurity in life. The tendency to build defenses with money is an indication of a lack of trust in God’s provisions for us. Jesus deals with this in His very clear and beautiful exposition in the Sermon on the Mount. He says: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”⁵⁰⁰ And the writer to the Hebrews admonishes us by saying: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”⁵⁰¹

The problem with bribes is not only that it shows a lack of faith in God’s provision for us, but it also brings us under the power of the Evil One. Bribes are baits. Abraham recognized this when he refused the gifts the king of Sodom wanted to make him after his war with the confederacy of Kedorlaomer. We read in Genesis the following account of the encounter: “After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). The king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.’ But Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most

⁴⁹⁶ Rev. 20:11,12

⁴⁹⁷ Prov. 6:35

⁴⁹⁸ Prov. 17:8, 23

⁴⁹⁹ Prov. 21:14

⁵⁰⁰ Matt. 6:25-32

⁵⁰¹ Heb. 13:5,6

High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’⁵⁰²

No man is immune to temptation. One of the great scandals in the Netherlands a few decades ago was that Prince Bernhard, the husband of Queen Juliana had taken a bribe from the Lockheed company. He was married to one of the richest women in the world! Abraham understood the danger and, even before he was tempted he took an oath never to accept anything as a bribe. We may think that money will give us independence, but it enslaves. Mammon wants to be served. And Jesus says: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”⁵⁰³

The law on the Sabbath year is connected to the preceding verses in that it implies greed. Farmers tend to get out of their land what is in it because it means income. To let land lie fallow for a whole year means a tremendous loss of income and loss of money means loss of security. *The Pulpit Commentary* says about the Law of the Sabbatical year: “Days of rest, at regular or irregular intervals, were well known to the ancients and some regulations of the kind existed in most countries. But entire years of rest were wholly unknown to any nation except the Israelites, and exposed them to the reproach of idleness.”

The law on the Sabbath year was meant as a test of trust to the people of Israel. God wanted them to trust Him for their needs. He gave them guarantees that they would not starve to death if they let the land lie fallow every seventh year. He also foresaw their concern and worry. That is why we read in Leviticus: “You may ask, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?’ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.”⁵⁰⁴

God also foresaw that His children would miserably fail in this test. Evidently, they never kept the law on the Sabbath year. God warned them of the consequences of their disobedience. Elsewhere in Leviticus we read: “I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the Sabbaths you lived in it.”⁵⁰⁵ And the neglect of the keeping of this law is given as, at least, one of the reasons for the captivity. We read: “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.”⁵⁰⁶

We note that obedience does not only bless the person who obeys but also others, even the animal world. Vs. 11 tells us: “Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave.” David says: “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”⁵⁰⁷ What follows us is to the benefit of others. It is the blessing we leave behind us when we pass. The same is expressed in another psalm; people who know the Lord are a blessing to others: “As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.”⁵⁰⁸

Another interesting side benefit of the keeping of the Sabbatical year is the blessing the wild animals receive. “The wild animals may eat what they leave.” Normally, a farmer would keep wild animals away from his fields. They are destructive and harm the crop. During the Sabbath year God blesses them. He protects endangered species, but only after man has been blessed. The poor have priority over wildlife.

Just as in connection with the giving of the manna, as we have seen in chapter 16, we find here, also, a suspension of the curse. Adam had been told: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground.”⁵⁰⁹ The painful toil is suspended for a whole year. Man can wipe off the sweat of his brow and rejoice in the

⁵⁰² Gen. 14:17, 21,22

⁵⁰³ Matt 6:24 (KJV)

⁵⁰⁴ Lev. 25:20-22

⁵⁰⁵ Lev. 26:33-35

⁵⁰⁶ II Chr. 36:21

⁵⁰⁷ Ps. 23:6

⁵⁰⁸ Ps. 84:6

⁵⁰⁹ Gen. 3:17-19

Lord. It is a Sabbath in the real sense of the word. Fellowship with God is described with the words of the KJV: "in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."⁵¹⁰

These commandments are no plea for laziness, but it is obvious that God does not want His children to be workaholics. He wants us to be able to work and to be able to relax. It has been my experience that I accomplish more when I turn the scheduling of my activities over to the Lord. Fellowship with Him means entering into His rest.

Seemingly, the life of Christ contradicts this dictum. He exhibited an, almost, feverish zeal to finish His task. He said to His disciples: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."⁵¹¹ And when the Jews accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath, He counters with: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."⁵¹² We have to see His attitude, though, against the background of sin in the world. Jesus had come to save the world from sin, not to relax and enjoy the Father's creation. The Sabbath year, as well as the Sabbath day, was a pointer to the time to come, when redemption would be complete. Jesus worked so that we could enter into His rest.

We are, presently, in a war situation in which we cannot take days off. We are under attack, and we fight back. The goal of our warfare, however, is to achieve peace. The life of a child of God is a strange paradox of laboring and resting. But if we engage in strenuous activity, it should not be because of anxiety for the future. And that is why most people work so hard. People who do not worry about the future, but trust the Lord for sustenance, will be able to relax and they accomplish more.

This brings us to the seventh day of the week: the Sabbath. From *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* we copy the following regarding the Sabbath: "Sabbath ... the practice of observing one day in seven as a time for rest and worship. This practice apparently originated in creation, because God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh <Genesis 1>. By this act, God ordained a pattern for living-- that man should work six days each week at subduing and ruling the creation and should rest one day a week. This is the understanding of the creation set forth by Moses in <Exodus 20:3-11>, when he wrote the Ten Commandments at God's direction. Meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a means by which man's living pattern imitates God's <Ex. 20:3-11>. Work is followed by rest. This idea is expressed by the Hebrew word for Sabbath, which means 'cessation.' Sabbath rest also holds promise of the ultimate salvation that God will accomplish for His people. As certainly as He delivered them from Egypt through Moses, so will He deliver His people from sin at the end of the age through the Great Redeemer <Gen. 3:15; Hebrews 4>."

Everything that can be said about the Sabbath year goes for the Sabbath day also. In the Old Testament it was a commandment to keep the Sabbath. In the New Testament the Sabbath is an invitation. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."⁵¹³ There is no commandment to cease from activity on the seventh day in New Testament. In spite of what people say, Sunday is not the Sabbath. It is the first day of the week or, if you want, the eighth day, but not the seventh. Nine of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament are repeated in the New. The only one omitted is the Sabbath commandment. Yet, when I grew up in the Christian Reform Church in the Netherlands, breaking the Sabbath by doing work on Sunday was considered a very serious offense. This attitude had nothing to do with celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was the reason that the early Christian started to gather on Sundays. Often, people who keep the Sabbath on Sunday know very little celebration of the resurrection in their lives. Some keep the Sabbath, and everything they can lay their hands on (!)

Paul calls the Sabbath a shadow of the reality in Christ. In Colossians we read: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."⁵¹⁴ This is no vote against observing rest on Sunday and setting aside that day for worship services, but it shows that the law that imposed Sabbath rest upon people is no longer in force. Our Sabbath rest in Christ is from the inside out.

⁵¹⁰ Ps. 16:11

⁵¹¹ John 9:4

⁵¹² John 5:17

⁵¹³ Matt. 11:28-30

⁵¹⁴ Col. 2:16,17

The Pentateuch gives several reasons for the keeping of the Sabbath. In ch. 20:11 the reference is to creation. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." In Deuteronomy it is redemption. "So that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." And, here, in vs. 12 we read: "So that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."⁵¹⁵ In connection with chapter 20, where the Ten Commandments are given, we have already seen that the reference to animals is unique in the law-giving of Antiquity. Here the animals are mentioned even before man. God wants all His creatures to be refreshed. Evidently, God sees the whole of creation as one: man and beast are linked together, both in the bondage of sin as well as in the promise of redemption. Paul captures this truth in Romans, where he says: "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."⁵¹⁶

Vs.13 sums it all up: "Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips." The essence of all the commandments is to love God; "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,"⁵¹⁷ or, as Jesus puts it: "If you love me, you will obey what I command."⁵¹⁸ Not invoking the names of other gods is part of our love for God.

Vs. 14 - 19 contain the commandment to celebrate three feasts for the Lord each year. Fellowship with God has a festive character. The apostle Paul recognizes this when he says: "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival."⁵¹⁹ Strangely enough, the Passover celebration is not mentioned in ch. 23. The three feasts which the Israelites were ordered to keep were the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of the First Fruits, and the Feast of Pentecost (the Harvest Feast).

Any reference to sin is absent from these feasts. The Feast of Bread without yeast is the feast of "sincerity and truth." It is the feast of the redeemed life. Jesus emphasizes this in the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. In Matthew we read that Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. The lamb that represented the sacrifice which He was about to bring on the cross was on the table in front of them. Yet, He did not take the meat of the lamb and said: "Take and eat; this is my body," but we read: "While they were eating, Jesus took *bread*, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body,'"⁵²⁰ The Lord's Supper is not a celebration of the Passover, but of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is the feast that is celebrated seven days. The Passover was a "once for all" event. It happened once. It could be commemorated, but it could not be repeated. But the Feast of Unleavened Bread was an every-day experience. It stood for a life of sincerity and truth. We are saved once for all when we enter life through the narrow gate. But for the rest of our lives we walk the narrow path of the sanctified life, the life without the yeast of sin.

The three feasts are not given in chronological order. The Feast of the First Fruits is mentioned after the Harvest Festival. We could say, though, that the order of the feasts follows a spiritual calendar. It is the calendar of our experiences, or of a growing awareness in our spiritual life. We realize that we ought to live a life of sincerity and truth. But we, inevitably, come to the point where we realize that we don't have what it takes to live this kinds of life. Only the power of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit, will enable us to live a life that is acceptable to God. This discovery is, what Dr. A. B. Simpson called "The crisis of the deeper life." And, finally, we understand that the life God wants us to live is the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is the center of the Feast of the First Fruits.

The phrase "No one is to appear before me empty-handed" in vs. 15, obviously, belongs to the following verse regarding the harvest, not to the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. God wants us to take the blessings He has given us, as He gave abundant harvests to the Israelites, and return them to

⁵¹⁵ Deut. 5:14-15

⁵¹⁶ Rom. 8:20-22

⁵¹⁷ Deut. 6:5

⁵¹⁸ John 14:15

⁵¹⁹ I Cor. 5:7,8

⁵²⁰ Matt. 26:26

Him. We will only enjoy blessings if we give them up. Remember, the consecration of a part to the Lord implied that He has the right to all.

The implication of the fact that we are not allowed to appear before the Lord empty-handed in connection with the Feast of Pentecost is tremendous. We tend to see ourselves as sinners, who are saved by grace through the blood of Christ and who have nothing to bring to God which would be of any value to Him. In the three festivals mentioned here, the question of sin and redemption is not even referred to, except indirectly. We saw already that in vs. 15 the Passover lamb is not even mentioned in connection with the Exodus from Egypt. The stress is on the holiness of life, exemplified in the eating of the unleavened bread.

Regarding the feast of Pentecost, the fruit has to be presented to God as a token that the harvest belongs to Him. We remember that Cain's sin was that he by-passed the need for having his sins pardoned and brought the fruit of his labor to God, which was unacceptable to Him. Here, the Israelites are commanded to do the very thing for which Cain was condemned. The difference was that atonement had taken place and God does not go back to it, as we do ourselves. We feel ourselves incapable to fulfill the demands of God's laws, but Paul tells us that, as far as God is concerned, the matter of acceptability has been taken care of by the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."⁵²¹ The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost means that we can appear before the Lord with our hands full of the blessings He has bestowed upon us, and He will accept us.

In Leviticus there are seven feasts mentioned.⁵²² Besides the observance of the weekly there are the three feasts, we find here in ch. 23. Added to them are the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles. All of these were to be celebrated in the seventh month of the year; respectively on the first, the tenth and the fifteenth of that month. The Feast of Tabernacles was to last for seven days.

Vs. 17 says: "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD." The verse does not specify at which occasions this appearance had to be. We would get the impression that it would be at the three feasts mentioned above, but this is not specifically mentioned. It seems that the observance of the Day of Atonement would require the presence of the people at the tabernacle, or later at the temple in Jerusalem. How strictly the Israelites observed this commandment, we do not know. Most of these observances must have been forgotten, for we read that Hezekiah sent invitations to the Northern Kingdom to come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Most of the people of the Northern tribes refused to come, but: "Some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD. A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month."⁵²³ And we read about Josiah's celebration of the Passover: "Not since the days of the judges who led Israel, nor throughout the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem."⁵²⁴ This does not mean that the feast was never celebrated but, evidently, it had not been observed too seriously.

This section is concluded with the admonition of vs. 18 and 19: "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast. The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." Except for the last one, none of these commandments are new. The same words are repeated in ch. 34:25,26. The Israelites had been told already that yeast, that is any reference to sin, could not be part of the sacrifice. The implication is that atonement for sin could not be made by someone who possessed a sinful nature. Only the perfect Lamb of God, who was without blemish could atone for the sins of mankind. It is also clear that God did not want any trace of corruption in what was sacrificed to Him. Fat that was kept till the next day would spoil. In ch. 34:25 it is the Passover Lamb that is not to be kept overnight. We read: "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning." The

⁵²¹ Rom 8:3,4

⁵²² See Lev.23

⁵²³ II Chr. 30:11-13

⁵²⁴ II Kings 23:22,23

principle is the same since both commandments refer to the body of Christ. Even in His death His body knew no decomposition. That is why Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, quoting from the psalms, says: "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."⁵²⁵ This prophecy was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ. So the prohibition to keep fat for a sacrifice overnight, or to keep any of the Passover Lamb overnight refers to the resurrection from the dead.

The next commandments regarding the bringing of the first fruits fit in the same category. But the mention of cooking a young goat in the milk of his mother is puzzling. Jewish tradition has speculated about the meaning of this. In practice, it means that beef cannot be consumed together with dairy products. One cannot order a roast beef sandwich and a glass of milk in a kosher restaurant in Jerusalem. I tried it once. There must be more involved than compassion for the mother goat who provides the milk. She wouldn't know about it anyhow. So, why is this prohibition given? Some commentaries presume that the reasons are humanitarian. But a more logical explanation seems to be that it was a heathen custom to cook a young goat in the milk of his mother and sprinkle the milk on the land to implore the blessing of the god of fertility upon the fields. So this commandment would be directed against idolatry.

The Pulpit Commentary takes the view that it is a prohibition against cruelty. It is "protest against cruelty, and outraging the order of nature, more especially that peculiarly sacred portion of nature's order, the tender relation between parent and child, mother and suckling." But, as we said above, the goat would not be any the wiser.

Adam Clarke seems to me more logical in his comment.: " 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.' This passage has greatly perplexed commentators; but Dr. Cudworth is supposed to have given it its true meaning by quoting a MS. comment of a Karaite Jew, which he met with, on this passage. 'It was a custom of the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid and boil it in the milk of its dam; and then, in a magical way, to go about gardens and orchards; thinking by these means to make them fruitful, that they might bring forth more abundantly in the following year.' After all the learned labor which critics have bestowed on this passage, the simple object of the precept seems to be this: 'thou shalt do nothing that may have any tendency to blunt thy moral feelings, or teach thee hardness of heart.'" Even human nature shudders at the thought of causing the mother to lend her milk to seethe the flesh of her young one!" The prohibition is also found in ch. 34:26 and in Deuteronomy.⁵²⁶

In vs. 20-23 God tells Moses that they will be guided by an angel on their way to Canaan. We read: "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared." We may presume that this angel is the Angel of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state. He is the One, Who, according to the writer to the Hebrews, would "lead many sons to glory."⁵²⁷ These verses have a different tone from what we read in ch. 33. In vs. 2 and 3 of that chapter the Lord said to Moses: "I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." There, God is angry with the people because of their sin with the golden calf. Moses answers, therefore, in vs. 15, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." In the latter case it is, obviously, not the presence of Christ that would go before the people, but an angel, one of God's created beings.

It seems strange that God says these things to Moses here since the presence of the Lord had been with them all the time in the form of the cloud and the column of fire. These words put the journey through the desert in a historic perspective. It shows that God does lead many sons to glory through the guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ and that Israel's journey through the wilderness is an allegory of the pilgrimage of the Christian through this world on his way to Heaven.

Another strange thing is that God tells Moses that the angel will not forgive the people when they sin. We read in vs. 21: "Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him." It would seem that the angel would forgive, especially since God's Name was in him. This also seems to contradict what God says to Moses when He reveals His glory to him. Moses heard Him say: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (ch. 34:6-7). Knowing how God

⁵²⁵ Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27

⁵²⁶ Deut. 14:21

⁵²⁷ Heb. 2:10

deals with our sins, in punishing them in Jesus Christ, we understand what is meant. God does not overlook sin. The fact that God's Name is in him guarantees God's righteousness; His holiness and love met in the cross.

In order to understand God's animosity toward the inhabitants of Canaan we have to remember that the conquest was not a matter of a tribal warfare. The Bible gives only sparse information about the condition of the people that inhabited Canaan. It is easy to underestimate the horror of their sinful practices. Their idolatry was no innocent practice of their primitive religion. It was the kind of inhuman, demonic-inspired behavior that was the reason for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Centuries before Israel entered the land God told Abraham: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."⁵²⁸ Now the measure was full.

In the Old Testament Molech, Chemosh and Ashtoreth were called "detestable."⁵²⁹ In I Kings we read: "There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites."⁵³⁰ An example of the practices of the Canaanite religion is found in II Kings, where we are told: "Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites."⁵³¹ The Canaanites murdered infants in cold blood and burned them on the altar of their gods or buried them alive in the foundations of their buildings. Gross sexual immorality was part of religious practices.

Israel's conquest of Canaan was just as much an "act of God" as the flood that cleansed the ancient world. God wanted His people to cut out the cancerous growth in His world, but they were halfhearted surgeons who, eventually, caught the disease themselves.

In vs. 23 the Lord promises Israel the victory. As a matter of fact, He says: "I will wipe them out." The KJV translates it with: "I will cut them off." The Hebrew word is *kachad* which, according to *Strongs Definition*, means: "to secrete, by act or word; hence (intensively) to destroy." Other nuances would be: "to hide, to conceal, to cut down, to make desolate, to efface, to annihilate." The battle is the Lord's. David understands this when he says to Goliath: "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands."⁵³² In I Chronicles we read how the Reubenites and Gadites were victorious in their conquests "because the battle was God's."⁵³³ And when the Moabites and Ammonites attack Judah, one of the Levites prophesies to Jehoshaphat: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's."⁵³⁴ The spiritual implications of this Old Testament truth for our life and time are abundantly clear. In our struggle against evil the battle is the Lord's and not ours. He is the One Who overcomes the world.

The admonition of vs. 24: "Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces," was completely lost on Israel. From the time of their entrance in Canaan till the captivity, they underestimated the dangers of spiritual contamination, and many of them fell prey to the enemy because they did not obey this command. Even Solomon, the wisest man on earth, was caught in the web and ended his brilliant life in idolatry and ignominy. No descendant of Adam is immune to the lures of the enemy. Even in a ministry of delivery, we have to be aware of the danger of pollution.

The promises God gives to His people if they worship Him are expressed in physical and material terms. "Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span." (Vs. 25, 26). For us this means, first of all, "every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly realms."⁵³⁵ But physical welfare is not excluded.

⁵²⁸ Gen. 15:16

⁵²⁹ I Kings 11:5, 7

⁵³⁰ I Kings 14:24

⁵³¹ II Kings 16:2,3

⁵³² I Sam. 17:47

⁵³³ I Chr. 5:18-22

⁵³⁴ II Chr. 20:15

⁵³⁵ Eph. 1:3

In the following verses (27-33), the Lord indicates to the people how the victory over the evil of Canaan will be brought about. Four points are outlined that are of spiritual significance to any kind of battle with the enemy of God.

1. God will initiate the victory without the use of human agencies: Vs. 27 and 28 say: "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way." The terror of the people to be conquered cannot be attributed to the force and strategy of the Israelite army. The main weapon will be "hornets." The Hebrew word is *tsir`ah* which has the connotation of stinging, or a wasp.

The second line shows the strategy of victory; it will be done "little by little." This does not only mean that the victory will not be won in one day, but it also means that God wants His people to grow into the position of being victorious. Victory is dependent upon faith, and faith is subject to growth. It is as they see the enemy defeated one by one that the vision of the people will grow up to the level where they will be able to claim victory for larger things. Vs. 29 and 30 bring this out: "But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you."

Then there is the warning against contamination, as we have seen already above. The enemy is not to be underestimated. Human beings with sinful natures will always be subject to temptation. David's words to Jonathan apply to all of us: "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."⁵³⁶ That is why the Lord says: "Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

In vs. 31 the Lord outlines the scope of the conquest: "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River." As far as we know, Israel never spread out to the point of filling the expanse God had given to them. Their boundaries could have run from Egypt to the Euphrates; Solomon's influence may have reached that far at one point, but the whole territory never became part of Israel. We read: "And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life."⁵³⁷ This statement confirms that Solomon received tribute from the people living there.

Lastly, there is the warning against contamination: "Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you." Behind every idol stands a demonic power which intends to murder God's creatures. The devil sets snares. David testifies to this when he says: "We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped."⁵³⁸ Because of our sinful human nature, we are not immune to temptation. The devil knows what kind of bait to use to lure us.

If people who worship idols remain in the country, the people of Israel will be subjected to peer pressure. The most comfortable response would be to become good neighbors. Ironically, the devil uses being-a-good-neighbor for his own purposes. Jude sums up the attitude of the child of God to neighbors who have links with the demonic. He says: "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."⁵³⁹

We live, presently, no longer in a theocracy as Israel did but in a secular society. Driving out people who are involved with demons is not an option. We can see, though, how active and aggressive the enemy's propaganda is in our modern society. Agnosticism and atheism are acceptable philosophies of life; therefore, there is no place for God in society. Worship of God is first confined to private life and then banned in most of its outward expressions. We can see clearly how relevant God's warning to Israel was.

I wonder what the world would have looked like if Israel had taken this command of God seriously. In the book of Judges, we find a long list of the failures of Israel to comply with God's orders.

⁵³⁶ I Sam. 20:3

⁵³⁷ I Kings 4:21

⁵³⁸ Ps. 124:7

⁵³⁹ Jude vs. 21-23

“The LORD was with the men of Judah. They took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive the people from the plains, because they had iron chariots. The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites. ... But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land. When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, but the Canaanites continued to live there among them. Neither did Zebulun drive out the Canaanites living in Kitron or Nahalol, who remained among them; but they did subject them to forced labor. Nor did Asher drive out those living in Acco or Sidon or Ahlab or Aczib or Helbah or Aphek or Rehob, and because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land. Neither did Naphtali drive out those living in Beth Shemesh or Beth Anath; but the Naphtalites too lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, and those living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath became forced laborers for them. The Amorites confined the Danites to the hill country, not allowing them to come down into the plain. And the Amorites were determined also to hold out in Mount Heres, Aijalon and Shaalbim, but when the power of the house of Joseph increased, they too were pressed into forced labor.”⁵⁴⁰ There would have been a clear testimony of God in this world, if His people had been faithful to Him. We find that in our contemporary world too those who obey the truth are in the minority.

It is not without reason that the devil is called “the prince of this world.”⁵⁴¹

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The ascent of the mountain described in this chapter is, obviously, not the same as the one in chapter 19, although there are some similarities. There, Moses went up alone; here he is accompanied by Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu. Also, the laws received at this time, are different from the ones Moses received the first time. During the first encounter the Ten Commandments were given orally, together with a series of other laws, described in chs. 21-23. The topic in this section which spans eight chapters (24-31) is mainly a detailed description of the tabernacle to be built.

We do not know how long Moses was in God’s presence the first time but here we read that he spent forty days in the cloud with God.

From *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* we copy the following outline of Exodus 24:

“Moses, as mediator between God and Israel, having received divers laws and ordinances from God privately in the three foregoing chapters, in this chapter, I. Comes down to the people, acquaints them with the laws he had received, and takes their consent to those laws <v. 3>, writes the laws, and reads them to the people, who repeat their consent <v. 4-7>, and then by sacrifice, and the sprinkling of blood, ratifies the covenant between them and God <v. 5-6, 8>. II. He returns to God again, to receive further directions. When he was dismissed from his former attendance, he was ordered to attend again <v. 1-2>. He did so with seventy of the elders, to whom God made a discovery of his glory <v. 9-11>. Moses is ordered up into the mount <v. 12-13>; the rest are ordered down to the people <v. 14>. The cloud of glory is seen by all the people on the top of mount Sinai <v. 15-17>, and Moses is there with God forty days and forty nights <v. 18>.”

When this chapter begins, Moses is at the foot of the mountain with the people and God calls him to come up with his brother and two nephews and a company of seventy elders of the people. The words: “You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him,” are, obviously, addressed to the company of seventy-three people.

God singles out Moses. The special relationship between God and Moses is based on God’s choice, not on Moses’. Moses’ election *did* grow into an intimate fellowship with God which is unparalleled in the Old Testament. God gives this testimony about him: “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.”⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ Judg. 1:19-21, 27-35

⁵⁴¹ John 16:11

⁵⁴² Num. 12:6-8

In this, Moses is an image of the great mediator to come, our Lord Jesus Christ. The author of the Hebrew epistle emphasizes this when he says: “He [Jesus] was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.”⁵⁴³

The Hebrew word translated “faithful” is *aman* which, according to the *Strongs Definition*, means: “to build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse ...” There is a shade of meaning in the word that could be understood as intimacy. Moses became God’s intimate friend. In the Old Testament nobody knew God as Moses did. That is why we read in the psalms: “He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.”⁵⁴⁴ Israel saw what God did, Moses knew why He did it.

The response of the people, when Moses comes back down from the mountain, is the same as in ch. 19:8, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” How little did they know themselves! Many of them would forfeit their lives because of this promise. Less than six weeks later they would have made the Golden Calf. It is this promise, based on the complete lack of understanding of their own sinful nature, that becomes their downfall. Peter’s denial of Jesus is a New Testament parallel that personalizes this attitude. We read that Peter says: “ ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ ”⁵⁴⁵

Instead of being so cocksure about themselves and of boasting in their ability to remain faithful, they should have implored God’s mercy and asked for grace to stand. Ecclesiastes warns us against this attitude. “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the messenger, ‘My vow was a mistake.’ Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?”⁵⁴⁶

The people’s promise was, probably, based on fear. They had the mistaken notion that, if they promised to obey, the glory of God, which frightened them, would leave them alone. God showed His glory to the people to make them realize with whom they were dealing. They thought they could appease God as they would appease evil spirits. God is only appeased by confession and repentance.

Vs. 4 tells us, “Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.” This is the first mention in the Bible of the writing of a book. This is the beginning of the Pentateuch, of the Holy Scriptures. We may assume that the writing of the Bible began with Exodus chapter 21-23.

Whatever misunderstanding the people may have had about themselves and their ability to obey God’s Word faithfully, the next ceremony demonstrates that God knew what He was doing. Moses builds an altar and has twelve pillars of stone erected. The altar, obviously, stands for the cross of Christ, the pillars represent the people. Young men bring the sacrifices. We do not read who they are, but, since the Levitical priesthood had as yet not been established, there were no ordained priests to do the rites. We read in vs. 6-8, “Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’ ” Even before the people have had a chance to sin against the commandments they promise to obey, God has made provisions for their pardon. It is on the basis of the shed blood of the animals that died in their places, that they are acceptable to God.

The writer to the Hebrews comments on this event, saying: “This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.’ In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” We do not read in the Exodus account that scarlet

⁵⁴³ Heb. 3:2-6

⁵⁴⁴ Ps. 103:7

⁵⁴⁵ Matt. 26:33-35

⁵⁴⁶ Eccl. 5:4-6

wool and branches of hyssop were used, neither that Moses sprinkled the blood on the scroll. We do not know where the Hebrew writer gathered this extra-biblical information, but that does not mean that he is incorrect.

The blood is first applied to the throne of God and then sprinkled on the people. Sin did not originate with God, but God's perfect holiness demanded that every sin of every sinner had to be expiated by the blood of the sacrifice which took the place of the sinner, in order to remain perfect holiness. As the Hebrew epistle puts it, the heavenly things had to be purified.⁵⁴⁷ The blood would have had no cleansing effect upon the people if it had not been applied to the throne of God. Sin is a cosmic affair. What happens on earth is linked to what happens in Heaven.

After the bringing of the sacrifice and the legalization of the covenant, Moses and the seventy-three others ascend the mountain. In vs. 13 we read that Joshua is among them also. Whether this means that there were actually seventy-five persons, including Moses, is not clear. Joshua may have been one of the seventy elders. But his role in the encounter with God differs from the others in that he stays with Moses while the others all go down, probably on the seventh day.

Vs. 11 is rather intriguing. We read: "But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank." The KJV renders this: "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink." The translation "raise his hand" could be interpreted as a threat. The context, however, seems to indicate that this was more meant in the sense of being touched by the hand of God. God's revelation of Himself did not affect these people in the same way as it did Moses or even Joshua. Joshua seems to have been more sensitive to God's presence than anybody else except Moses. We read about him in ch. 33:11: "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent." The glory of the Lord made Joshua thirsty for more. This did not seem to be the case with the other members of the group. We read about them: "they saw God, and they ate and drank."

It is a mystery how people react differently to spiritual things in general and to the revelation of the Lord in particular. Some are very sensitive, and others remain untouched and unchanged. Man is autonomous and God does not force Himself upon man. It is up to us to accept or to reject. We control the measure of our surrender, at least as long as we live on earth. When we look at Jesus' disciples, we see that not two of them reacted to His revelation of Himself in the same way. John responded with deep affection and sensitivity, but Judas managed to keep on stealing and lying, even as he spent three years of his life, day and night, in the presence of the incarnate Word of God. God can make us sensitive and responsive, but only as we ask Him. We have no power to make ourselves bear fruit. The only power we have is to resist.

"They saw God, and they ate and drank." There is nothing wrong with eating and drinking in the presence of God, but if eating and drinking takes priority over being saturated with God's glory, there is something wrong with us. Jesus ate and drank, but there were times when He was too full of the presence of the Father to be able to take in food. After speaking to the Samaritan woman, He said to His disciples: "I have food to eat that you know nothing about. ... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."⁵⁴⁸

It is not clear when God called Moses in this sequence of events. At one point Moses must have sent the elders back, since at the moment of the making of the Golden Calf, we find Aaron in the middle of the action, while Moses is still on top of the mountain.⁵⁴⁹ The problem is that we read in vs. 9, "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up," and in vs. 14 Moses says to the elders, "wait here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them." The "here" is either at the place where they ate while seeing the Lord, or at the base of the mountain. The important part is that God tells Moses to climb to the top of the mountain to receive the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments engraved upon them. As it turns out Moses will first spend six days, waiting for the Lord to invite Him into the cloud and then another total of forty days in the presence of the Lord where God explains to him in detail what he needs to know for the construction of the tabernacle and the service the priests are to perform in it. During this time Moses actually saw the original which is in heaven. We read, for instance, in ch. 26:30, "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain."

⁵⁴⁷ Heb. 9:23

⁵⁴⁸ John 4:32, 34

⁵⁴⁹ See Ex. 32

The only thing that happens during the first six days is that the glory of the Lord comes down upon Mount Sinai in the form of a cloud and Moses waits. In spite of Milton's dictum, "They also serve who only stand and wait," waiting is one of the hardest exercises a man can perform. It goes against the grain of our being. Waiting on the Lord is a spiritual exercise that is even harder.

The theme of waiting for the Lord is developed, especially, in the book of Psalms. A few examples are: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."⁵⁵⁰ "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him."⁵⁵¹ "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."⁵⁵² Those verses indicate that waiting takes courage and strength of character. It takes patience, faith and watchfulness. "More than watchmen wait for the morning!" Isaiah says: "The one who trusts will never be dismayed." Or, as the RSV puts it: "He who believes will not be in haste."⁵⁵³ Waiting is one of the vital ingredients of victory. The difference between Moses and the rest of the nation of Israel was that Moses waited and the others did not. We read of them: "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'"⁵⁵⁴ That is why Moses knew the Lord and the others never did.

Moses waited for the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord is the ultimate measure for all creation. Paul defines sin as falling short of God's glory. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁵⁵⁵ Our only hope of salvation is to be invited in the cloud of God's glory as Moses was. We will never measure up to the glory of God, unless we are covered with it. The Israelites looked at God's glory from the outside. To them Mount Sinai looked like a fire spewing volcano. They saw the glory from a distance and kept their distance from it, not only in a physical sense but also spiritually. It did not keep them from sinning.

Our position differs from Moses' in that we are not only covered by God's glory, but the shekinah moves inside. It is what Paul calls, "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."⁵⁵⁶ Even the most humble Christian is more than Moses ever was.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Chapter 25:1-40

This chapter is the first part of a lengthy section, from chapter 25 through 32, in which God gives detailed instructions to Moses regarding the making of the tabernacle and its furniture and the preparation of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood. The section begins with the involvement of the people who are to furnish the material needed for the work, and it ends with the appointment of Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, to execute the work.

Chapters 25 - 27 deal with the building of the tabernacle. Ch. 25:1-8 contains the call for a free-will offering. Vs. 9 lays out the whole blue print of the work. "Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." This injunction we find repeated in vs. 40 and later in ch. 27:8 in connection with the making of the brass burnt offering altar. The verses 10-23 detail the construction of the ark and its cover. The verses 24 -30 describe the making of the table of show bread. The verses 31-40 show the pattern for the menorah, the lampstand.

From *Matthew Henry's Commentary* we copy the "Outline of Exodus 25": "At this chapter begins an account of the orders and instructions God gave to Moses upon the mount for the erecting and furnishing of a tabernacle to the honour of God. We have here.

- I. Orders given for a collection to be made among the people for this purpose <v. 1-9>.
- II. Particular instructions,
 1. Concerning the ark of the covenant <v. 10-22>.

⁵⁵⁰ Ps. 27:14

⁵⁵¹ Ps. 37:7

⁵⁵² Ps. 130:5,6

⁵⁵³ Isaiah 28:16

⁵⁵⁴ Ex. 32:1

⁵⁵⁵ Rom. 3:23

⁵⁵⁶ Col. 1:27

2. The table of showbread <v. 23-30>.
3. The golden candlestick <v. 31, etc.>.”

The commentary makes the following interesting observation regarding the impact the construction of this tabernacle may have had upon world religion in general. We quote: “In these verses God tells Moses his intention in general, that the children of Israel should build him a sanctuary, for he designed to dwell among them (v. 8); and some think that, though there were altars and groves used for religious worship before this, yet there never was any house, or temple, built for sacred uses in any nation before this tabernacle was erected by Moses, and that all the temples which were afterwards so much celebrated among the heathen took rise from this and pattern by it.”

The offering

Vs. 1-8. The voluntary offering. Only people who want to give may give. This is not a tax that is levied; it is an opportunity to show what grace is all about; what the most important thing in life is. God says: “You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give.” The purpose is to “have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.”⁵⁵⁷

We have to let this penetrate. God wants to live among men and pitch His tent among them. All this, of course, is foreshadowing the greatest event in world history, of which John says: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”⁵⁵⁸ The miracle is not only that God comes to live among men, but that He allows us to give Him living quarters. He does not force Himself upon mankind. He only comes to those who voluntarily provide a place for Him to live.

That is what the apostle Paul calls “grace” and it is proof that man understands what is important in life and what is not. “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”⁵⁵⁹

The Macedonians gave of their poverty. The Israelites gave of what they had taken from the Egyptians as a back payment for four centuries of slave labor. If Israel’s slavery in Egypt is a picture of man’s slavery of sin and of the tyranny of the powers of darkness, their contributions came from the wages of this slavery. God managed, in a way that is beyond our comprehension, to use that which is bad and degrading to build a monument for His glory. All the gold and silver and jewelry that was donated for the construction of the tabernacle and that was a reminder of the terror of Egypt, became holy the moment God touched it.

Centuries later He would do the same in becoming a man who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death on a cross. He sanctified a stable and a manger for animals and a cross, an instrument of torture, the ultimate symbol of man’s depravity, simply, by touching it. He still does the same by touching hearts and lives that are ravaged by sin.

The list of items shows how practical God is: “gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems.” The “hides of sea cows” is a translation of the Hebrew word *t'chaashiyim* *Strongs Definitions* says: “*tachash* probably of foreign derivation; a (clean) animal with fur, probably a species of antelope.” Other translations have “goat skins” (RSV), “Seal skins” (ASV), or “badger’s skins” (KJV). Goat skins would, of course, be readily available. Sea cow, seal, or badger skins would be items that had been taken out of Egypt. Even there these would not have been readily available, and they would have been luxury items.

The Pulpit Commentary remarks about the “badger skins”: It is generally agreed among moderns that this is a wrong translation. Badgers are found in Palestine, but not either in Egypt or in the wilderness. The Hebrew *takhash* is evidently the same word as the Arabic *tukhash* or *dukhash*, which is applied to marine animals only, as to seals, dolphins, dugongs, and perhaps sharks and dog-fish. ‘Seal’ skins’ would perhaps be the best translation.” From a *Dutch Encyclopedia* we translate: “As it is not known which animal is meant the word has been left untranslated. The word has sometimes been connected to the

⁵⁵⁷ Vs. 8

⁵⁵⁸ John 1:14

⁵⁵⁹ II Cor. 8:1-5

Egyptian word *teches*, which means a fine kind of leather and this has been thought to come from the sea cow which lives in the Red Sea. According to Ezek. 16:10 the skin of the *tachas* was used for the making of sandals. There the word *tachas* is translated with ‘most precious.’”

Adam Clarke has an interesting contribution to make at this point. He says: “Few terms have afforded greater perplexity to critics and commentators than this. Bochart has exhausted the subject, and seems to have proved that no kind of animal is here intended, but a color. None of the ancient versions acknowledge an animal of any kind except the Chaldee, which seems to think the badger is intended, and from it we have borrowed our translation of the word. The Septuagint and Vulgate have skins dyed a violet color; the Syriac, azure; the Arabic, black; the Coptic, violet; the modern Persic, ram-skins. The color contended for by Bochart is a very deep blue.”

The tabernacle had to be an exact copy of the one in Heaven. John tells us that he saw the real tabernacle of which this one was a copy. “After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.”⁵⁶⁰ The heavenly reality differs, of course, just as much with the copy that is made on earth as a marble statue differs from the living person it represents. We don’t know exactly what Moses saw on the mountain. We know that heavenly things are spiritual realities. Gold, silver, and precious stones, such as we know them on earth, are copies of glory. The lampstands in Heaven, for instance, express the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. Jesus says to John, “the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” And when the angel says to John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb,” he sees the New Jerusalem, of which he writes, “It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”⁵⁶¹

The essence of the tabernacle was the presence of God on earth. “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.” As such it represented, in the first place, the body of Christ. It was an image of the Incarnation.

The ark

The first item that is shown to Moses is the ark. We find the description in vs. 10-16. The ark was a, comparatively, small chest of 3 ¾ feet long, 2 ¼ feet wide, and 2 ¼ feet high, according to TLB. It was meant to contain the Stone Tablets with the Ten Commandments and the cover would be the place where God promised to reside.

Throughout the centuries it was the symbol of the presence of God among the people of Israel. The ark played a prominent role in Israel’s entry in the promised land and the bringing down of the walls of Jericho. In Joshua 3 - 6 we see the ark going ahead of the army. In I Samuel we find the ark in Siloh, where the tabernacle was erected. King David was the first king to recognize the importance of the ark as the center of the kingdom. In II Sam. 6 he succeeded in having the ark brought over to Jerusalem, after an initial attempt that failed. King Solomon had the ark placed in the new temple, where it remained till the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. What happened to the ark when Israel went into captivity, nobody knows. It is unlikely that the ark was taken to Babylon, because this fact would, undoubtedly, have been mentioned. The ark was, probably, put in a safe place during the siege of the city, or even before, and has never been found since. Jeremiah prophesied about this, saying: “‘In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘men will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.’”⁵⁶² So much for modern speculations that the ark will be found or remade!

The ark is called “the mystery of God” in Revelation.⁵⁶³ It is, in fact, the mystery of God’s revelation. The ark stands for the presence of God. It contained the law and it was covered by, what the KJV calls, “the mercy seat,” that is the place where atonement was made by the blood of the sacrifice. The ark, being a picture of the Incarnation, thus stands for God’s presence, love, and justice. At the call of the seventh trumpet, this mystery will be revealed in all its glory.

⁵⁶⁰ Rev. 15:5

⁵⁶¹ Rev. 1:20; 21:9,11

⁵⁶² Jer. 3:16

⁵⁶³ Rev. 10:7; 11:19- “But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”

“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”

It is no wonder that the ark was the first object God mentioned to Moses in connection with the construction of the ark. It was the best picture of God in the Old Testament, so far.

If we realize what the ark stood for, it is incomprehensible that there were men who tried to manipulate the ark for the furtherance of their own projects. One of the clearest instances of this manipulation occurred during the war between Israel and the Philistines. When the Israelites are defeated in the first battle we read: "When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, 'Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.' So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim."⁵⁶⁴ Subsequently, the ark was captured by the Philistines and God defeated their idol, Dagon, in a way that was not devoid of humor. In it all, the Lord showed who was in control. Even if man thinks he can use God for his own schemes, he doesn't get anywhere. When the ark was captured in the New Testament and the Son of God was arrested, sentenced, and executed, it was the greatest defeat for the manipulators and the greatest victory over all the powers of darkness.

The basic material for the ark was acacia wood. We quote from the *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Acacia. A large thorny tree with rough gnarled bark. The orange-brown wood was hard-grained, and it repelled insects. It bore long locust-like pods with seeds inside and produced round, fragrant clusters of yellow blossoms. Many species of acacia grew in the desert of Sinai, in southern Palestine, and in Egypt." So the frame of the ark was bug resistant. The gold coating, inside and out, would, of course, protect it from rotting or being eaten away on the inside. As the *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* indicates, the wood must have been available in the desert. There was nothing uncommon about the wood. It was readily available. It was as common as human beings are common. We are not talking about the uniqueness of man's personality, but about his presence on earth. What made the ark so special was its gold covering. The ark was like an every day human being, covered with the glory of God.

It was a, relatively, small but heavy and precious chest. The carrying poles, which remained attached to it, made it a "portable sanctuary" and it protected itself from being touched by human hands. The ark was to contain the Stone Tablets with the Ten Commandments.

The responsibility for the care of the ark fell upon the Kohathites. We read about them in Numbers, "The leader of the families of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. They were responsible for the care of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used in ministering, the curtain, and everything related to their use."⁵⁶⁵

The Mercy Seat

The most important part of all the furniture in the tabernacle was the lid that covered the ark. It is described to Moses in verses 17-22. The NIV calls it "the atonement cover; TLB: "the place of mercy." The older translations render it as "mercy seat."⁵⁶⁶ The Hebrew word is *kapporeth*. It means a lid. *Strong's Definitions* refers to the word from which it is derived, *kaphar* which is defined as: to cover (specifically with bitumen); figuratively, to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel: KJV-- appease, make (an atonement, cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pacify, pardon, purge (away), put off, (make) reconcile (-liation)." It is the same word which is translated in the Septuagint as *hilasterion*. This same word is used by Paul in Romans about Christ. "God presented him as a *sacrifice of atonement*, through faith in his blood."⁵⁶⁷

So, the mercy seat was the most vivid picture in the Old Testament of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was crucial in the relationship between God and man. The glory of God was, symbolically, expressed in the statutes of two cherubim. These cherubim were heavenly creatures associated with the throne of God. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes about them: "A careful comparison of the first and tenth chapters of the book of Ezekiel shows clearly that the "four living creatures" <Ezek. 1:5> were the same beings as the cherubim <Ezekiel 10>. Each had four faces-- that of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle <Ezek. 1:10>; (also <10:14>)-- and each had four wings. In their appearance, the cherubim "had the likeness of a man" <Ezek. 1:5>. These cherubim used two of their

⁵⁶⁴ I Sam. 4:3,4

⁵⁶⁵ Num. 3:30,31

⁵⁶⁶ RSV, ASV, KJV

⁵⁶⁷ Rom. 3:25

wings for flying and the other two for covering their bodies <Ezek. 1:6,11,23>. Under their wings the cherubim appeared to have the form, or likeness, of a man's hand <Ezek. 1:8; 10:7-8,21>.”

We do not get the impression that the cherubim that were sculptured on the cover of the ark had four faces. A comparison with John's vision of the cherubim in Revelation would indicate that there were four cherubim, each with the face of a creature on earth. “The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.”⁵⁶⁸ The apparent discrepancy between Ezekiel's and John's vision could be explained in terms of the speed with which the cherubim that guarded the throne of God were moving about. Ezekiel may have been confused by the speed, which made it seem as if one creature had four faces. When Solomon built the temple he had two gigantic, fifteen feet high cherubim made which overshadowed the ark with a wingspread of 15 feet each.

We get the impression that the cherubim that were pictured on the cover had only two wings each. This differs from the visions Ezekiel and John describe. Ezekiel, apparently, sees only four wings. “Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body.”⁵⁶⁹ But John distinguishes six wings. We read: “Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.”⁵⁷⁰ This discrepancy, again, may be due to the speed with which those heavenly beings were moving back and forth. Moses, evidently, saw only two wings on each cherub.

The cherubim are facing down, looking at the cover. This means that they are averting their eyes from the presence of the Lord, Who is above the cover. They are looking at the Testimony of the law and at the cover which was sprinkled every year with blood on the Day of Atonement. They are absorbed by the sight of God's justice and mercy. This reminds us of Peter's words about the mystery God has revealed to us, but which remains a mystery to the angels. We read in I Peter: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”⁵⁷¹

At this point, no further explanation is given as to the function of the atonement cover, although the name invites explanation. We do read one of the most amazing statements of the Bible, though, in connection with this cover when God says to Moses: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”

The Bible refers to God as, “You who sit enthroned between the cherubim.”⁵⁷² The relatively small space above the cover, less than ten cubic feet, is the place where God reveals Himself on earth. When King Solomon dedicates the newly built temple to the Lord, he expresses the amazement of all when he says: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”⁵⁷³ God confined Himself to an even smaller space than the magnificent temple in Jerusalem when He revealed Himself in a body, smaller than ten cubic feet, in His Son Jesus Christ.

Our confusion stems from the fact that we tend to assign space to a spirit. Since our spirit lives in a body we think of spirits in terms of body size; as if a large body would contain a large spirit. We believe in God's greatness when we try to imagine the limitlessness of the universe. David wrestled with this thought in Psalm 8. On the one hand he says: “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”⁵⁷⁴ But then he turns his eyes toward space and he exclaims: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” God's greatness is just as great in a little baby as in the size of outer space.

⁵⁶⁸ Rev. 4:7

⁵⁶⁹ Ezek. 1:11

⁵⁷⁰ Rev. 4:8

⁵⁷¹ I Pet. 1:10-12

⁵⁷² Ps 80:1

⁵⁷³ I Kings 8:27

⁵⁷⁴ Ps. 8:2

The table

We should be amazed at the random order in which the details of the tabernacle and its furniture are given to Moses. There seems to be a lack of logic or progression. We understand why God first introduces the ark to Moses. It symbolizes the presence of the Lord. God begins by Himself. If man were the starting point, the burnt offering altar would have been the first object to be presented. But, since God Himself is the goal and center of all and all else proceeds from Him, it is clear that any revelation will begin with Him. The elders in the book of Revelation say: "You created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."⁵⁷⁵ And Paul says to the crowd of Athenian philosophers: "For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"⁵⁷⁶ But where, in the chain of progressing revelation, does the next item fit: the table of show bread? The main purpose of the table is, of course, the one given in vs. 30: "Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times."

From *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* we quote: "Showbread, Holy or consecrated bread placed in the sanctuary of the tabernacle or Temple every Sabbath to symbolize God's presence and His provision for His people. The ritual always involved 12 loaves of bread, representing the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel. It was called showbread because it was kept continually before God's presence in the tabernacle. The showbread symbolized the continual presence of the Lord-- a presence more vital than one's daily bread-- and the people's dependence on God's provision for their spiritual and physical needs."

It is obvious that God did not need to be fed with bread baked by humans. The pathetic custom practiced by followers of some world religions to put out tidbits of food and flowers as a sacrifice for the gods has no relationship with the presentation of the showbread on this table. The bread was there for the humans and it was, ultimately, consumed by the priests at the end of every week.

The Bible uses bread as an image of the Word of God, which is, probably, the main lesson of the bread on this table. We would have expected that, after giving Moses the instructions about the construction of the ark, God would have told them about the altar of incense, the place where worship and praise were brought to Him. But God considers the next priority to be man's need. Moses' words, later quoted by Jesus, come to mind here: "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."⁵⁷⁷ The bread is a symbol of man's real need.

After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus says to the crowd: "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.' Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.' Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'" ⁵⁷⁸

So, the element of sacrifice is present in the Showbread. The bread is the bread of life, symbolizing the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, not, in the first place in connection with the atonement for our sin, but as the power that helps us to live in fellowship with God after our sins have been forgiven.

The table in the tabernacle is the table God has spread for us for sustenance and fellowship. David mentions this in the 23rd Psalm, where he says: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."⁵⁷⁹ The symbolism is best expressed in the Lord's supper. During the Passover celebration we read: "Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" Our daily life in the presence of God is based on the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The table stands for fellowship with God and for all that is needed for this fellowship; it

⁵⁷⁵ Rev. 4:11

⁵⁷⁶ Acts 17:28

⁵⁷⁷ Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4

⁵⁷⁸ John 6:26-29,32, 33, 35

⁵⁷⁹ Ps. 23:5

is the symbol of God's grace. The bread is not for Him but for us. When God said to Moses: "I will dwell among them," He meant more than just being present with them; He wanted an intimate fellowship with His people. The ark tells us that God is present in His glory; the table tells us that He wants to draw us into this glory and share His glory with us.

We read more about the showbread in Leviticus, where God says to Moses: "Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."⁵⁸⁰

There is no specific mention of the symbolic significance of the number twelve but it is obvious that the twelve loaves represent the twelve tribes of Israel. In the light of Jesus' explanation of Himself as being the bread of life, which is broken in order to give life to the world, this representation of the twelve tribes by twelve loaves of bread before the Lord takes on new significance. Earlier, God had said to the people: "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."⁵⁸¹ Israel's priesthood did not only mean that they would have to relay God's revelation of Himself to a lost world, but it also meant that they had to be the bread for the world. Their priesthood was to be sacrificial and they were meant to be the sacrifice, just as Jesus' sacrificed Himself because He was the bread of life. God gave Israel bread so that they would become bread. Every blessing given to us is intended to make us a blessing. We become what we receive.

There is no mention in this chapter of the incense we read about in Leviticus. There the Lord said: "Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire."⁵⁸² The bread was not burned as a sacrifice, but the incense was as a representation of the bread. When our lives become bread that is broken for the lives of others, we become a sweet aroma upon the altar of God's praise.

Even before the bread is mentioned, God speaks, without further explanation, about "plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings." We are not told what kind of offerings are intended. It doesn't take much ingenuity, however, to deduct that the pitchers and bowls are to be used for drink offerings. In ch. 29 God gives instruction about the two daily offerings that are to be brought, in the morning and evening. We read: "With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering."⁵⁸³ We also read that drink offerings had to accompany certain freewill offerings. God says: "After you enter the land I am giving you as a home and you present to the LORD offerings made by fire, from the herd or the flock, as an aroma pleasing to the LORD-- whether burnt offerings or sacrifices, for special vows or freewill offerings or festival offerings-- then the one who brings his offering shall present to the LORD a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil. With each lamb for the burnt offering or the sacrifice, prepare a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering."⁵⁸⁴ So we find on the table not only bread, but also wine. And the wine was to be sacrificed on the bronze altar that stood outside the sanctuary. The incense was burned on the golden altar in the Holy Place and the wine was to be brought to the bronze burnt offering altar outside. So the table was the link between the two altars.

We wonder how much Moses understood of what God was showing him. I try to imagine Moses sitting, so to speak, next to God while God shows him a picture album of the various items we read about in these chapters. These are pictures of heavenly objects, of spiritual realities. They all speak of the same truths, that is the glory of God and the way in which God wants us to share in His glory. They portray at the same time what God intends us to be and what sin has made us to be in our present condition. They all speak of our being dead in sin and our dying to sin and our sharing in eternal life.

⁵⁸⁰ Lev. 24:5-9

⁵⁸¹ Ex. 19:6

⁵⁸² Lev. 24:7

⁵⁸³ Ex. 29:40

⁵⁸⁴ Num. 15:2-5

The miracle of this chapter, as we suggested before, is that it begins in the Most Holy Place and works its way back to the Holy Place, while at the same time pointing to the place outside where we are in our natural condition.

The lampstand

The last item to be shown in this chapter is the golden lampstand, the menorah, the source of light. The menorah is represented as an almond tree with buds, flowers and fruit. We read the description in vs. 31-40.

The first fundamental difference between the lampstand and the two previous items described in this chapter, the ark and the table, is that the lampstand is made of pure gold only. The gold is not the outside cover of the acacia wood, but the whole lampstand is gold. There is nothing common about the lampstand. It is not an object that is ordinary at the core but glorious on the outside. It is pure gold alone, glory through and through.

Whereas the other objects carry with them suggestions of death, (the blood that is sprinkled on the mercy seat and the bread that is broken and eaten from the table and the wine that is poured out), the lampstands speaks only of life.

I don't know the characteristics of an almond tree. I have been amazed to see citrus trees in the tropics with, on one side, branches with buds and blossoms and on other branches ripe fruit. Having grown up in Western Europe where trees go through the separate stages of development according to the four seasons, this phenomenon was new and amazing to me. Since there are marked seasons in the Middle East, I doubt whether the almond tree has buds, blossoms, and fruit at the same time, like the tropical citrus does. If so, we are looking at a symbolic growth that goes beyond what we see in nature. It is a growing tree with buds, flowers, and fruit.

The lampstand conveys the truths of life and light. We think of John's words, speaking about Jesus: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."⁵⁸⁵ And also: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."⁵⁸⁶

If light is an image of the essence of God's character, the lampstand seems to speak about the witness to God's character by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the charge Jesus gives to the children of the Kingdom of Heaven. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."⁵⁸⁷ The quality of our lives will be a testimony to the character of God, so that people will praise our heavenly Father.

When Zechariah had a vision of a lampstand that was fed supernaturally by two living olive trees that poured the oil directly into the lamps, the angel explained to him that the meaning of it is the Holy Spirit Who empowers man's testimony in order to overcome demonic opposition. Light is a weapon. We read that the angel said to him, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."⁵⁸⁸

And, finally, according to Jesus' words to John, the lampstand represents the witness of the church. "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."⁵⁸⁹

Light is stronger than darkness. Even the smallest light defeats the thickest darkness. This is true in the physical realm, but even more so in the spiritual sphere. The light we know, like the light of the sun or of a lamp, is an image of the real light, which is the character of God.

The amazing thing about the lampstand is that it expresses growth. As such, it is not just a representation of God's character or of the Holy Spirit, but of man and of what God can do in the life of man. The eternal God cannot grow; only created life can give. So the lampstand is as much a picture of man as it is of God. It speaks, both of the Word that became flesh, as of us and the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁸⁵ John 1:4,5

⁵⁸⁶ I John 1:5

⁵⁸⁷ Matt. 5:14-16

⁵⁸⁸ Zech. 4:6

⁵⁸⁹ Rev. 1:20

That is why Jesus can say of Himself: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁵⁹⁰ And of us He says: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."⁵⁹¹

We cannot overemphasize the element of growth that is expressed in the image of the lampstand. No human being is born as a full grown light. No one is born again as a mature lamp either. We all start small and increase with time as the Holy Spirit begins His work in us. We will not have the fullness of God's glory until we shine in Heaven as part of the New Jerusalem.

When God says to Moses: "Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it," He indicates the way to glory as well as the purpose. The purity of the gold speaks of a purification process by which gold is melted in the fire and the hammering out of it points in the direction of the suffering that is part of the growing process.

Speaking of the goal, the heritage which awaits us in heaven, Peter says: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."⁵⁹² Light grows in suffering. Light may be stronger than darkness, but it is not without reason that darkness stands for evil and evil does not give up easily. Even Jesus' way to glory was a way of suffering. His light grew as He struggled upward. That is why the author of the Hebrew Epistle says: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."⁵⁹³

Light gives the impression of shining effortlessly, and in a way it does. But the vehicle of light, in this case the lampstand, is the result of a fiery trial and hard pounding of the hammer and the light itself is the result of burning oil and a wick that is consumed in the process.

The weight of the lampstand was one talent which, according to a footnote in the NIV, is approximately 34 kilogram or 75 pounds. That is a heavy piece of metal!

Finally, the original of the lampstand Moses had to make was in heaven. We read at the end of this chapter: "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." The lampstand was an expression in material form of a spiritual reality. Moses saw one candlestick, John saw seven in the opening chapter of the book of Revelation.

As we mentioned before, there is significance in the fact that God reveals to Moses only two of the three objects that would be placed in this part of the sanctuary, the table and the lampstand. The golden altar to burn incense is not mentioned at this point. This omission seems to lay the stress on the way in which fellowship with God develops: by the Word of God, as exemplified in the table with the showbread and the lampstand as the emblem of the Holy Spirit. In order to come to God we need the Word and the Spirit. David said: "Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."⁵⁹⁴ That is what God is doing here to Moses. The ultimate goal is fellowship with God and worship. The elements that express this goal are contained in objects made with wood and gold. But real fellowship and worship are spiritual. They can be expressed in pieces of furniture, but they are in reality invisible spiritual entities. God shows Moses the picture, but that is all the people of Israel would have.

The author of the Hebrew Epistle makes this astute observation: "The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-- external regulations applying until the time of the new order."⁵⁹⁵ The pieces of furniture in this part of the tabernacle emphasize the need for regeneration and transformation by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in us.

When we get to the study of the golden altar of incense, we will see that it is considered to be part of the Most Holy Place, the second room of the tabernacle, although it was placed in the Holy Place, that is

⁵⁹⁰ John 8:12

⁵⁹¹ Matt. 5:14

⁵⁹² I Pet. 1:6,7

⁵⁹³ Heb. 2:10

⁵⁹⁴ Ps. 25:4,5

⁵⁹⁵ Heb. 9:8-10

the first room. The table and the lampstand do, clearly, belong to the first room. This is the room in which the priests could enter. Nobody was allowed to enter the second room, except the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. So the table and the lampstand were, particularly, the pieces of furniture that were part of the daily service of the priests.

The lampstand was the only source of light in the tabernacle. The ark stood in the dark in the Holy of Holies and if the oil in the lamps of the lampstand would not be replenished daily, there would be no light at all. The same bread was on the table for a whole week, but the lamps had to be filled daily. This indicates the priority of service for the priest. The first thing he would do, when entering the tabernacle, was to tend to the lamps. Unless we are daily filled with the Spirit of God, our lights will not shine. The life of the almond tree is dependent upon the fruit. This seems to turn the truth upside down: In nature the fruit depends upon the life of the tree and in the spiritual realm our lives depend on the fruit.

In describing and showing the lampstand to Moses, God emphasized the fact that it is to be one piece. We read: "Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it." When Jesus explains to His disciples the function of the body of Christ, He differentiates between Himself as the vine and His followers as the branches. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."⁵⁹⁶ Likewise the church is one body with Christ as the head and we the members. The head and the members are "of one piece." But just as the function of the body depends on the head and the light of the lampstand depends on the lamps, so does the testimony of the church depend on the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ is not the Head of the church, and if He is not the Head of each of its members, there is no church. Some bodies that are severed from their head may keep on jerking and moving, like the proverbial chicken, they do not function.

One last word about the wick trimmers. They are only mentioned in passing in vs. 38. Nothing is said about their function. It is clear, however, that this lampstand is an earthly utensil that is subject to the laws of wear and deterioration like everything else on this earth. The wick burns up and it dies. This death has to be trimmed away. In this respect the copy differs from the original since there will not be any trimming of wicks in Heaven, just as there will not be any filling up of the cups with oil. Zechariah's vision suggests this already. The prophet sees a gold lampstand that is fed with olive oil from two live trees that pour the oil directly into the lamps.⁵⁹⁷ In using the image of the vine and the branches, Jesus refers to this trimming when He says: "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."⁵⁹⁸ We give light by dying and we bear fruit by being cut back till glory will change us and light will be part of our being.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Chapter 26:1-37

This chapter describes the actual building. In the preceding, chapter God began with the basic furniture; here He gives to Moses the plan for the house.

Vs. 1-14 give the pattern for the tent curtains to be made

Vs. 15-30 describe the frame

Vs. 31-33 describe the inside curtain that separates the Holy of Holies from the Holy place

Evidently, the furniture was more important than the house itself. God's dwelling place would be a home, not a house. God brought His own furniture from Heaven, so to speak. The word tabernacle is the translation of the Hebrew *mishkan* which means a "residence."

The house would be a tent. Since the Israelites lived in tents, God would live in a tent also. Tents are temporary dwellings which are made to be torn down and moved. The apostle Paul captures the idea when he says in the Second Corinthian Epistle: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile

⁵⁹⁶ John 15:5

⁵⁹⁷ Zech. 4:2,3,11,12

⁵⁹⁸ John 15:2

we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”⁵⁹⁹ And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”⁶⁰⁰ The fact that God came to live in a tent instead of in a permanent house foreshadows the death of our Savior.

The tabernacle had a fourfold cover: the linen curtains, the goat hair blanket, a red dyed rams’ skin cover and the badger skins. The inside lining consisted of ten linen sheets of forty-two by six feet each. So joined together there was a sheet of forty-two by sixty feet. The two sections of forty-two by thirty feet were joined together with the hooks. The material was to be made of fine linen yarn which was dyed in different colors: blue, purple and scarlet. The sheets were to be decorated with images of cherubim. Whether these were woven into it or embroidered on it, as the TLB suggests, is not clear. There is also no mention as to the size of the figures. The working out of this project seems to be left to the creativity of the people in charge. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “Cherubim of cunning work. Rather ‘cherubim, the work of a skilled weaver.’ Figures of cherubs were to be woven into the hangings in the loom itself, not embroidered upon them afterwards.”

Since, from the inside of the tabernacle, only the ceiling covered with these sheets would be visible, the impression created by the bluish overtone of the material would be of a Heaven and angels. The edges of the sheets would fall over the outside of the boards and would not be visible from within. The sheets were to be hooked together with loops and gold clasps, fifty in all.

These linen curtains were to be covered with a larger curtain made of goat hair. TLB gives the measurements of these curtains as forty-five by six feet, and there were to be eleven of them instead of ten. The eleventh section would make an overhang at the back and would allow the front curtain to be folded double over the entrance. The next layer consisted of a series of ram skins died red and on top of that was to be a similar blanket of sea cow hide, or badger skins. The sizes of these last three covers are not given, but it was understood that they would cover the tabernacle completely, not only to make it water proof, but also to keep the glorious gold structure hidden from the human eye.

The red colored ram skins suggest the presence of blood. As we mentioned before the translation of the Hebrew word *l’chaashiyim* as sea cow would make this outer cover a very rare item. The modern equivalent would be a mink coat. Sea cow skins would not be readily available in the desert. They could, of course, have been part of the spoil of Egypt. Since the lesson the tabernacle symbolizes is that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us and that Jesus came in the form of a normal human being, it would seem more logical to suppose that the outer skin would be an ordinary one, not like a priceless treasure. The inside, it is true, was glorious, but outwardly this glory was covered in such a way that only those who could see through the disguise knew. Isaiah said about the real tabernacle: “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”⁶⁰¹

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary makes the following observation at this point: “That the outside of the tabernacle was coarse and rough, the beauty of it was in the inner curtains. Those in whom God dwells must labor to be better than they seem to be. Hypocrites put the best side outwards, like whited sepulchres; but the king’s daughter is all glorious within <Ps. 45:13>; in the eye of the world black as the tents of Kedar, but, in the eye of God, comely as the curtains of Solomon, <Cant. 1:5>. Let our adorning be that of the hidden man of the heart, which God values, <1 Pet. 3:4>.”

Vs. 15-30 describe the building of the frame of the tabernacle. We read in vs. 15 and 16, “Make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide.” The KJV translated it: “And thou shalt make boards for the tabernacle of shittim wood standing up. Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the breadth of one board.” The LB states in a more colloquial manner: “The framework of the sacred tent shall be made from acacia wood, each frame-piece being fifteen feet high and 2 ¼ feet wide, standing upright.” The sides of the tabernacle would be formed by twenty boards, and the end by six, which would make the whole structure forty-five by

⁵⁹⁹ II Cor. 5:1-4

⁶⁰⁰ Heb. 2:14-15

⁶⁰¹ Isa. 53:2,3

thirteen and one half by fifteen feet, or approximately thirteen and a half by four by four and a half meters. This makes it a comparatively small building. The height was more than the width. *The Dutch Biblical Encyclopedia*, however, gives the measurements as 15 x 5 meter and 5 meter high.

The boards would be grooved so that they could be fitted together to make a solid wall. Each board had to have rings into which cross bars would be fitted and at the bottom of each of the boards were two silver bases. So the frame would be a very solid structure, put together from individual pieces. *The Pulpit Commentary* says about it: "Boards . . . of shittim wood. These boards were to be fifteen feet long by two feet three inches broad, and, if they were each of a single plank, can scarcely have been furnished by any of the acacias which now grow in the Sinaitic peninsula. It is possible, however, that they were made up of two or more planks, since the name by which they are designated, *kereth*, is thought to be applied in Ezek. xxvii, 6, to the 'deck of a ship.'" TLB is probably clearest in the description of the structure. We read: "with grooves on each side to mortise into the next upright piece."

Paul teaches us that the temple, of which the tabernacle was the predecessor, was an image of the body of Christ. He emphasizes the fact that we are individuals who are bonded to each other in Jesus Christ. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."⁶⁰² And, "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."⁶⁰³ So, the picture of the individual boards is clear. God had the church in mind when He described this structure to Moses and showed him the original. We are like boards of acacia wood, covered with gold; a human frame, covered with the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

The word for "projections" in vs. 17, literally, means "open hands." This could mean that the boards were grooved on the side so that they could be fitted into each other, like our modern walls or floors.

The silver bases, or the sockets, as the KJV calls them, is another item that lacks clarification. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: "Nothing is said of the shape of these 'sockets.' They were certainly very massive, as each contained a silver talent (ch. xxxviii 27), and thus weighed from eighty to ninety pounds. It has been supposed that they stood on the ground, and formed a sort of continuous base, out of which the planks rose. But this would have constituted a very unsafe structure. Kalish is probably right in his view, that the sockets were let into the ground – resembling those at the bottom of a gate, into which the bolt is pressed down. Each socket received one of the 'tenons.'" TLB translates the above quoted verse as follows: "The bases for the frames of the sanctuary walls and for the posts supporting the veil required 9,500 pounds of silver, 95 pounds for each socket."

Whatever form these foundation pieces may have had and however much they may have weighed, they did form a solid foundation upon which the tabernacle rested. Paul speaks about the foundation of the church, in which he identifies the foundation as Jesus Christ. We read: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."⁶⁰⁴ In the next verse he cautions us as to what material to use in building. "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw" Now, this does not connect too well with the project Moses was to undertake, except for the fact that it speaks about foundations and building materials. The writer to the Hebrews identifies us, the church of Jesus Christ, with the actual building. He says: "And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."⁶⁰⁵ There is a connection between the weight and solidity of the foundation and the assurance we have when we found ourselves placed upon it. Or, as the Hebrew author says: "to our courage and the hope of which we boast." And a ninety pound silver block is more solid than a piece of concrete. So, we can boast all right!

Vs. 25-29 mention the crossbars. There are to be three sets of five bars, one set for each side. No further specifications are given, except for the fact that one of the bars has to go from one side to the other. This would imply that the other bars would only partially cover the width of the walls. The bars are made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold and they are to be fitted in rings that protrude from the boards. They are the unifying and stabilizing elements of the tabernacle. The amazing part of this section is its lack of detail. Whereas at some points the items are described to the minutest details, at this point much is left to

⁶⁰² I Cor. 3:16,17

⁶⁰³ Eph. 2:21

⁶⁰⁴ I Cor. 3:11

⁶⁰⁵ Heb. 3:6

the creative understanding of Moses and the ones to whom the work is delegated. The suggestion is that there is liberty in putting together what God wants to be done.

Paul gives the New Testament pattern of things in the epistle to the Ephesians. Speaking about the church and of Christ, he says: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."⁶⁰⁶ Here we see, so to speak, the function of the cross bars.

The construction of the corners is not clearly described in the various translations. The NIV says: "At these two corners they must be double from the bottom all the way to the top, and fitted into a single ring; both shall be like that." TLB sounds clearer with: "These corner frames will be connected at the bottom and top with clasps." The RSV seems to say the opposite of what is meant with: "they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring; thus shall it be with both of them; they shall form the two corners." We may suppose, though, that Moses received a clear view of what he was supposed to copy and that the picture imprinted itself upon his mind in a way that would never be erased. After all, the injunction was: "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain."

The last section of this chapter, from vs. 31-37, deals with the two curtains: the one that separates the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place and that one that forms the entrance to the Holy Place. The first curtain is described in vs. 31-33 and the second in vs. 36-37. In between is a verse that deals with placement of the ark in the Most Holy Place, the cover, the table, and the lampstand. We read: "Place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain, put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. ... Place the table outside the curtain on the north side of the tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side."

The curtain was a symbol of separation. It prevented man from entering into the presence of God. It was beautiful, but it was deadly. No one could pass it without forfeiting his life. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons were killed when they tried to break through.⁶⁰⁷ Behind this curtain was the throne of God, the two Stone Tablets with the Ten Commandments, and the atonement cover or mercy seat. But they were inaccessible and invisible because of the curtain. The inaccessibility was suspended once a year on the Day of Atonement, but the invisibility remained. When Aaron entered the Most Holy Place he had "to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense [would] conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he [would] not die."⁶⁰⁸ Aaron was not allowed to see the mystery of atonement and salvation. The writer to the Hebrews remarks astutely, "By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing."⁶⁰⁹ It is also in the Epistle to the Hebrews that we find that this curtain is a picture of Christ in His incarnation. We read: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, *that is, his body*, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith."⁶¹⁰ The curtain was meant to be torn eventually. We read that this happened the moment Jesus died on the cross. "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."⁶¹¹

The final revelation of the ark and what it stands for is shown in the book of Revelation. We read that, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, God's mystery will be revealed in its complete and final form. John says: "Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, 'There will be no more delay! But in the days

⁶⁰⁶ Eph. 4:11-16

⁶⁰⁷ Lev. 10:1,2

⁶⁰⁸ Lev. 16:13

⁶⁰⁹ Heb. 9:8 (RSV)

⁶¹⁰ Heb. 10:19-22

⁶¹¹ Matt. 27:50,51

when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.' The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.' Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.⁶¹² The mystery of the ark is the complete and unrestricted reign of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the answer to the prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."⁶¹³

When Moses was on the mountain, God showed him things that, even now, have not been completely fulfilled. We don't know how much Moses may have understood of the mystery but we see often that, even when one doesn't understand, the essence of the truth can overwhelm us and this, undoubtedly, must have been Moses' experience. Now, he knows what God showed to him then by way of picture.

The key of this last portion of the chapter is in vs. 30, "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain." Moses saw the original and he had to make a copy of it. The heavenly reality is spiritual, the earthly copy is material. God wanted Moses to express in matter what cannot be observed by our five senses, so that it would become visible and touchable. What Moses had to do is the essence of art, or rather the essence of life itself. Life on earth, in its true form, is intended to be an expression of the reality of heaven. When God made man in His image and likeness He meant that he should live a life that would be an image of His life. In all we are and do, God wants us to show what He is and does. In our relationships, as fathers, mothers, children, lovers, in our thinking and feeling and doing, we exemplify the character of God. Sin has made a caricature of it all. But sin is only a temporary interruption of God's plan and purpose. The time will come when all life on earth and in Heaven will be what it was meant to be. To live a holy life, which is the only way life should be lived, we trace the plan that God shows us on the mountain.

There were two curtains in this tabernacle. They seem to have been similar in many ways. Their basic material and color were the same. A difference seems to have been that whereas the curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place had the cherubim woven into it, the cherubim on the outer curtain were to be embroidered, or added to it after the material was finished. It is true that the cherubim were not specifically mentioned in connection with the outside curtain, but we suppose that the embroidery applies to these figures. If we can draw a lesson from this, it would be that angels do not belong on earth in God's original plan. Their place is in the Heavens. On earth they are added afterward. We may, probably, conclude that the presence of angels has something to do with the coming of sin into the world. The writer to the Hebrews calls them: "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation."⁶¹⁴

Another difference between the two curtains is that the first one was suspended among four pillars and the second one among five. All these pillars were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. But the four pillars at the Most Holy Place stood on silver bases, whereas the five pillars at the entrance of the Holy Place were put on bronze bases. The difference in numbers, receding from five to four, suggest the receding lines in a pictures, giving the illusion of depth. Lines that are parallel in reality, seem to meet in the distance. It is as if a road or a path is painted in front of us and an invitation is given to walk on it. The perspective of the receding lines seems to draw us toward the goal.

Another allusion that is given by the increase of numbers is that of a reaching out. It is as if God stretches out His arms toward us in a most inviting gesture. We have to think about Jesus' story of the return of the Prodigal Son. He says: "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."⁶¹⁵

There is a strange paradox in the way everything is put in place. There is the ark, the symbol of God's holy presence, but it is not accessible to man. There is the covering of the ark with the atonement cover, which speaks of accessibility. The curtains form a forbidding separation between God and man, but the pillars are an invitation. The tabernacle speaks of God's holiness which separates Him from man and of His love which draws man to Himself.

⁶¹² Rev. 10:5-7; 11:15,19

⁶¹³ Matt. 6:9-10

⁶¹⁴ Heb. 1:14

⁶¹⁵ Luke 15:20

At this point only the table and the lampstand are mentioned. The golden altar for burning incense has not entered the picture yet. We will not read about it until chapter thirty. We are still at the point of connecting with God, not yet of worship. There has to be a clear understanding of who God is, why we are separated from Him, and how this problem of separation can be overcome. After that follows worship and adoration.

The outside curtain has the same heavenly colors as the inside. The blue, purple and scarlet invite us to draw near. The overtone is blue, but the scarlet gives a touch of red to the whole of the curtain. Red is the color most alluring to our eyes. Our attention is immediately drawn by it. For the common Israelite, the area was still off limit, but the invitation was there, and it contained a promise of things to come. We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. Our position in Jesus Christ is higher than that of any of the Old Testament priests, or even the High Priest.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Chapter 27:1-21

This chapter deals with three topics:

1. The construction of the brass altar (vs. 1-8)
2. The construction of the court yard (vs. 9-19) and
3. The preparation of the oil for the lampstand (vs. 20,21).

1. The construction of the brass altar (vs. 1-8)

TLB gives the measurements of the brass burnt offering altar as 7 ½x 7 ½x 4 ½feet. This altar was to be used for the burning of the sacrificial animals and the various grain offerings. As far as man was concerned, this was the most important piece of furniture in the whole tabernacle, because it offered the solution to the problem of man's sin.

Apparently the shape of this altar was not unconventional. We quote from *The Pulpit Commentary*: "Altars were commonly either square or round. An Assyrian triangular one was found by Mr. Layard at Nineveh; but even this had a round top. The square shape is the most usual, and was preserved, probably in all the Temple altars, certainly in those of Solomon (2 Chr. iv. 1) and Herod (Joseph. Bell. Jud. 5, § 6)."

Whether this altar was unique in the sense that such an altar had never been built before, or whether this kind of altar existed in Egypt also, we don't know. The quotation from *The Pulpit Commentary* uses examples of a later period. The altars we encountered previously in the Bible were made of earth or stone. Before the plan for the tabernacle was revealed, God had told Moses: "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it."⁶¹⁶ Obviously, the plan for this altar means a deviation from the commandment given before. *The Pulpit Commentary* supposes that, once this brass altar was put in a place from where it would no longer be moved around, the hollow section of it was filled with earth. But of this we find no indication in the Bible.

The horns of the altar formed an intriguing part of the structure. No direct explanation is given in the Bible as to the use of these projections. There are only a few scant indications as to what function these horns must have had in the temple service and in the mind of the people. Ps. 118:27 seems to indicate that sacrificial animals were, at least sometimes, tied to the horns of the altar. "The LORD is God, and He has given us light; bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar." (NAS). And people who feared for their lives, like Adonijah and Joab, fled to the altar to take hold of the horns. "But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar."⁶¹⁷ "When the news reached Joab, who had conspired with Adonijah though not with Absalom, he fled to the tent of the LORD and took hold of the

⁶¹⁶ Ex. 20:24-26

⁶¹⁷ I Kings 1:50

horns of the altar.”⁶¹⁸ Those are the only illustrations we can find in the Bible of the use of the horns. But nowhere do we find any description of the function of these horns.

The wooden structure which formed the basis of the altar was to be covered with bronze. The Hebrew word is *nechosheth*, which is defined by *Strongs Definitions* as “copper, hence, something made of that metal, i.e. coin, a fetter; figuratively, base (as compared with gold or silver).” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Definition* of the word is: “1) copper, bronze a) copper (ore), bronze (as a copper alloy) b) fetters (of copper or bronze) c) copper (as a value).” Commentators, generally, agree that no pure copper was used, but an alloy of copper and tin, which is bronze. Archeological finds seem to confirm this idea. *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “A solid plate of bronze is no doubt intended, such as would protect the shittim wood and prevent it from being burnt.”

Most of the activities in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, center around the bronze altar. All of the sacrifices prescribed in the first seven chapters of Leviticus are brought to this altar to be burned. The bronze altar is the place where the sacrificial animal died. It is, more than any other part of the tabernacle, an image of the cross upon which Christ died for the sins of the world. Remembering this, it is the most amazing to read that God says to Moses, speaking about this altar: “It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.” There is a real spiritual altar in Heaven. We read in Revelation: “When he [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”⁶¹⁹ Yet, the altar exists only because of sin that has to be atoned for. And sin is a parenthesis in eternity; it is not part of God’s eternal plan of creation. Yet there stands the altar in Heaven, of which this bronze one was a copy. And Jesus is called: “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”⁶²⁰ O, mystery of mysteries!

2. The construction of the courtyard (vs. 9-19)

The description of the construction of the courtyard completes the blue print of the actual structure. A fence of white linen was to be erected around the tabernacle. The dimensions were about 150 x 75 feet. The south and north sides were each to have twenty bronze posts on which the curtain was hung and the west and east sides ten posts each. So the posts were placed approximately 7 ½ feet apart. The posts were connected with each other by silver rods from which the curtain was suspended by bronze hooks. The entrance was to be on the east side. The Hebrew word used there is *mizrach* which is derived from *zârach*, which means to irradiate or shoot forth beams, so its usual translation is *sunrise*.

The Hebrew doesn’t actually use the words east, west, north and south but, rather, in front, to the right, to the left, etc. *The Pulpit Commentary* quotes a Rabbinical tradition which says: “that Adam found himself on his creation fronting toward the east, and had consequently the west behind him. Hence, they said, the four cardinal points received the names of *kedem*, ‘in front’ (the east); *yâmin* ‘the right hand’ (the south); *âkhôr*, ‘behind’ (the west); and *shemôl*, ‘the left hand’ (the north).”

The entrance curtain was made of the same material as the curtain that led into the Holy Place and the one that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It was about 30 feet wide, leaving a section of white curtain of about 10 feet on either side. The height of the pillars was about 7 ½ feet, which was half the size of the height of the tabernacle, so the building could be seen rising up from the outside. But the fence indicated that it could only be entered in one way.

It has been said that the church should project an impression of holiness and purity as the white linen fence did. But at the same time, there is the one gate with the inviting colors that woo the people to come close and go in. Unfortunately, the image the contemporary church projects mostly is a soiled testimony and an entrance that lacks inviting color.

We do not read that the curtains at the entrance of the courtyard were open. It seems that the people who entered had to pass through them. They may have been tied at the corners to leave a passage for the public. If every man who entered had to shove aside the curtains, the curtains would not have lasted long. We can see in this an image of the passing into the Most Holy Place, which is accessible to us but was forbidden to the Jews. This is the ultimate entrance, about which the writer to the Hebrews says: “through the curtain, that is, his body.”⁶²¹

⁶¹⁸ I Kings 2:28

⁶¹⁹ Rev. 6:9

⁶²⁰ Rev. 13:8

⁶²¹ Heb. 10:20

Vs. 19 combines a large inventory of articles to be used for the various services that are carried out in the tabernacle and it makes a casual reference to the tent pins, which are not mentioned anywhere else. We may conclude from this, however, that pins and cords were used to tie down the covers, the posts of the tabernacle and fence posts, much in the same way as tents are put up in our time. *The Pulpit Commentary* says here: “The ‘pins’ of the tabernacle are undoubtedly the pegs or tent-pins, whereby the tent-cloth wherewith it was covered was extended and kept taut. There were also probably similar pegs or pins for cords used to keep the ‘pillars’ (ch. xxvi. 37) or tent-poles in place.”

3. The preparation of the oil for the lampstand vs. 20,21

The two final verses of this chapter mention the olive oil used for the lamps inside the Holy Place. None of the commentaries touch on the problem as to where the Israelites would manage to find olives in the desert. Olive oil is notorious for its capacity to spoil within a short time. If olive trees were found in some of the oases the Israelites encountered on their journey, the fact is not mentioned in the Pentateuch. Food was provided supernaturally during the forty years Israel spent in the desert. The manna came down daily, and there were periods during which quail would descend upon the camp for meat, but we do not read that olives were included in the “bread from Heaven.” It is hard to imagine that the Israelites would have brought a supply of olives out of Egypt which lasted them forty years. This is one of the unsolved mysteries. It is just as mysterious to me that nobody ever put a question mark behind these verses.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary believes that this beaten or pressed oil was made by bruising the olives in a mortar. Once Israel had arrived in the promised land larger equipment was used.

We have to remember that several of the prescribed sacrifices could not be brought while Israel was traveling through the desert. None of the grain offerings could be brought, for instance. It seems, however, that the operation of the lampstand in the Holy Place was not to be postponed till Israel arrived in the promised land. So they must have had some supply of oil with them to keep the lamps burning.

The NIV translates the last part of vs. 20 with, “so that the lamps may be kept burning.” This leaves room for an occasional going out of the lamps. Other translations are more stringent. The KJV says: “to cause the lamp to burn always.” TLB reads: “... the lamps of the Tabernacle, to burn there continually.” The RSV may be the most correct in its translation: “that a lamp may be set up to burn continually.”

The Pulpit Commentary says about this: “It has been supposed from this expression that the lamp must have been kept constantly burning both day and night; and Josephus declares that this was actually so, at least with three out of the seven lights (*Ant. Jud.* iii 7, § 7). But there are several places in Scripture which state, or imply, the contrary. (See especially Ex. xxx. 8 ; and 1 Sam. iii 3.) It seems to have been the duty of the high-priest to light the lamps every evening, and to give them a sufficient supply of oil to last till daybreak, at which time ‘the lamp of God went out’ (1 Sam. i.s.c.) The supposition that ‘one light at least was always burning’ (Kalisch), because no daylight could penetrate into the structure through the *fourfold* covering, ignores the fact that light would enter through the *single* curtain at the entrance, as well as the probability that some portion of that curtain may generally have been looped up. If we regard the lamp as extinguished during the daytime, we must understand ‘always’ here to mean ‘regularly every night.’”

The above quoted verse of I Samuel, which reads: “The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was,”⁶²² seems a strange proof in this argument. “The lamp of God” could very well have a spiritual connotation in this story, in that God had not ceased to reveal Himself yet. I do not read this to mean that the little Samuel had gone to bed early that night. In the vision Zechariah receives from the angel, he sees that the lampstand is fed with oil supernaturally. He records: “Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.’ Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ Again I asked him, ‘What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?’ He replied, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ ‘No, my lord,’ I said. So he said, ‘These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.’”⁶²³

The apostle John shows us the reality of what is represented here, when he describes his vision of the throne of God in Revelation. We read: “Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the

⁶²² I Sam. 3:3

⁶²³ Zech. 4:1-3, 11-14

seven spirits of God.”⁶²⁴ But when Jesus appears to John at first, he sees Him, standing between seven lampstands. The explanation the Lord gives Himself is: “The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”⁶²⁵

From the above, we understand that the lampstand in the tabernacle represents more than one truth. The ultimate reality the lamps symbolize is the seven spirits of God, or the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit manifests Himself through human beings, particularly through the body of Christ, that is the church.

Light is the essence of God. As John says: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” Light is the fastest phenomenon we know, traveling at 186,282 miles per second, or 299,792.458 km/sec. It is also the strongest. No darkness holds before the light. “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (RSV).⁶²⁶ We all know what light is and, at the same time, nobody knows what light is. God is light.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The priestly garments chapter 28:1-43

In this chapter the Lord turns from the tabernacle to the priest. The link between this chapter and the preceding one is the lampstand. The following chapters will describe the priest’s ordination and his task. This chapter deals with his garments. Aaron was the best dressed man in the world. God clothed him with His glory. David speaks about “the splendor of his [God’s] holiness.”⁶²⁷

We can see the significance of the lampstand being the link between this chapters and the previous one. The light of the lampstand represented, both, the character of God and the testimony thereof by man. God lets His light shine upon man to make him become light. “You are the light of the world,” said Jesus.⁶²⁸ And that is what priesthood is all about.

This priesthood is initiated by God. We know little about the priests and their calling before this time. Before Aaron’s ordination only two other priests are mentioned in the Old Testament: Melchizedek and the father-in-law of Moses, probably Jethro. About Melchizedek we read: “He was priest of God Most High.”⁶²⁹ Regarding Jethro’s priesthood we don’t read anything except that he was a priest of Midian.⁶³⁰ His priesthood seems to have been related to the service of Yahweh, and not to any heathen idol. When he brings his daughter and two grandsons back to his son-in-law he seems to have recognized the supremacy of Yahweh.⁶³¹

This priesthood to which God called Aaron is, particularly, connected to the service in the tabernacle. Aaron and his descendants had to serve in this limited context of space and time. The space is the tabernacle and later the temple on earth; the time limit is death. Melchizedek exemplified the eternal priesthood. As such he was a type of Christ. About Him David prophesied: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”⁶³² The true High Priest is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is not subject to these limitations of space and time. The writer to the Hebrews says about Him: “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.”⁶³³ Although we are looking at a picture that gives a limited and partial view of the heavenly reality, there is enough beauty and glory in it to bless us.

⁶²⁴ Rev. 4:5

⁶²⁵ Rev. 1:20

⁶²⁶ John 1:5

⁶²⁷ Ps. 29:2

⁶²⁸ Matt. 5:14

⁶²⁹ Gen. 14:18

⁶³⁰ Ex. 2:16

⁶³¹ See Ex. 18

⁶³² Ps. 110:4

⁶³³ Heb. 7:23,24; 8:1,2

God calls Aaron and his four sons to the priesthood. Two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu, would not fulfill their task for long. They died when they entered the tabernacle without observing the rules.⁶³⁴ Eleazar would succeed Aaron as high priest upon his death.⁶³⁵

The best tailors of the people are to make the priestly garments, which consist of: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash.

It is easy to pass over the fact that there are garments involved in the service as priests before the Lord. We take it for granted that the priests would not go around naked. We should not forget, however, that God did not create man wearing clothes. We read about Adam and Eve: “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”⁶³⁶ The shame of nakedness came with the awareness of sin. After eating from the fruit God had forbidden, we read: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” God asked them: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Then God makes accommodations to this fallen condition, and we read: “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”⁶³⁷

So there is in the description of the clothing of Aaron and his sons a suggestion or a reference to the fall. But the tables are turned. The clothing which God provided for Adam and Eve protected them from the results of sin with animal skins, which had been obtained by the killing of animals and the spilling of blood. The priestly garments covered the priest with glory. Although clothing may not have been part of God’s original plan of creation, it is incorporated in God’s glorious scheme through redemption.

In the description of the garments to be made, much attention is given to the ephod. Nine verses are devoted to it. The Hebrew word *ephod* has been left untranslated in most English versions. *Strongs Definitions* gives the following definition: “Probably of foreign derivation a girdle; specifically the ephod or high-priest’s shoulderpiece.”

From *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* we copy the following: “This word, which appears in Assyrian and (perhaps) Ugaritic, occurs 49 times in the biblical Hebrew, 31 times in the legal prescriptions of Exodus-- Leviticus and only once in biblical poetry <Hos. 3:4>. This word represents a close-fitting outer garment associated with worship. It was a kind of long vest, generally reaching to the thighs. The ‘ephod’ of the high priest was fastened with a beautifully woven girdle <Exod. 28:27-28> and had shoulder straps set in onyx stones, on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes. Over the chest of the high priest was the breastplate, also containing twelve stones engraved with the tribal names. Rings attached it to the ‘ephod.’ The Urim and Thummim were also linked to the breastplate.”

Although little is known of the etymology of the word, it is clear what the ephod was a part of the high priestly outfit. The material to be used was the same as that used for the making of the curtains that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place and the latter from the courtyard, with two exceptions, that is that no cherubs were embroidered on the ephod and the curtains had no gold thread woven into them.

It seems that the ephod was secured in three ways: the shoulder pieces were fastened together and the waistband was tied in the back. The shoulder pieces performed a double function: they served as clasps to hold the ephod together on top and they held two onyx stones on which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were engraved. The Hebrew word which is translated with “so it can be fastened,” is *chabar*, which *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Dictionary* defines as, “1) to unite, to be joined 2) to tie magic charms, to charm.” It could be that the magic connotation in the second definition came up later in time when the spiritual significance of the onyx stones on Aaron’s shoulders was lost.

The Hebrew word translated by onyx is *shoham* which, according to *Strongs*, is derived from the word to blanch. It is thought to be the gem called beryl (from its pale green color). *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* thinks that it could be a stone that shows “somewhat even bands or layers of black or dark tints, and white.” But then it adds: “Josephus, however, states clearly that the stone on the breastplate was onyx, and the shoulder-pieces of the ephod sardonyx - the variety of onyx with bands of dark red (sardine or sardius). This testimony, from one personally familiar with the priestly vestments, is incontestable.”

On the onyx stones the names of the twelve tribes were engraved. Since twelve names were used, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were probably combined as Joseph and Levi must have been included

⁶³⁴ See Lev. 10:1,2

⁶³⁵ Num. 20:25,26

⁶³⁶ Gen. 2:25

⁶³⁷ Gen. 3:7, 11, 21

in the list. In this case there would be no reason to exclude Levi. These names were also engraved individually on the twelve stones of the breastplate. Aaron was to carry the names of the tribes on his shoulders and on his heart when he appeared before the Lord. The significance of this cannot easily be overlooked.

The shoulder pieces and the breastplate are perfect images of intercession. Vs. 29 says: “Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the LORD.” This would apply to the shoulder pieces also. What we read in vs. 38 regarding the gold plate Aaron had to wear on his forehead is applicable to these parts of the outfit also: “he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be.” As a high priest Aaron was held responsible for his people. He bore their guilt. Or, as the NAS translates it: “Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate.”

On top of the ephod was fastened “a breastpiece for making decisions.” *The Pulpit Commentary* says here: “It has been noticed that the ephod had for its main object or purpose to be a receptacle for the breast-plate which was attached to it after it had been put on, and formed its principal ornament. The Hebrew word *khoshen*, which is translated “breast-plate,” means “ornament”; and the *khoshen* must certainly have been the most striking and brilliant object in the whole attire of the high priest. Externally, it did but repeat the symbolism of the ephod, exhibiting the high priest as the representative of the twelve tribes, whose names were engraved upon its twelve stones, as well as upon the onyxes of the ephod. Internally, it had, however, another, and a deeper import. It contained within the Urim and the Thummim, (ver. 30), by means of which God was consulted, and signified his will to his people. This must be regarded as its main end and use. It was from the *decisions* thus given that it received the name of “the breast-plate (or ornament) of judgment.”

The breastpiece was a separate piece of cloth made of the same material as the rest of the ephod, but with an attachment of a gold filigree setting. The KJV calls it “ouches.” The Hebrew word is *mishbetsah*, which is defined by *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Dictionary* as “plaited or filigree or chequered work (of settings for gems).” *The Pulpit Commentary* gives the opinion of three different scholars on this: “Buttons” according to Cook; “sockets” according to Kalish and “rosettes” according to Kiel.

On this cloth was a gold frame to be attached in which twelve precious stones were mounted. These stones are identified in the NIV as: a ruby, a topaz and a beryl, a turquoise, a sapphire, an emerald, a jacinth, an agate, an amethyst, a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. It is obvious that the identification of each stone is not certain. When we compare the different translations we see that not all agree concerning the names for the stones. The KJV, for instance gives the following list: “a sardius, a topaz, a carbuncle, an emerald, a sapphire, a diamond, a ligure, an agate, an amethyst, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper.” When we compare the two lists, we see that translators agreed only on the topaz, sapphire and jasper. There are other identical names but they are not found at the same places. Several of these stones are found as foundations in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem.⁶³⁸ It would be rather time consuming and unprofitable to study in detail what each of these stones stood for. The main point is clear: they are precious stones, and they reflect the character of God. John gives us a brief glimpse of God’s glorious character when he tries to describe the glory of the triune God sitting on the throne in Heaven. He says: “And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.”⁶³⁹

The stones on the high priest’s breastplate are engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel. They are embedded in the glory of God’s character. We have to remember the value of a name in the Old Testament. Names were more than appellations only; they stood for character and personality. Aaron was not just wearing some decorative jewelry. He presented the names of human beings to the Lord in a setting of His glory.

We should look beyond the fact that Aaron enters the sanctuary, thus dressed, as if he is reminding the Lord of His people Israel. The essence of prayer is not what we say to God, but what He says to us. Aaron’s outfit is not meant to remind God of how we feel, but to remind us of how God feels about us and our fellowmen. God speaks more to us in prayer than we speak to God. When Aaron brings the names of the twelve tribes before the Lord, God wants him to understand how He feels about His people. That is what intercession is all about. Prayer is not the believer moving the heart of God, but God moving ours. God wants to share His compassion for man with us. When Jesus exhorts us to pray for workers in God’s

⁶³⁸ Rev. 21:19,20

⁶³⁹ Rev. 4:3

harvest, it is because He is moved with compassion. And He wants us to pray with the same compassion He has. We read: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"⁶⁴⁰

What Aaron does expresses that which is so beautifully put in words by the author of the Hebrew epistle: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."⁶⁴¹ Aaron brings the tribes of Israel into the presence of God in a way which symbolizes the way Jesus brings many sons unto glory.

We may presume that after a while Aaron got used to the situation. Much of it must have become routine to him. The awe wore off, but that does not change God's intent. The jewelry Aaron wore was an outward expression of an inward reality. Routine or not, the reality did not change. Some of God's compassion for His people that is expressed in Aaron's shoulder pieces and breastplate, is put in words by Isaiah when he says: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me."⁶⁴² Names engraved in precious stones are permanent. They can never be erased. Neither can they be wiped off when God engraves them on the palms of His hands. The stones on Aaron's shoulders and on his heart displayed a touch of eternity as well as of glory.

The breastpiece was a separate piece of cloth attached to the ephod with gold chains. Vs.2 tells us: "It is to be square-- a span long and a span wide-- and folded double." TLB puts it as follows: "This chestpiece is to be of two folds of cloth, forming a pouch nine inches square." This pouch had the double function of holding the frame with the twelve stones on the outside and the Urim and Thummim on the inside. The stones were set in four rows of three.

The description of the way in which the breastpiece was to be fastened to the ephod is rather complicated. The attachment of the top part was different from the one at the bottom and it is described separately. The two gold rings of the top are not mentioned at the same time as the two at the bottom. The top rings were attached to the shoulder pieces by two cords made of gold thread braided together and the two bottom rings were tied to the belt of the ephod by two blue ribbons. This sounds too strange not to have any deeper meaning. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon compares the human spirit to a silver cord. Describing the death of man he says: "Remember him-- before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well."⁶⁴³ We may presume that, if the human spirit is represented by a silver cord, a golden cord would be the image of the Spirit of God. That is the cord that goes upward and links the precious stones on Aaron's heart with the ones on his shoulders. Without the link that the Holy Spirit provides there would be no ministry of intercession. If it were not for the presence of the Spirit of God, Aaron's garments would be nothing but a beautiful, expensive, but meaningless outfit. The way Aaron is dressed expresses what the apostle Paul would later put in words like these: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."⁶⁴⁴

There is a human connection also, which is represented by the blue ribbons that attach the breastpiece to the belt. There is a heavenly element in this also, which is expressed in the color blue, but the downward direction of the ribbons and also the way they are contrasted to the golden braids on top would indicate that man has his share of responsibility in the ministry of intercession. The Holy Spirit does not simply take over and push us aside. The breastplate is kept in place by the two golden cords on top and the two blue ribbons on the bottom.

What the Urim and Thummim actually were nobody knows. *Nelson's Dictionary of the Bible* offers the following: "URIM AND THUMMIM - ... (lights and perfections)-- gems or stones carried by the high priest and used by him to determine God's will in certain matters. Many scholars believe these gems were cast, much as dice are thrown, to aid the high priest in making important decisions. The Urim and Thummim were either on, by, or in the high priest's breastplate. For this reason the breastplate is often called the breastplate of judgment, or decision. In the instructions for making the breastplate, the linen was

⁶⁴⁰ Matt. 9:36-38

⁶⁴¹ Heb 2:10 (KJV)

⁶⁴² Isa. 49:15,16

⁶⁴³ Eccl. 12:6

⁶⁴⁴ Rom. 8:26,27

to be doubled to form a square <Ex. 28:16>. If the top edge was not stitched together, the breastplate would be an envelope or pouch. Many scholars believe the Urim and Thummim were kept in this pouch and were stones or gems with engraved symbols that signified yes-no or true-false. By these the high priest reached a decision, according to this theory. The Jewish historian Josephus (A. D. 37-100?), a contemporary of the apostle John, believed that the Urim and Thummim had to do with the flashing of the precious stones in the breastplate. Later Jewish writers believed that the letters in the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on the stones stood out or flashed in succession to spell out God's answer. This theory does imply that the Urim and Thummim could produce answers to questions which called for more than a mere yes or no reply. Another theory is that by staring at the glow of the Urim and Thummim, the high priest went into a state of ecstasy or trance during which God spoke to him. The student or Bible teacher should bear in mind that all of these theories are pure guesswork. No one knows the exact nature of the Urim and Thummim or precisely how they were used. There are few allusions to the Urim and Thummim in the Bible. They are first mentioned in the description of the breastplate of judgment <Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8>. When Joshua succeeded Moses, he was to have answers from the Urim through Eleazar the priest <Num. 27:21>. They are next mentioned in Moses' dying blessing upon Levi <Deut. 33:8>. There are places in the Bible where Urim and Thummim may be implied but are not named <Josh. 7:14-18; 1 Sam. 14:37-45; 2 Sam. 21:1>. Saul sought direction from the witch of En-dor when he could receive no answer from the Lord, 'either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets' <1 Sam. 28:6>. Another interesting reference to the Urim and Thummim occurred during the period after the return of the Jewish people from their years in captivity by the Babylonians. The Persian governor of Jerusalem denied the people permission to observe some of their ancient Jewish food laws until 'a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim' <Ezra 2:63>."

From this last Scripture reference quoted by *Nelson*, it appears that the Urim and Thummim survived the captivity; for how long, we don't know. There is no indication that they still existed, or were used in New Testament times. This manner of consulting God and obtaining answers from Him is no longer accessible to us in our day. We only know the counterfeit that is used in spiritism, such as the ouija board. The fact that God can no longer be consulted by us with the use of stones or dice or any such thing, but that it was, apparently, an appropriate and legitimate way in Old Testament times seems to indicate that the lines that separate our natural world from the spiritual are drawn sharper now than they were before. In his book *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis paints a picture of the world in which Merlin lived, when good magic (which seems to be what the Urim and Thummim stood for) and black magic were not separated as clearly as they are in our time. It is quite possible that the enemy has taken over certain objects that were formerly, legitimately, used in fellowship with God and that are now out of bounds for us. He flooded the market with counterfeits which made the good stuff disappear. All of the above does not help us much to understand the use and meaning of the Urim and Thummim, but it makes us realize that we do live in a different age and that the means of communication that were proper in previous centuries are no longer available to us. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit has given us access to God and to the knowledge of His will in a way that was not available to the Old Testament saints.

The use of the Urim and Thummim was not to be a thoughtless and mechanical throwing of dice, or whatever the method may have been in which the oracle was consulted. Twice we read in vs. 30 that Aaron was to wear these stones on his heart. Every consultation of these stones and every decision made as a result of that consultation was something that affected Aaron to the depth of his soul. The knowledge of the will of God was not to be something that went outside of him, but something that affected him deeply. This might give some credence to the theory, mentioned by *Nelson*, "that by staring at the glow of the Urim and Thummim, the high priest went into a state of ecstasy or trance during which God spoke to him."

Vs. 31-35 give us more information about the making of the ephod. We said before that the same material was used for the making of the ephod as for the curtains that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place and the Holy Place from the courtyard. This is basically true, but verse 31 tells us that the ephod itself was entirely made of blue cloth and that the other colors were used for the decorations on the edge of the garment. The hem of the ephod was embroidered with pomegranates and decorated with little gold bells. The sound of the bells was more than a means to produce pleasant music as Aaron moved around. It was to protect him from death. No further explanation is given at this point. We understand from the incident reported in Lev. 10, where Aaron's two sons died as they entered the sanctuary, that the high priest performed in the Holy Place at the risk of his life. He had to be alert and he had to know what he was doing. The sound of the bells would assist him in this.

We further read in vs. 32 that the ephod had to have a woven collar at the neck to keep it from fraying or from being torn. This collar would protect the ephod not only from involuntary tears, but also from voluntary ones. A high priest was not allowed to tear his clothes. We read in Leviticus: "The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes."⁶⁴⁵ That is why Caiphas committed such a grave sin during Jesus' trial. We read: "Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.'⁶⁴⁶

The last part of Aaron's priestly outfit was a golden plate with the inscription "Holy to the Lord" engraved upon it. This plate was attached to his turban with blue cords. Aaron would wear these words on his forehead as he entered the sanctuary. The significance of this is clear. It was as if Aaron had to remind himself constantly that he had been set apart for the Lord's service. The plate protected his mind and his intellect.

The great command in the Bible is "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."⁶⁴⁷ Jesus interpreted this as involving the mind. Answering one of the questions asked in public he replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."⁶⁴⁸ The slight shade of different meaning was not a revolutionary statement of Jesus. In saying this He, obviously, followed the accepted interpretation of the theologians of His time. Love is not only a matter of the heart, but also of the head. It involves the whole man.

The head plate also suggests that our relationship with God does not annul our intellect. Faith and intelligence are not incompatible. The idea that obedience to God's will would mean intellectual suicide is a myth; just as much as Eve's thought that the forbidden fruit would be desirable for gaining wisdom was a myth.⁶⁴⁹ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge."⁶⁵⁰ God is the source of all intelligence. The man who thinks that the Gospel is for the simple minded alone, overestimates his own intelligence. Entering into a faith-relationship with God means entering into a world of knowledge, logic, and wisdom that is far superior to our own world of limited comprehension. God is the God of the mind as well as of the emotions. He created Adam as an intelligent being. It is "cool" to believe in God.

Vs. 38 gives us a startling surprise. The wearing of the head plate indicated that "he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be." There are several statements in this verse that need clarification: first about the guilt that was involved in the gifts the Israelites brought. We understand the relationship among certain sacrifices, such as the sin offering and the guilt offering and the people's guilt. But the verse includes all sacrifices, those that had no relationship with sin, such as the burnt offering, the food offerings, and the various fellowship offerings. There was guilt attached to everything the Israelites brought to the Lord, and this guilt fell upon Aaron's head.

Nothing we bring to God is acceptable to Him as is, because we are not acceptable to Him as we are. God could only accept Israel's sacrifices if one person would bear the guilt for them. It all came down upon the head of him who was wearing the plate "holy to the Lord."

This points to our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom all the sacrifices, whatever they may be, were fulfilled when He died upon the cross as the only and ultimate sacrifice. We can now come to God with sacrifices that are acceptable to Him because we come in His Name. We are now acceptable ourselves because of Him. He bore the guilt for all we bring to God and for ourselves.

The fact that this truth is tied to Aaron's turban indicates that the bearing of the people's guilt is a matter of an intelligent choice. Jesus had made up His mind, when He came into this world, that He came to die for the sins of the world. David prophesied about Jesus' decision to become the Lamb of God. We read: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll.'⁶⁵¹ Jesus talks about this decision Himself. He says in the Gospel of John: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own

⁶⁴⁵ Lev. 21:10

⁶⁴⁶ Matt. 26:65

⁶⁴⁷ Deut. 6:5

⁶⁴⁸ Matt. 22:37

⁶⁴⁹ Gen. 3:5

⁶⁵⁰ Prov. 1:7

⁶⁵¹ Ps. 40:6,7

accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”⁶⁵²

Vs. 39 deals with the tunic, the turban, and the sash. The first two are to be made of fine linen which probably means that they were white. The sash was the sash for the tunic, not to be confused with the sash for the ephod. This part of Aaron’s outfit would be the same as of the garments his sons were to wear as priests. What distinguished the high priest from the priests was the ephod with the breastplate, the shoulder pieces and the head plate. The basic outfit was the same: that is, a tunic of white linen with a sash and a turban.

John sees Jesus in this basic outfit, without the turban, in the first vision in the book of Revelation. He describes the vision as follows: “And among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man,’ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.”⁶⁵³ We do not read that Aaron’s sash was made of gold, although gold thread may have been used in the embroidery. Jesus appears to John, not as the High Priest, but as an ordinary priest, although infinitely more glorious than any priest on earth.

The garments for Aaron’s sons, although they were only the elementary outfit, were meant “to give them dignity and honor,” in the same way as the complete high priestly outfit was to give dignity to Aaron.

The consecration, which is briefly mentioned in vs. 41, is described in detail in the following chapter.

The last two verses of this chapter are of an unusual character. The priests were to wear linen underwear. We are not told why, only what will happen if they do not comply: their life would be in danger! “So that they will not incur guilt and die.” We can only conclude that the tunic did not reach to their feet, but that it was a rather short garment, probably reaching to the knees. A previous mention was made on ch. 20, where we read: “And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.”⁶⁵⁴ There is, evidently, a danger of indecent exposure.

Concerning the tunic, *The Pulpit Commentary* says the following: “The *ketōneth* was a long linen gown or cassock, worn immediately over the drawers. It reached to the feet, and had tightly-fitting sleeves (Joseph. *Ant. Jud.* iii. 7, § 2).” This contradicts our previous observation, but it doesn’t invalidate it. Fashion changes over the years-- how much more over the centuries!

Another interesting feature of the description of the priestly outfit, including the undergarments, is the requirement that they be made from linen. The prophet Ezekiel throws an interesting light upon this in his detailed description of the temple and the service of the priests. We read: “They [the priests] are to wear linen turbans on their heads and linen undergarments around their waists. They must not wear anything that makes them perspire.” The well known traveling evangelist, Major Ian Thomas, once preached a sermon about this, in which he said: “God hates sweat!” Sweat was part of the curse that Adam incurred upon himself when he sinned. God said to him: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground.”⁶⁵⁵ Sweat is usually the result of human exertion. It is also, of course, a protection of the body against overheating. But in the context of Ezekiel’s quote, it speaks of human contrasted to the work of God. The service the priests perform before the Lord is not a human endeavor to please God, it is God’s initiative, it is God’s work, it is grace. Paul gives us the spiritual application when he says: “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”⁶⁵⁶

It is amazing what we can learn from an undergarment. God protects us from the shame of sin by keeping us covered, not only with underwear, but with the blood of Christ; He wants us to serve Him, not in our own strength, which would make us perspire, but in His grace, which sets us free. God’s priests are free from toil and shame. And His priests we are!

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

⁶⁵² John 10:17,18

⁶⁵³ Rev. 1:13

⁶⁵⁴ Ex. 20:26

⁶⁵⁵ Gen. 3:19

⁶⁵⁶ Rom. 4:4,5

This chapter can be divided in three parts:

1. **The consecration of the priests** ch. 29:1-37
2. **The daily sacrifice** ch. 29:38-42a
3. **God dwells among His people** ch. 29:42b-46

1. The consecration of the priests ch. 29:1-37

According to vs. 35 the consecration of Aaron and his sons would take seven days. Each day the same ceremony was to be repeated. We take this to mean that for seven days the same sacrifices were to be brought. It is not stated specifically that Aaron and his sons had to be washed, dressed and anointed anew every day. The execution of what is prescribed here is found in Lev. 8:1-36.

Matthew Henry's Commentary says the following about this consecration: "The Hebrew phrase for consecrating is filling the hand (v. 9): Thou shalt fill the hand of Aaron and his sons, and the ram of consecration is the ram of fillings, v. 22, 26. The consecrating of them was the perfecting of them; Christ is said to be perfect or consecrated for evermore, <Heb. 7:28>. Probably the phrase here is borrowed from the putting of the sacrifice into their hand, to be waved before the Lord, v. 24." The two words used in Strongs Definitions are *yad* and *male'* or *mala'* which means *an open hand* and *to fill*. In the consecration of the priests, God provided the sacrifices that were to be presented to Him. Man comes before God empty handed, but God fills his hands with Himself. The sacrifice we present to God is Jesus Christ.

Nobody has translated this truth more beautifully than the Flemish poet Guido Gezelle.

Jesus Christ is my sacrifice, my altar, my right.
Nothing makes me more courageous in prayer
Then this sacrifice, this altar, than this unmerited right,
on which I base my salvation.

The sacrifices consisted of one young bull, two rams, and a grain offering consisting of bread without yeast, cakes and wafers with oil. The bull was sacrificed as a sin offering, the two rams as burn offerings. All the animals were to be "without blemish." The ceremony on the first day began with a ritual washing of Aaron and his sons in front of the tabernacle. It sounds as if the men would be standing naked in front of the whole congregation, but this could hardly be the case. After the warning at the end of the previous chapter, regarding the undergarments the priests were to wear, it would be very contradictory, to say the least, if God would require them to undress in public. We may suppose that the washing was more a rite that represented purification in a symbolic way. God loved Aaron and his sons and love does not seek to embarrass. Even if the rite of purification was only symbolic, it expressed, nonetheless, the principle that these men stood naked before the Lord. *The Pulpit Commentary* says at this point: "Whether the washing of consecration extended to the whole body, or was limited to the hands and feet, is also a point on which critics have disagreed, but one of no great importance."

The way Aaron is dressed is described as if it is filmed. We see it happen before our eyes. God wants us to see the picture. This word-picture shows us how important this ceremony is to God. He delights in it, and He wants us to share His excitement. Unless we understand this, the dressing ceremony would be rather tedious to us. We have to realize how much we are involved in what happens here. It is true that Aaron and his sons are dedicated to the Lord; it is His initiative, but it is for the atonement of our sins and for our salvation. Or, at least, it presents a picture of the reality of Jesus' dying on the cross and of His high priestly office now, which saves us to the uttermost.

The anointing with oil of Aaron symbolizes the coming of God's Holy Spirit upon him. David saw in this anointing an image of the unity of brotherhood, a picture of the church. He wrote: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes."⁶⁵⁷ The presence of the Holy Spirit upon the life of one man results in a bond of love and unity among those who have consecrated themselves to God.

Vs. 9 tells us, "The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance." This seems to contradict the argument the writer to the Hebrews presents in the chapters 7 and 8 of his epistle. When he speaks about Christ, as being "high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek," he says: "If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come-- one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For

⁶⁵⁷ Ps. 133:1,2

when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.”⁶⁵⁸ And about the law that ordained Aaron and his sons to the priesthood, the writer says: “He [God] has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”⁶⁵⁹ The answer to this paradox lies, first of all, in the fact that Christ is High Priest in Heaven, not on earth. The writer to the Hebrews mentions this: “If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.”⁶⁶⁰

The Hebrew word for *lasting* in lasting ordinance, or as the KJV puts it perpetual statute, is *owlam* or *olam*, which is defined by *Brown Driver Briggs* as “long duration, antiquity, futurity, forever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient,” etc. So lasting, does not, necessarily, means everlasting in this context.

We may, however, put it this way that Aaron’s priesthood stands for the service of God by man on earth, and Christ’s priesthood is carried out in Heaven. It is by His priesthood that every man who has a relationship with Him becomes a priest on earth. As we read in the book of Revelation: “And [he] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.”⁶⁶¹ In this sense the priesthood of Aaron is an image of God’s eternal plan with man.

After the priests have been dressed in their sacerdotal attire, the first sacrifice, which is a sin offering, has to be brought (vs. 10-14). A bull is brought to the entrance of the tabernacle. Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the animal’s head to indicate that they identify themselves with the bull. What happens to the animal happens to them in a substitutionary way. They confess that they are sinners and that they are under the death sentence, which is executed upon a substitute. *Adam Clarke* explains here: “In the case of the sin offering and trespass offering, the person who brought the sacrifice placed his hands on the head of the animal between the horns, and confessed his sin over the sin offering, and his trespass over the trespass offering, saying, ‘I have sinned, I have done iniquity; I have trespassed, and have done thus and thus; and do return by repentance before Thee, and with this I make atonement.’ Then the animal was considered as vicariously bearing the sins of the person who brought it.”

This sacrifice expresses both man’s condition of total depravity and God’s glorious plan of salvation. To begin with the latter, man is invited by God to enter into His presence, to praise Him and serve Him, and to form a bridge between God and the rest of creation. God makes a priest out of a sinner. Man is so foul in God’s sight that death is the only answer, and the carcass has to be burned as if it were garbage. Yet, at the same time, man is clothed with garments that give him honor and dignity beyond imagination. It is only after Aaron and his sons have laid their hands on the bulls head and killed the animal, poured out his blood and burned the remains on the garbage dump, and have seen themselves killed and thrown away as garbage in effigy, that they become people who have honor and dignity before God. They may have been esteemed by man before, but that kind of honor and glory went on the dumps. It is God’s honor and dignity that are imputed upon them through this death.

Some of the blood is applied to the horns of the altar and the remainder is poured out at the base. Two things come to mind in connection with this part of the ritual. Jesus asks the Pharisees the question: “Which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?”⁶⁶² The altar sanctifies the sacrifice, but the sacrifice sanctifies the altar first.

Death is man’s greatest shame. It is the greatest shame in the universe. Death makes a mockery of life; it makes life meaningless. If death is the end of life, then life is senseless. The altar is, therefore, a place of shame. The greatest altar in the universe was the cross upon which Jesus died; it was the epitome of shame. To die on a cross meant to be rejected, despised and cursed. Yet, when Jesus died on the cross, the cross was sanctified by His blood. It became the emblem of supreme love and salvation. The blood of Aaron and his sons, as represented by the blood of the bull, made the altar into a place that would sanctify the offering.

Then there is the blood that is poured out at the base. In the book of Revelation, John describes a scene that takes place during the Great Tribulation: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had

⁶⁵⁸ Heb. 7:11-12

⁶⁵⁹ Heb. 8:13

⁶⁶⁰ Heb. 8:4

⁶⁶¹ Rev. 1:6

⁶⁶² Matt. 23:19 (NAS)

maintained.”⁶⁶³ These are the martyrs killed by the Antichrist. They are the victims of senseless mass executions.

In the Bible blood is identified with the soul of man. “The life of a creature is in the blood.”⁶⁶⁴ The souls under the altar are the blood that is poured out at the base of the altar. That which seemed to be a senseless waste of life on earth becomes, in the eyes of God, a precious sacrifice for Him. David says: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”⁶⁶⁵

When Jesus died on the cross, the sun eclipsed and the world was wrapped in darkness, but Heaven was set aglow. His blood was applied to the altar in Heaven, and His life was poured out at the foot of the altar as the most precious thing in the sight of the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews says: “It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”⁶⁶⁶ The copies of the heavenly things were purified by a copy of the blood of Christ when the blood of the bull, which died instead of Aaron and his sons, was applied to the horns of the altar and poured out at its base. So much more was at stake than a ritual performed in the desert to inaugurate men; this ceremony acted out what happened in eternity.

Some parts of the bull were burned on the altar: “the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them.” No explanation is given in the Bible as to why animal fat could not be used for human consumption. We know now that there is a health hazard, but that does not seem to have been the main concern here. The Lord forbade Israel to use fat for human consumption: “This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.”⁶⁶⁷ I don’t know what function fat fulfills in the human body. We live in a “lean” century where “low fat” and “no fat” are sales pitches. But in some cultures fat is seen as a symbol of blessing. Solomon seems to have considered that being fat was being blessed. In the book of Proverbs we read: “The liberal soul shall be made fat.” “The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” “He that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.”⁶⁶⁸ Against this background, we could say that God wants the symbols of blessing to be given back to Him as a sacrifice.

Solomon describes the death of man in a highly poetical way as: “The silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”⁶⁶⁹ There is a separation of soul and spirit from the body. The soul is pictured under the images of “the silver cord, the golden bowl and the pitcher at the spring.” The spirit is simply called the spirit. The soul is shattered, but the spirit returns to God. This separation may be expressed in the burning of certain parts of the body on the altar. The spirit returns to God who gave it. But the rest is discarded, thrown away as garbage, outside the camp. This is a graphic picture of Jesus’ death on the cross. Golgotha was outside the city walls. A person who was executed was led outside the camp. He was excluded from the community. Jesus was a sin offering, as vs. 14 states.

At this point the chapter that deals with sin is closed. This finality is expressed by the writer to the Hebrews when he says: “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”⁶⁷⁰ The Greek uses two different words that are translated by the one word “purification” in English. *The Amplified Bible* brings this out quite well by saying: “When He had by offering Himself accomplished *our* cleansing of sins and riddance of guilt,” Although in the inauguration ceremony the ritual is repeated seven days in a row, there is this feature of finality in the way God deals with our sins. God never comes back to the matter once it is taken care of. Now His attention is fixed upon the two rams.

The first ram is brought as a burnt offering to God. The burnt offering is the unique sacrifice, the holocaust, that is completely dedicated to God. We find its description in Leviticus.⁶⁷¹ It is the offering of which only God would eat, to use a human expression. It pictures Christ’s sacrifice of Himself to the Father

⁶⁶³ Rev. 6:9

⁶⁶⁴ Lev. 17:11

⁶⁶⁵ Ps. 116:15

⁶⁶⁶ Heb. 9:23

⁶⁶⁷ Lev. 3:17

⁶⁶⁸ Prov. 11:25; 13:4; 28:25 (KJV)

⁶⁶⁹ Eccl. 12:6-7

⁶⁷⁰ Heb. 1:3

⁶⁷¹ Lev. 1:1-17; 6:8-13

as a sacrifice of love. There is no reference to sin in it. It goes beyond anything man can do for God. It is the sacrifice of the Second Person of the Trinity to the First Person of the Trinity. The scope and depth of it lies far beyond the horizon of our humanity. Yet, this is the first sacrifice the newly ordained priests have to bring to God. It is even part of their ordination. Without wanting to vulgarize the concept, we could say that this presentation is so precious to God that He wants to unwrap it first. It is “a pleasing aroma” to God. The KJV calls it “a sweet savour.”

We have mentioned elsewhere that God must hold death in any form in abhorrence. When we read about God’s reaction to this burnt sacrifice, we have to understand some of the ambivalence of God’s emotions, to use another human expression. What enralls God is not the death of one of His creatures, or the fact that His Son dies on a cross, but the motivation for this death. Christ willingly died for His Father because of His eternal love. Christ’s death was bitter-sweet, very bitter, but also sweet beyond imagination.

The depth and meaning of the burnt sacrifice surpasses our understanding. Aaron and his sons had, probably, no inkling of what they were doing when they brought this sacrifice. As humans, we perform many acts of which we do not understand the significance ourselves. We find in Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats a good example of this. Those who have loved the Lord will ask: “‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”⁶⁷²

The sacrifice of the second ram is the actual ordination sacrifice. The only other instance in which a similar sacrifice is brought is during the purification ceremony of a healed leper.⁶⁷³ The unusual feature of this sacrifice is the application of some of the blood to certain parts of the priest’s body. We read: “Take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet.” And in connection with the purification ritual of a leper we read: “The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.” The same ceremony is performed for the highest and the lowest among the people. God makes lepers into priests, and He wants the priests to understand that, without the blood that is applied to them, they are lepers, suffering from a disease that is worse than leprosy.

It is obvious what the ritual intends to demonstrate: the blood of the sacrifice is applied to Aaron’s right ear, his right thumb and his right toe. The consecration to the priesthood means that his ear is dedicated to the Lord, which results in obedience in his acts and his walk. A little children’s chorus says: “Be careful little ears what you hear... Be careful little hands what you do... Be careful little feet where you go.” The application of the blood to those parts of the body that symbolize those facets of our lives that govern the whole of our being, brings about some drastic changes in behavior. God has created us in His image. This means that we have a choice to hear and obey, or to disobey. The application of the blood to the right ear lobe indicates that we have chosen to obey Him Who died for us.

This ritual makes life with God a very practical issue. We can speak in general terms about the fact that Christ died for us, without this affecting our lives in a practical way. But we cannot have the blood of Christ applied to our ear lobe without pledging allegiance to Him. Christian life starts with a promise to obey. What our hands do and where our feet go is determined by what our ears hear.

The equivalent of the application of the sacrificial blood to the right ear lobe is the piercing of the ear of the slave who said: “I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free.” Scripture says: “Then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.”⁶⁷⁴ The pierced ear is the ear to which the blood is applied.

The deep lesson of this is that, since the fall of Adam, our natural tendency is to disobey. Without the death of Christ for us, obedience would not even be an option. Only on the basis of our reconciliation with God through His death can the blood be applied to our ear and hand and foot.

The ritual also seems to indicate that obedience is not, automatically, the result of reconciliation. The blood has to be applied, specifically, to the various parts of the body that symbolize our spiritual

⁶⁷² Matt. 25:37-40

⁶⁷³ Lev. 14:10-14

⁶⁷⁴ Ex. 21:5,6

functioning. We have to perform conscious acts of surrender to God in order to live a life that will bear fruit for Him. Frances Harvergal expresses this truth so beautifully in the hymn,

“Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee...”

And Paul emphasizes the same act of surrender when he says: “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”⁶⁷⁵ Such acts of surrender are acts of our will. God does not force us into anything against our will. He will not seal our ear and hand and feet with His blood unless we say to Him: “I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free.”

When the death of Christ is applied to our ear, we die to any sound except the sound of His voice. When the blood is applied to our hands, we cease from carrying out our own plans, and when it is applied to our feet, we will go only where He tells us to go.

God wants to be sure that Aaron understand the relationship between the consecration of their bodies to the Lord’s service and the death of the sacrificial animal. First of all, some of the blood is sprinkled around the altar. It is not poured out at the base, like the blood of the first ram that was sacrificed as a burnt offering. The sprinkling emphasizes the fact that there is a link between death and obedience. It is obedience unto death. It reminds us of Paul’s words: “He [Christ] humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”⁶⁷⁶ Aaron’s obedience is to foreshadow the obedience of Jesus Christ.

This link with the altar is reinforced in the following verse. The wording sounds strange in English: “And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments.” The symbolism is obvious; it is as if the blood that had been sprinkled on the altar could be taken back and applied again to Aaron and his garments. The idea is, evidently, to emphasize that it is the same blood that was sprinkled on the altar that is now sprinkled on Aaron, his garments and on his sons and their garments. The Hebrew word for “to sprinkle” here is different from the one used in vs. 16. Here it is *nazah*. The word *zaraq*, which is used in vs. 16 denoted a more powerful action, like casting away, throwing out. *Nazah* is a gentle form of application.

It seems a strange paradox that Aaron was dressed in the richest outfit this world could produce in order to give him dignity and glory, and then he must spoil these garments by sprinkling them with a mixture of blood and oil. As with all paradoxes in the Bible, there is, also in this one, a deep lesson to be learned. The greatest paradox of all is that the Lord of glory was nailed on a cross. There is no denying that Aaron’s garments made him the best dressed man in the world. It is also clear that the mixture of blood and oil ruined his clothes. And yet, this is the essence of his ordination. There are garments of glory, there is the blood which symbolizes the shame of sin and death, and there is the oil, which stands for the Holy Spirit. This combination of glory, shame, and power form the elements of our service to God. A great paradox indeed!

In *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* we read the following about the staining of the garments: “We reckon that the blood and oil sprinkled upon garments spot and stain them; yet the holy oil, and the blood of the sacrifice, sprinkled upon their garments, must be looked upon as the greatest adorning imaginable to them, for they signified the blood of Christ, and the graces of the Spirit, which constitute and complete the beauty of holiness, and recommend us to God; we read of robes made white with the blood of the Lamb.”

Certain parts of the animal, all the fat, the kidneys and the right thigh, together with samples of the grain offering are waved before the Lord and then burned upon the altar. The KJV uses the word shoulder for thigh. The Hebrew word is *showq*, which can mean either hip, leg, shoulder, or thigh.

After the part of the ordination sacrifice which belonged to the Lord was burned upon the altar, Moses was given part of the breast. The other parts of the animal were for Aaron and his sons. It seems strange to us that vs. 28 says about this part of the ordination sacrifice that “this is always to be the regular share from the Israelites for Aaron and his sons. It is the contribution the Israelites are to make to the LORD from their fellowship offerings.” After all, the ordination of the priests was a unique occasion that happened only once in a life time. *The Pulpit Commentary* remarks here: “A short digression is here made, from this particular offering, to all future offerings for consecration. For the future both the breast and the right shoulder are to belong to the priests. The shoulder, moreover, is the be ‘heaved,’ and only the breast

⁶⁷⁵ Rom. 6:13

⁶⁷⁶ Phil. 2:8

‘waved;’ ‘heaving’ being a single lifting up of the offering towards heaven, while ‘waving’ was a repeated movement in a horizontal direction. Wave and heave offerings are always connected with the portions of the priest, or with things dedicated to God’s service.”

The mention of Aaron’s priestly garments which will be inherited by his son, contains a poignant reference to his mortality. Part of the sacrifice may be Aaron’s share “for ever,” as the KJV puts it, but he will leave his garments behind when he dies. In these verses, eternity and time are placed side by side. This is another paradox of the priesthood. There is an eternal aspect in the right to parts of the sacrifice. It is obvious that Aaron and his children would not eat meat in Heaven, at least not in the literal sense of the word. But they will be sustained by the sacrifice throughout eternity. Their garments, however, will be exchanged for something more glorious than anything that can be found on earth. On earth the priestly garments gave honor and dignity to the man. In Heaven the inner glory of man will give a hue of glory to the garments. We get a glimpse of the glory of the heavenly outfit in Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain. Mark tells us: “After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”⁶⁷⁷

But there is also the negative aspect of death. The writer to the Hebrews touches upon this when he says: “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office.”⁶⁷⁸ Aaron would not need his high priestly clothes in Heaven anymore, because the One, whom he portrayed while serving on earth, will be there and will carry out the office. Again from Hebrews, “But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.”⁶⁷⁹

The consecration was to last seven days, one whole week. A period of seven days in the Bible usually stands for a principle that is valid for a life time. The celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for instance, took a whole week to symbolize the fact that people who are redeemed by the power of God ought to live a life in which sin has no place. So it is with the ordination to the priesthood. Aaron and his sons were dedicated to the Lord for life. And since we have been made priests by the blood of Christ, we also are priests for life. John captures the essence of our salvation in the first song of praise in the book of Revelation, when he says: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”⁶⁸⁰

Another parallel between the seven day long consecration to the priesthood and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is in the daily eating of the elements. The unleavened bread was eaten every day for seven days, that is, for a lifetime. The meat of the ordination sacrifice was to be eaten every day. Some freewill offerings that were brought in connection with a vow could be eaten on the day after the sacrifice had been brought, but all other kinds of fellowship offerings had to be eaten on the same day. Avoidance of sin, as symbolized in the eating of unleavened bread and consecration to the Lord’s service, is to be a daily practice. Some things in the spiritual life are done once for all. We are converted once and born again once. But fellowship with God and service for Him have to be renewed daily.

The ordination ritual did not only set apart Aaron and his sons, it also consecrated the altar. We have previously pondered the spiritual implications of this part of the consecration. The blood of Jesus transformed the cross from a place of curse and shame to a symbol of God’s love. Vs. 37 tells us that, not only will the altar be most holy because of the blood that touched it, but “whatever touches it will be holy.”

This means a complete reversal of the law of corruption that rules the world. The prophet Haggai, speaking about the law of corruption, brings out what is considered normal, with his question to the priests of his time: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Ask the priests what the law says: If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’ The priests answered, ‘No.’ Then Haggai said, ‘If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?’ ‘Yes,’ the priests replied, ‘it becomes defiled.’”⁶⁸¹

The sanctifying power of the altar in this chapter is not just an exception to the rule, it is the victory over the rule of corruption. It means that the effect of the substitutionary death of one of God’s

⁶⁷⁷ Mark 9:2,3

⁶⁷⁸ Heb. 7:23

⁶⁷⁹ Heb. 7:24

⁶⁸⁰ Rev. 1:5,6 (KJV)

⁶⁸¹ Hag. 2:11-13

creatures has brought the end to the reign of death. Death and its power of corruption have been vanquished. In the consecration of Aaron and his sons, the consecration of the altar was only an image of things to come. For us, who live after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, it means that death has been swallowed up by life. Whoever touches the cross will be holy!

2. The daily sacrifice ch. 29:38-42a

About the two daily sacrifices *The Adam Clarke Commentary* says: “These two lambs, one in the morning, and the other in the evening, were generally termed the morning and evening daily sacrifices, and were offered from the time of their settlement in the Promised Land to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The use of these sacrifices according to the Jews was this: ‘The morning sacrifice made atonement for the sins committed in the night, and the evening sacrifice expiated the sins committed during the day.’” *Clarke* does not mention the period of Babylonian Captivity during which there was no temple or temple service, nor the suspension of these services during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. Neither did these sacrifices have any connection with sins committed during the night or during the day. They were both burnt offerings which were a pleasing aroma to the Lord. As we have seen above, this sacrifice pictures Christ’s sacrifice of Himself to the Father as a sacrifice of love. There is no reference to sin in it. It is this sacrifice, which is a celebration of divine love, a love unknown on earth, that has to be brought twice daily. It is the sacrifice that expresses the meaning of life, not only of human life, but of all life, even the life of God Himself. Twice a day the priest has to remind this world that God is love, $\alpha\gamma\alpha\pi\eta$, the love God has for the world so that He gave His only Son.

The burnt offering is accompanied by an offering of flour, olive oil, and wine. The quantity is not clearly indicated in the original. Where the NIV mentions “a tenth of an ephah,” the KJV speaks about “a tenth deal.” *The Pulpit Commentary* estimates that it would be about three pounds of flour and one and a half pint of oil and wine each. TLB differs and reads as follows: “With one of them offer three quarts of finely ground flour mixed with 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pints of oil, pressed from olives; also 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pints of wine, as an offering.” About the manner of sacrifice *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “The application of the ‘drink-offerings’ is uncertain. Josephus says (Ant. Jud. iii. 9, § 4) that they were poured out round the brazen altar. But the analogy of the ‘meat offering’ makes it probable that a portion only was thus treated, while the greater part belonged to the priests. In the entire provision by which burnt and peace-offerings were to be necessarily accompanied with meat-offerings and drink-offerings, we can scarcely be wrong in seeing an arrangement made especially for the convenience of the priests.” The problem with the drink-offering is that in Leviticus the serving priests are specifically forbidden to drink wine. “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.”⁶⁸² So, we may assume that Josephus’ report is correct.

The daily sacrifices consisted of a burnt offering and a fellowship offering; the latter consisting of flour, oil and wine. Since none of the burnt offerings were for human consumption, we suppose that this particular fellowship offering was not eaten by the priests either. The burnt sacrifice, as we saw above, depicted the divine feature of the sacrifice; the fellowship offering stood for the human part. When we present ourselves as “living sacrifices” to God, we surrender to Him body, soul, and spirit. This three-fold surrender is represented in the sacrifice of the flour, the oil, and the wine.

3. God dwells among His people ch. 29:42^b-46

It is to these daily sacrifices that God adds the promise of His presence among the people. The verses 42 and 43 are crucial: “For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory.” God’s presence on earth will be experienced at the place where the burnt offering and the fellowship offering meet, where God’s sacrifice of Himself in Jesus Christ meets with our surrender to Him. That is what the cross stands for.

The last verse of this chapter contains a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt and the purpose of it. Freedom from slavery, however wonderful it may be, is not the first and foremost purpose of redemption. God redeems His children so that they will know Him. The essence of eternal life is knowing God. In His prayer for the disciples Jesus says: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”⁶⁸³ And knowing God should be the all consuming passion of every

⁶⁸² Lev. 10:9

⁶⁸³ John 17:3

redeemed soul, as it was Paul's passion. "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."⁶⁸⁴

CHAPTER THIRTY

This chapter can be divided in five parts:

1. **The making of the altar of incense** vs. 1-10
2. **The census of the people** vs. 11-16
3. **The making of the bronze washbasin** vs. 30:17-21
4. **The preparation of the anointing oil** vs. 30:22-33
5. **The preparation of incense** vs. 30:34-38

1. The making of the altar of incense vs. 1-10

The altar of incense was the second altar used in the tabernacle and later in Solomon's temple. Its place was before the veil, and it was exclusively used to burn incense. It was one cubit square and two cubits high. TLB gives the measurements as eighteen inches square and three feet high.

Matthew Henry's Commentary says: "It does not appear that there was any grate to this altar for the ashes to fall into, that they might be taken away; but, when they burnt incense, a golden censer was brought with coals in it, and placed upon the altar, and in that censer the incense was burnt, and with it all the coals were taken away, so that no coals nor ashes fell upon the altar." The fact that no grate was mentioned is no indication that there was none. A censer is used during the ceremony of the Day of Atonement,⁶⁸⁵ but there is no indication that it was placed on this altar for daily use.

In the book of Revelation, John gives us a description of the real golden altar in heaven of which this one was the copy; this helps us to understand its use and significance. We read: "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake."⁶⁸⁶

The altar is the place of worship and intercession before the throne of God. More than any other piece of furniture in the Holy Place, the altar indicates a direct relationship with the throne of God. In verse 6 God says, specifically: "Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony-- before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony-- where I will meet with you." This direct connection is emphasized by the writer to the Hebrews. In the eighth chapter he says: "Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant."⁶⁸⁷ This does not mean that the altar stood behind the veil, but that it belonged there, because it was connected to the ark and the atonement cover.

As most of the other furniture in the Sanctuary, this altar is made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. Here too, wood represents the human factor and gold the divine glory. The combination of these two elements gives us a beautiful picture of what prayer is.

Human speech is a miraculous phenomenon. The fact that human beings can utter sounds that make sense is one of the great mysteries of creation; the fact that human speech can become prayer is an even greater miracle. In the first instance, God adds meaning to sound so that it becomes speech; in the second case, God adds His glory to speech so it becomes prayer. The angel in the scene of Revelation which was quoted above mixes prayer with incense, and so it rises before the throne of God.

As sinful human beings, who wear masks before each other to cover our vulnerability, we communicate through speech. Sometimes this communication is intense and beautiful; in many cases speech is nothing more than talk, small and vulgar. Even in our present imperfect condition, the veil is lifted in prayer and the baring of our souls before God becomes a deep and meaningful communication

⁶⁸⁴ Phil. 3:10-11

⁶⁸⁵ See Lev. 16:12

⁶⁸⁶ Rev. 8:3-5

⁶⁸⁷ Heb. 9:3,4

which makes us long for the time when we will see Him face to face. All this is included in the cloud of sweet perfume that rises before the Lord from this altar.

But the altar was off bounds for the ordinary person. Only the priest who served in the temple could approach the Lord at the golden altar of incense. In the present dispensation we have a privilege that goes far beyond anything Aaron and his sons could ever do. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."⁶⁸⁸ The golden altar of incense is a reminder to us that we have at our disposal a "sweet hour of prayer" of which we should avail ourselves at least twice a day. If prayer on earth can turn into sweet hours, what will heaven be like?

The altar of incense was the most movable piece of furniture in the whole tabernacle. It was small and it could be carried with two poles passed through two rings only. This detail seems to suggest that prayer is not bound to one specific place. Jesus emphasizes this in His talk with the Samaritan woman: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."⁶⁸⁹

God said to Moses: "Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony-- before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony-- where I will meet with you." Prayer is based on the atonement. As we have seen before, the atonement cover is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word *hilasterion*, which is translated as "sacrifice of atonement"⁶⁹⁰ by the NIV and as "propitiation" by the KJV is the translation of the Hebrew word *hakaporet*, which the KJV translates with "mercy seat." Fellowship in prayer with God the Father is only possible through the atonement in Jesus Christ. We pray to the Father in the Name of Jesus.

Adam Clarke gives an interesting comment on the place of the altar "before the mercy seat," which would also explain the puzzling statement in Hebrews 9:3,4. We quote: "*Before the mercy seat that is over the testimony.* These words in the original are supposed to be a repetition, by mistake, of the preceding clause; the word *happarochoeth*, the 'veil,' being corrupted by interchanging two letters in *haccapporeth*, the 'mercy seat'; and this, as Dr. Kennicott observes, places the altar of incense before the mercy seat, and consequently in the holy of holies! Now this could not be, as the altar of incense was attended every day, and the holy of holies entered only once in the year. The five words which appear to be a repetition are wanting in twenty-six of Kennicott's and Rossi's MMS., and in the Samaritan. The verse reads better without them and is more consistent with the rest of the account." *The Pulpit Commentary* adds to this: "It might have been doubtful from what is said here, which side of the veil the altar was to be placed. The doubt is precluded by the narrative of what Moses actually did in ch. xl. 21-29, which makes it clear that the altar was placed with the golden candlestick and the table of shew-bread, outside the veil, in the 'holy place, and not with the 'holy of holies.' "

The composition of the fragrant incense, which Aaron is to burn on this altar is given to us at the end of this chapter in vs. 34-38. Even this altar, where the sacrifices are brought which are a sweet aroma to the Lord, which symbolize intimate and precious fellowship with God, is subject to pollution by human sin. Every year, on the Day of Atonement, the altar had to be cleansed by the blood of the sacrifice of atonement. The blood that was applied to the throne of God also cleansed the place of prayer.

2. The census of the people vs. 11-16

It seems strange to find the commandment to take a census of the people among the list of furniture of the tabernacle. We find human souls between the golden altar of incense and the bronze wash basin. The superficial connection between this commandment and the surrounding ones seems to be that money was to be collected for the expenses of the building of the tabernacle and the carrying out of the services. There was, however, the opportunity for a freewill offering, as we read in ch. 25:2-7. The tax levied in these verses could hardly compare to what came in as voluntary gifts. And in ch. 36:3-7 we read that the response of the people to the appeal for a freewill offering was so overwhelming that an order had to be issued to stop, because more came in than was needed.

⁶⁸⁸ Heb. 10:19-22

⁶⁸⁹ John 4:23,24

⁶⁹⁰ Rom. 3:25

The issue seems to be more the soul of the individual than the needs of the tabernacle. It is true that the money is to be used for the service of the tabernacle, as vs. 16 indicates, but that part of the matters seems to be incidental; it is not the main and only purpose of the commandment. The payment is called a ransom and the price to be paid is, obviously, a symbolic one: half a shekel. TLB renders this with "half a dollar." It is impossible to determine in our time, how much that would be. Evidently, it was not much, since even a poor man could afford to pay it. Jesus rhetorical question: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"⁶⁹¹ implies that one soul is worth more than all the riches of the whole world and that ransom payment is out of the question.

The census was limited to males of twenty years old and above. So the purpose of the census was not to determine the size of the nation as a whole; women and children were excluded. When this census was carried out, as described in Numbers, we understand that the object of the count was enlistment in the army. We read: "All the men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army were listed by name, one by one, according to the records of their clans and families."⁶⁹² So there is a connection between census and service. A man was counted before the Lord when he served Him. God loves every one of His creatures, but we only count before Him, when we serve Him, and there is a connection between our service and our ransom. God wants it to be clear that we cannot pay him back for our redemption by serving him.

To pay half a shekel, or say "half a dollar" for a soul that is worth more than all the riches of the world, would amount to mockery. Yet there is no better impetus for service than the realization of our salvation. It is this realization that made the apostle Paul cry out: "When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"⁶⁹³ This gives depth to this commandment of the census. It is not our efforts and service before the Lord that pay the price for our redemption, but the price of our redemption that was paid, challenges us to live for Him and to die for Him; and, strangely enough, what we do for Him is taken into account. This is, probably, what is meant by the words, "it will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD."

Another striking truth that is brought out in the law concerning the census is the equalizing effect it has upon people. "The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less." The distinction that is made on earth between rich and poor is not valid before the Lord. We are all poor in His sight. Or, rather, all the rich are poor before Him and all the poor are rich. The book of Proverbs tells us: "Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all."⁶⁹⁴

There still remains the question as to why this law about the census is inserted here, between the commandment about the golden altar for burning incense and the description of the bronze washbasin. When we turn again to Numbers, we find that the Levites were not to be included in the census. We read: "The LORD had said to Moses: 'You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites. Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony-- over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death. The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony."⁶⁹⁵ The reference to the census at this point in the story emphasizes the role and importance of the Levites.

The ransom to be paid in the census is an image of the real ransom paid by our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁶⁹⁶ And Jesus was born during the great census ordered by Caesar Augustus. Luke says: "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire [Roman] world."⁶⁹⁷ Augustus, obviously, had no idea as to who really paid for this census.

⁶⁹¹ Mark 8:36, 37

⁶⁹² Num. 1:20

⁶⁹³ I Cor. 9:16

⁶⁹⁴ Prov. 22:2

⁶⁹⁵ Num. 1:48-53

⁶⁹⁶ Matt. 20:28

⁶⁹⁷ Luke 2:1

The verses 17-21 deal with the bronze washbasin. No measurements are given for this piece of furniture. An interesting piece of information is given in ch. 38, where we read: "They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting."⁶⁹⁸ It isn't until the building of the temple under Solomon when most of the furniture was made new, that we are given measurements of the basin, which, at that point is called "the Sea." We read: "He made the Sea of cast metal, circular in shape, measuring ten cubits from rim to rim and five cubits high. It took a line of thirty cubits to measure around it. Below the rim, gourds encircled it-- ten to a cubit. The gourds were cast in two rows in one piece with the Sea. The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. The Sea rested on top of them, and their hindquarters were toward the center. It was a handbreadth in thickness, and its rim was like the rim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It held two thousand baths."⁶⁹⁹ TLB gives us the measurements in modern terms as 7 1/2 feet high and 15 feet from brim to brim; 45 feet in circumference ... and it had a twelve thousand gallon capacity." But it is doubtful that the basin that was made in the desert would be of the same size and have the same capacity. Water was a luxury item in the desert.

The water was to be used by the priests to wash their hands and feet when they entered the tabernacle for service. It was a ritual washing which symbolized moral purity. The atonement for their sin had been made by the blood of the sacrificial animal. The water cleansed them from the pollution which is part of living in a fallen world. That this purification was considered important is clear from the fact that God uses twice the phrase, "so that they will not die." The connection between the sacrifice of atonement and the purification by water is confirmed by Jesus in the brief dialogue in John 13. We read that Jesus said to Peter: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." When Peter reacted to this by wanting a complete bath, Jesus answered: "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean."⁷⁰⁰ This rite of purification is an important part in our fellowship with God. Without it, we would have "no part" with Him.

In the verbal exchange between Jesus and Peter in John, Jesus explains His washing of the disciples' feet as the setting of an example: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."⁷⁰¹ But we should not lose sight of the fact that Jesus was the original foot-washer. He is the One whose blood is shed on the altar, He is also the source of our purification for service. And, although the death factor does not come out as clearly in the image of the basin as in the altar, His getting up from the meal, taking off his outer clothing, and wrapping a towel around his waist, his pouring water into a basin and the washing of his disciples' feet, and then drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him, was an act of dying to self. Jesus demonstrated how service should be performed. The willingness to serve involves the willingness to die. It is all included in what the author of the Hebrew epistle says: "Here I am, I have come to do your will And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Our purification is brought about by the word of Christ to us. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you."⁷⁰² The washing which the priests did when they entered the Holy Place was a symbol of the perfect work of Christ on our behalf, making us fit for service by His blood and His Word. And, as we have seen from His words to the disciples, we are to be imitators of Christ. That is what the washbasin stands for.

4. The preparation of the anointing oil vs. 22-32

TLB gives the following paraphrase of the quantities used for the preparation of the anointing oil: "Then the Lord told Moses to collect the choicest of spices-- eighteen pounds of pure myrrh; half as much of cinnamon and of sweet cane; the same amount of cassia as of myrrh; and 1 1/2 gallons of olive oil." It is hard to confirm the accuracy of this paraphrase as far as the equivalent of 500 shekels to eighteen pounds is concerned, but it does give us an idea as to what quantity is intended.

Most of the ingredients were not locally available. Apart from the myrrh, everything was imported from a far distant source. The cinnamon may have come from India, or even from the Far East. This presupposes that a vast trade among countries and, maybe even continents, existed already at that time. God

⁶⁹⁸ Ex. 38:8

⁶⁹⁹ I Kings 7:23-26

⁷⁰⁰ John 13:8-10

⁷⁰¹ John 13:15

⁷⁰² John 15:3 (KJV)

does not use only local ingredients since His field is the world from which He harvests His perfumes. We could say that there is a missionary flavor conveyed by the anointing oil.

The preparation of these ingredients was delegated to the experts. So the perfume that was made, more than fifteen liters, (the fluid alone was already approximately 6 liters, plus more than 50 pounds of dry material) was a product of the highest quality and should be considered as extremely costly. If, in modern times, one pays a high price for a small bottle of good perfume, imagine what a quantity of six or seven gallons would be worth. We cannot, however, compare this anointing oil with anything that is on the market in our era. As we shall see, it was not to be used as regular perfume; its use was exclusively for the service in the tabernacle.

First of all, the tabernacle itself with all its furniture and utensils were to be anointed with this perfume. This unction transformed them from material things made by human hands into symbols of the divine Presence, so that they would become holy and everybody and everything that touched any part of the tabernacle would become holy.

We do not define holiness in these material terms in our present day; for us, holiness is a moral quality. The original meaning of the word holy, however, is “set apart” or “consecrated.” The presence of the Lord makes holy, not only people and their character, but also innate things. When God appeared to Moses for the first time, we read that God said to Moses: “Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”⁷⁰³ When inanimate objects are touched by God’s holiness they become like live-wire; they kill anyone who is not properly insulated. Aaron’s sons died this way and so did Uzzah.⁷⁰⁴

The whole concept of holiness comes to us in picture form. The manifestation of holiness was by means of unction and the presence of the Lord was visible in fire and smoke. Protection against the danger of touching holy things consisted in observing the proper ritual of sacrifice and the use of blood and water. This does not mean that holiness had no moral connotations, but it indicates that the moral implications of holiness are the result of belonging to God. The emphasis here is that the real meaning of the word holy is to be set apart. What God sets apart for His use He also cleanses. And that is where our concept of moral purity comes in. What the Lord says at a later date about the Sabbath can be applied to the ritual that is prescribed here also: “So you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.”⁷⁰⁵

The Israelites were specifically forbidden to make any perfume with the same recipe and this anointing oil was not to be used for any other purpose than for use in the consecration of the tabernacle and the priests. The KJV is more suggestive of any spiritual connotation in its archaic use of words. We read: “Upon man’s flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you.”⁷⁰⁶

The oil symbolized the Holy Spirit and the human body represented the natural man in his unregenerate condition. The word “flesh,” as Paul uses it in the New Testament, gives us a clearer picture of the spiritual dimensions of this commandment. The apostle says in Romans: “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”⁷⁰⁷ That which the NIV calls “the sinful nature” is rendered by the KJV as “the flesh.”

The Greek word is *sarx*, which *Strong’s Definitions* defines as: “the body (as opposed to the soul [or spirit], or as the symbol of what is external, or as the means of kindred), or (by implication) human nature (with its frailties [physically or morally] and passions), or (specifically) a human being (as such): KJV—carnal, or carnally minded.”

From *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* we quote: “In an even stronger sense, flesh is the earthly part of man, representing lusts and desires <Eph. 2:3>. The flesh is contrary to the Spirit <Gal. 5:17>. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God <Rom. 8:8>. <Galatians 5:19-23> contrasts works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.” The point of all this is that our flesh or our sinful nature is unacceptable to God. He does not give His Spirit to that which is not consecrated to Him. The human

⁷⁰³ Ex. 3:5

⁷⁰⁴ See Lev. 10:1,2; II Sam. 6:6,7

⁷⁰⁵ Ex. 31:13

⁷⁰⁶ Ex. 30:32 (KJV)

⁷⁰⁷ Rom. 8:5-8

tendency is to compromise and to try to make God compromise. We would like to hang on to our sinful condition and, at the same time, receive the benefits of the Holy Spirit. Everybody wants to go to heaven, but not everybody wants to repent of his sins and ask for forgiveness and be regenerated by the Holy Spirit in order to get there. We don't mind the anointing oil, but we want to pour it on ourselves as we are.

The anointing of the priests is an image of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them as a preparation for service. This is not just meant to be a ritual without life changing consequences. We do not read that Aaron or his sons experienced a change of heart as a result of this unction. When Samuel anoints Saul to be the first king of Israel he foretells him: "The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person."⁷⁰⁸ We do not see such a change in these priests. As a matter of fact, shortly afterwards two of these men who were anointed will die because of the sacrilege they committed.⁷⁰⁹ Yet the writer of Psalm 133 interprets Aaron's unction as a symbol of the fruit of the Spirit, such as those the Apostle Paul would list them in his Epistle to the Galatians: love, joy, peace, etc.⁷¹⁰ He says: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes."⁷¹¹ The anointing of the priest should have brought about love, joy and peace, but, evidently, it did not.

5. The preparation of incense vs. 34-38

The four components used in the preparation of this incense were stacte, onycha, galbanum and frank-incense. It is not clear in every instance what the substance is. According to *Strong's Definitions*, the Hebrew word for gum resin is *nataph* which, literally means "a drop" and which the KJV renders as "stacte." *Unger's Bible Dictionary* considers stacte to be myrrh. Onycha is the rendering of the Hebrew word *shecheleth*, which may be a substance that would be obtained from the crushing of the shell of an aromatic mussel. Galbanum is the transliteration of the Hebrew *chelbenah* which *Strong's Definitions* defines as "an odorous gum." Pure frankincense is the rendering of the Hebrew *lebownah*. The preparation of this incense was also referred to the experts, so it would be a product of the highest quality. The NIV says that the incense had to be salted. This is the translation of the Hebrew word *malach*, which literally means to pulverize or to rub (with salt).

As with the anointing oil, the incense also contained substances that would not have been locally available; they were probably imported by traders. This gives the incense the same international flavor as the oil. Whether the incense was burned upon the altar or just put before the veil in front of the ark, is not clear. I suppose we are dealing with the material that was burned on the altar.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

This chapter can be divided in two parts:

1. The appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab vs. 1-11
2. The Sabbath command vs. 12-18

1. The appointment of Bezalel and Oholiab vs. 1-11

The construction of the tabernacle and its furniture was a huge enterprise, too much for one or two persons to perform. So we may suppose that Bezalel and Oholiab did not do all the work themselves, but were assisted by other people, who are called "all the craftsmen" in vs. 6. Actually, there must have been a whole team of workers: Moses, who was the only one who had seen the original, Bezalel and Oholiab, who were gifted artists and assistants who helped in carrying out the assignment. If the two men were the only craftsmen doing the work, they would have had to have gifts so versatile that it cannot be imagined; they would have to be master goldsmiths, master tailors, master perfume makers.

⁷⁰⁸ I Sam. 10:6

⁷⁰⁹ See Lev. 10:1

⁷¹⁰ See Gal. 5:25

⁷¹¹ Ps. 133:1,2

First of all, Moses had to impart a vision to the two artists. We know from Moses' own confession that he was not a good communicator. When God called him, we read: "Moses said to the LORD, 'O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.'" ⁷¹² Yet Moses had to describe in detail to Bezalel what he had seen. Words would never have been sufficient to convey the message. Bezalel would have to see in Moses what the glory of God, with whom he had spent forty days and nights on the top of the mountain, had done to and in him. It was Bezalel's task, not only to make a copy of the items the Moses described, but to add that indefinable touch of God's glory that he saw in Moses. To be able to do this, it takes more than being an artist, it takes the Spirit of God.

This brings us to the subject of inspiration. Some people are blessed with natural artistic gifts. Some people use their gifts to the glory of God, many use them only to express themselves. Rembrandt painted numerous scenes from the Bible. His "Head of Christ" is one of the most beautiful paintings in the world. Johan Sebastian Bach and Anton Bruckner wrote above some of their compositions: "Soli Deo Gloria."⁷¹³ Some people have tried to detach art from any connection with God or with human values and they came up with the slogan: "Art for Art's Sake."⁷¹⁴ Ultimately, the significance of a work of art will depend on its relationship to God. It has to be admitted that there is something divine in all expressions of beauty. After all, it is God who gives gifts to the artists. Some artists are more religious than they would want to admit. But true artists will testify and affirm that they handle things of eternal value that go far beyond self-expression.

There is no doubt about what kind of artists Bezalel and Oholiab were. God had not only given them natural artistic gifts, but they were anointed by His Spirit for the work they had to do. Theirs was inspiration in the purest sense of the word.

We tend to feel some kind of jealousy toward people who had the privilege to put abstract glory into concrete form. The Old Testament worship involved all the five senses of man. With his eyes he beheld the tabernacle, where the glory of God manifested itself in a column of smoke and fire; with his ears he could hear the music and sometimes even the voice of God: he could smell the incense; taste the sacrifice; and touch the reality of it all. We tend to find ourselves poorer because we lack this kind of stimuli. The apostle Paul wakes us up from this dream when he says: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."⁷¹⁵ And we realize that there is nothing left of this Old Testament glory that was tangible and visible, but what we possess is eternal. Again, Paul says: "For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."⁷¹⁶

Even John's exciting words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete,"⁷¹⁷ are balanced with Jesus' words to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have

⁷¹² Ex. 4:10

⁷¹³ Only to God be the glory.

⁷¹⁴ "l'Art pour l'art." (French)

⁷¹⁵ II Cor. 3:7-18

⁷¹⁶ II Cor. 4:18

⁷¹⁷ I John 1:1-4

believed.”⁷¹⁸ So, in spite of our jealousy, we, who have not seen are more blessed than those who have seen and touched and tasted.

It is no coincidence, of course, that Bezalel was from the tribe of Judah, since he was an image of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews Moses is called a faithful servant in God’s house, but Jesus surpasses him as the builder of the house and the Son of the house. We read: “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house.”⁷¹⁹ In that sense, by way of image, Bezalel surpassed Moses in that Moses only transmitted the blueprint, but Bezalel constructed the house and created the furniture.

God gave him a great deal of liberty in expressing himself in the working out of the project. For the making of the ark, for instance, only the kind of material to be used is specified and the measurements are given. The only detail we read about is that the atonement cover had to have the image of two cherubs. It was up to Bezalel, not just to copy what he had not seen, but to make something that approached a heavenly reality. Is that not the essence of art?

Bezalel also portrays the Lord Jesus in that both are from the tribe of Judah; that relationship puts them outside and above the priestly office in the earthly tabernacle. They are the builders, and in that sense, they are above all that is done in the tabernacle. We turn again to Hebrews, where we read: “He [Jesus] of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah.”⁷²⁰

Oholiab was from the tribe of Dan, which later would become part of the Northern Kingdom after the division of Israel into two parts. His appointment seems to reinforce the sense of unity God wanted His people to have. Oholiab’s specialty seems to have been the textile part of the project. We read later about him that he was “a craftsman and designer, and an embroiderer in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen.”⁷²¹

2. The Sabbath command vs. 12-18

It seems strange to find this Sabbath command repeated at this point in the narrative. Some commentators connect it to the giving of the two Stone Tables on which the Sabbath command was the pivotal one, the one in the center. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes that the verses do not contain a mere repetition of the command already given, but that two new points are added: “1. That the Sabbath was to be a sign between God and Israel, a ‘distinguishing badge,’ a ‘sacramental bond’; and 2. That its desecration was to be punished with death.”

It is true that the Sabbath was a “distinguishing badge” in that it was a unique observance by the people of Israel alone. Circumcision was practiced by other people, but only Israel set aside one day each week to abstain from labor. The Sabbath command is the only one of the Ten Commandments that reaches back to before the fall of man into sin. Vs. 17 says: “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

The Hebrew word translated “rested” is *shabath*. *Strongs Definitions* definition of the word is: “to repose, i.e. desist from exertion.” The KJV usually renders it with: “to rest,” “to cease,” or even “to celebrate,” as in Leviticus. Speaking, of all things, about the Day of Atonement, the verse says: “It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.”⁷²² For reason unknown to me, the NIV omits the last clause of this verse, that most other translations add: “and was refreshed.” The RSV, for instance, reads: “It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.” The Hebrew word translated “refreshed” is *naphash*, which literally means “to breathe; passively, to be breathed upon, i.e. (figuratively) refreshed (as if by a current of air).” (Quote from *Strongs Definitions Definitions*.) The main idea for observing the Sabbath is the full enjoyment of creation.

⁷¹⁸ John 20:29

⁷¹⁹ Heb. 3:3, 5-6

⁷²⁰ Heb. 7:13-14

⁷²¹ Ex. 38:23

⁷²² Lev. 23:32 (KJV)

This seems to conflict with the punishment for breaking the Sabbath, which was capital punishment. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments here: “The penalty of death for breaking the sabbath seems to moderns over-severe; but the erection of sabbath-observance into *the* special sacramental sign that Israel was in covenant with God made non-observance an offense of the gravest character. The man who broke the sabbath destroyed, so far as in him lay, the entire covenant between God and his people - not only broke it, but annulled it, and threw Israel out of the covenant. Hence, when the sin was committed, no hesitation was felt in carrying out the law (See Numb. xv. 32-36).”

The incident from Numbers referred to, reads: “While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.’ So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.”⁷²³

Such a punishment, as we said above, does not only seem to conflict with the concept of celebration, but it does make the impression upon modern man of an over-reaction on the part of God to human frailty. We should understand, however, that the intent of the Sabbath-observance was much more modern than seems on the surface. The Sabbath rest linked man with God’s enjoyment of creation. God wants us to enjoy life, much more even than the most hardened existentialist could preach it. A man who refuses to celebrate the fact that he is alive is, in fact, already dead. His execution is merely a confirmation of his spiritual condition.

God wants us to be witnesses to the marvel of His creation. We are living testimonies of the fact that God is our Creator. That is what the Sabbath stands for in the first place. God does not want the fact that sin came in and separated us from fellowship with God to interfere with the basic enjoyment of our existence. Yet, it is sin that created the paradox which changes the Sabbath from a day of enjoyment to a day of death for people who are separated from God. God does not want His children to accept this fact. In keeping the Sabbath, we are fighting for our life and for the right to enjoy it. This is meant by the writer to the Hebrews when he says: “For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”⁷²⁴

As we said above, the Sabbath was the pivotal law in the Ten Commandments. As the fourth of the ten it connects the laws that govern our relationship with God with the laws that deal with our inter-human relationships. It is obvious that the Ten Commandments are the ground rules for man’s moral behavior. They are fundamentally different from the ceremonial laws, which deal with his sinful condition and tell him what to do about it. The Ten Commandments show what man ought to be; the ceremonial laws tell us that he isn’t what he ought to be. They indicate the way to restore the fellowship with God that was broken by sin.

The question remains whether the Sabbath command is a ceremonial law or a moral law. In breaking the first three commandments we sin against God alone. In breaking the fifth to the tenth commandments we sin against our fellow men; or rather, as the Prodigal son put it: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.”⁷²⁵ In breaking the fourth commandment, however, we sin against ourselves. We refuse to recognize that we are part of God’s creation and that we are alive and love life. Is this a moral trespass? Maybe we should call it the ultimate trespass.

We know from the Gospels that Jesus’ attitude toward the Sabbath differed from the way the people of His time interpreted the Sabbath command. In the eyes of the Jewish leaders, Jesus broke the Sabbath. Jesus’ answer to them was: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”⁷²⁶ Jesus’ interpretation of the Sabbath reveals that there is more involved than abstaining from certain kinds of work on the seventh day of every week. Jesus even goes beyond the reference to the Father’s rest at the completion of creation. The Sabbath command in the Old Testament reaches back to before the fall of man into sin. Jesus sees the Sabbath as reaching forward to the rest that awaits us when sin and death will be defeated. The work of the Father He refers to is the work of restoration.

The early church recognized this aspect of the Sabbath, and consequently the first day of the week, the day of Christ’s resurrection, began to overshadow the observance of the Old Testament shadow. This

⁷²³ Num. 15:32-36

⁷²⁴ Heb. 4:10

⁷²⁵ Luke 15:21

⁷²⁶ John 5:17

came about spontaneously. There is no record in the New Testament of any law stipulating this. The first day of the week is not a New Testament Sabbath. We do not celebrate the Sabbath; we celebrate the day after the Sabbath. Of the Ten Commandments that were on the two stone tablets, all of them are repeated in the New Testament, except the fourth. In observing the Sabbath, man celebrated the fact that God had made him a living creature. In our celebration of the eighth day, we celebrate the fact that we were dead and are now alive for ever and ever.⁷²⁷

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The Golden Calf Chapter 32:1-35

The events described here are not limited to this chapter; they spill over into the next two. The chapters 32-34 form, in a sense, the lowest and the highest points of the whole book of Exodus. In the making of the Golden Calf, Israel did the basest thing they could have done; they showed their real character as “a stiff-necked people,” as the Lord calls them. But their most horrible sin becomes a reason for the greatest revelation of God’s glory. Moses’ request, “Now show me your glory”⁷²⁸ is one of the bravest and most awesome things a man ever asked God. How God must have been delighted! These chapters are an illustration of Paul’s words: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”⁷²⁹

In this chapter we read, in the first place, about Israel’s crime of idolatry and then God’s warning to Moses and finally Moses’ reaction to the people’s sin.

We should consider the question of why the people committed this sin and then determine what Aaron’s responsibility was in the incident. Then there is the role of the Levites, and, finally, Moses’ intercession.

The first apparent reason for the making of the Golden Calf was frustration on the side of the people. For them the Exodus had been the doing of Moses, and now that Moses had disappeared, they felt forsaken. In spite of the fact that God had revealed Himself directly to the whole nation of Israel, they had never developed a personal relationship with God. Their knowledge of God and their experience of Him was limited to the person of Moses. When Moses disappeared, their connection with God was broken off.

But we get the impression that Moses’ disappearance was more an excuse than a reason for the making of the idol. The people had lived in Egypt for almost four centuries. All these people had been born and reared in Egypt. They had been saturated with the idolatry of Egypt, of which the worship of calves had been an important part. In spite of their heritage, which included God’s revelation of Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they felt more at home with the Egyptian idolatry than with their monotheistic religion.

From Ezekiel chapter 20 we understand that the Israelites had been practicing idolatry in Egypt and had taken their idols with them when they left the country. We read: “And I [God] said to them, ‘Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’ But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in Egypt.”⁷³⁰ So the natural thing for the Israelites to do, when Moses went out of the picture, was to revert to the worship of the image of an idol.

The Israelites inherited from the Egyptians the tendency to erase the differences between opposite religions. We quote from an interesting comment by *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “One of the most confusing aspects of Egyptian religion was its ability to accept the process of syncretism. Through this process one god would take on the characteristics of another god and thus eliminate its distinctiveness.” That is how the Israelites could say about the Golden Calf: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” It strikes us as strange that the people say: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt,” when they see the image of one single idol. The fact that they use the plural to give expression to object of their religion would indicate a tendency to syncretism.

The Israelites knew very well, however, how they had been delivered from Egypt. The death of all the first-born sons of Egypt during the Passover night was still fresh in their memory. They knew that the twelfth plague had been the defeat of the Egyptian idols and that they were protected from the plague

⁷²⁷ See Rev. 1:18

⁷²⁸ Ex. 33:18

⁷²⁹ Rom. 5:20

⁷³⁰ Ezek. 20:7,8

because of the blood of the lamb. God had said to Moses: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn-- both men and animals-- and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”⁷³¹ How then, could they identify the Lord with a Golden Calf? In doing so they left the protection of the blood they had enjoyed all the way from Egypt to Mount Sinai. They endangered their lives in withdrawing from the protection of the Lord.

Aaron’s role in the making of the calf seems to have been a strange mixture of wisdom and folly. We read in vs. 25 that “Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.” From this we gather that Aaron had analyzed the situation correctly and had chosen to take a course that would punish the people for their own folly. But from remarks in Deuteronomy, we understand that Aaron sinned in doing so, because Moses says there: “And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too.”⁷³² Aaron must have given in to fear for the mob and acted against his conscience. When he announced: “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD,” he may have made an effort to change the tide, but his words could also be seen as a confirmation of the attitude of the people, who identified their idol with YHWH, who had led them out of Egypt. Evidently, Aaron had brought guilt upon himself because he was afraid of men.

It could also be that, in requesting the people to bring their earrings and jewelry, he expected them to refuse to give up the loot they had taken from Egypt, but if this is what he thought, he was wrong; they gladly sacrificed their ornaments for the making of the idol. And so, while God gave instructions to his brother on top of the mountain regarding his ordination as High Priest, Aaron was busy pouring molten gold in the form of a calf. When we put the two pictures next to each other, what happened on top of the mountain and that what happened at the foot of the mountain, we realize how terrible sin is.

When God gave His instructions to Moses regarding the tabernacle, the service and the priesthood, He knew who Aaron was and what he was doing, yet He chose him as High Priest. There is a mystery in omniscience that is far beyond our understanding. The same mystery faces us when Jesus chose Judas as one of the twelve. God knows who we are and what we are capable of doing in the realm of sin; yet He chooses us and destines us to be taken up in His glory.

It is a detail, but when Aaron speaks about “the gold earrings that your wives, *your sons*⁷³³ and your daughters are wearing,” we see that the fad of men wearing earrings in our time is nothing more than a return of a centuries-old fashion.

Aaron’s suggestion about a festival for the Lord the next day makes the people lose all moral restraint. The RSV’s rendering of the event is that “the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” This is the translation most of the older versions, such as the KJV and ASV give. The NIV is, undoubtedly, more correct in saying: “they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” But TLB captures the mood best with its paraphrase: “they sat down to feast and drink at a wild party, followed by sexual immorality.” They must have had access to alcoholic beverages. There was nothing innocent about their behavior. The enemy was having a heyday. When we read earlier that the people became “a laughingstock to their enemies,” we realize that the enemy may have been a horde of demons. Sexual immorality must have been part of the idol worship in Egypt. We have to conclude that Israel may have left Egypt, but Egypt had not left Israel. The people carried a big load of filth and darkness with them when God redeemed them from their slavery. Inwardly, they remained slaves for centuries to come.

The behavior of the people at the foot of the mountain had its effect upon what happened on top of the mountain. There was, evidently, a direct connection between what went on above and below. Jesus’ words to His disciples indicate that there is a principle that is operative here also. We read: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”⁷³⁴ The immorality of the people brought the audience of Moses with God to an end. God sent Moses down with the obvious intent to bring the “festival” to an end.

It is a strange phenomenon that God makes Himself dependent upon the presence of His children on earth to limit or stop the spread of evil. At the same time God counts on His children to limit the effect of His wrath. We ought to be amazed at what God says to Moses in vs. 10, “Now leave me alone so that my

⁷³¹ Ex. 12:12,13

⁷³² Deut. 9:20

⁷³³ Italics are mine

⁷³⁴ Matt. 16:19

anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them--" as if Moses' presence would prevent God from letting His anger burn! Evidently, such is the case. Just as Lot's presence prevented the angel from destroying Sodom,⁷³⁵ so the presence of Moses would keep God from destroying Israel. And, if I read Scripture correctly, the presence of the church on earth will postpone God's final judgment.

The dialogue between Moses and God poses various problems. There is, obviously, more intended than is said. It would be hard to imagine that the eternal Creator of the universe would change His mind, because one of His creatures reminds Him of His own covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God does not need reminders, but Moses does. We should, therefore, look at this conversation from a different angle. What Moses says to God is, actually, what God wants Moses to understand.

There is the testing little phrase: "your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt." God tempts Moses to believe that he can take credit for what God did Himself through Moses. Many of God's servants find themselves unable to avoid that trap, but Moses does not fall in it. He bounces back at God in vs. 11, where he talks about, "your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand." We could paraphrase Moses' reply as: "You mean to say that *I* performed those miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea?" There may have been moments in Moses' life when he indulged in the illusion that he was a powerful and important man. This attitude was the essence of his sin at Meribah. We read about this in the book of Numbers: "He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' "⁷³⁶ There is a subtle danger for every servant of the Lord to regard the blessings God lets flow through us as emanating from ourselves. We need to pay attention to Jesus' words to keep us straight in our thinking about ourselves. He said: "When you have done everything you were told to do, [you] should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "⁷³⁷

Moses' conversation with God gives us a clear picture of what God wants our fellowship with Him to be. In verbalizing our thoughts in prayer to Him, He actually pours His thoughts into us. In our prayers we come to see the things we pray for in His light. Intercession does not mean that we lay our burdens before the Lord, but that He lays His upon us. God wanted Moses to understand the deep tragedy of a people whom He delivered from an unbearable condition of slavery into the dignity of their freedom, a people whom He sustained supernaturally and who turned their backs on Him in order to side with the enemy who would murder them. Some of God's heartache got through to Moses, because he starts to intercede, but he did not take God's word about the apostasy of Israel seriously until he saw the Golden Calf with his own eyes; then he really became upset.

There seems to be some kind of temptation also in the phrase: "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." Not only does God say that Moses stands between the wrath of God and the people, which gives him a position of extraordinary importance, but God also promises him a key role in history, as the potential patriarch of a new nation. God offered Moses the role that Abraham had played until now. This seems to be another pitfall that Moses manages to evade. Yet, he must have understood what God meant.

God's proposal raises again numerous questions that are hard to answer. We must accept the fact that the Almighty can do as He pleases. But we also believe that God cannot break His own rules and go against His own character. God cannot violate His own holiness. Moses shows deep insight when he answers God's proposal with the words: "O LORD, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" He says in other words: "Lord, you cannot do this, because you bound yourself with a promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. If you break your promise, you won't be God anymore!" There are some things that even the omnipotent God cannot do. He cannot lie and He cannot break a promise. All of creation would fall apart if the Word of God would fail because it is by the Word of God that everything that exists is held together. The author of the Hebrew epistle says about Jesus: "[He is]

⁷³⁵ See Gen. 19:22, where the angel says to Lot: "I cannot do anything until you reach it [Zoar]."

⁷³⁶ Num. 20:10

⁷³⁷ Luke 17:10

upholding the universe by his word of power.”⁷³⁸ The same epistle also says that “it is impossible for God to lie.”⁷³⁹

Moses also brings up the point of God’s testimony to those who do not know Him. He shows the right kind of psychology, if that is the term we may use, when he says to God: “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’?” On several occasions the Israelites themselves accused God that He had brought them out of Egypt so that they would die in the desert. They ascribed to God motives that one would ascribe only to the basest criminal. As it turned out the whole nation of Israel did die in the wilderness with the exception of two men, but this was not the result of God’s evil intent; it was the fruit of their disobedience.

God is love. And yet, God takes enormous risks in permitting evil to go, apparently, unchecked so that people come to doubt the love of God. Many people have asked the question before the gas chambers of Auschwitz, how such a thing could happen if God is love. Elly Wiesel’s God died in a German concentration camp.⁷⁴⁰

In putting the question to God, Moses understood that a God Who is love could not kill His children in cold blood. He may, at that point, not have had a clear understanding about the gravity of Israel’s sin, but he did take it for granted that God’s love would not allow the sinner to die. Actually, he acted much more severely with the Israelites himself, after he had seen the Golden Calf, than God did. Little did he know how God would solve the sin problem by putting man’s sin upon Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. After having seen the Golden Calf and having realized the gravity of Israel’s sin, Moses places himself fully in the gap between God and man, as Jesus would do in a more perfect way centuries later. He says to God in vs. 32: “Please forgive their sin-- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” At this point, the love of God has truly conquered Moses’ heart.

After Moses’ initial intercession God did, what He had intended to do all the time: He relented. Then Moses went down the mountain with the two Stone Tablets in his hands. We are specifically told that God Himself had written the text of the Ten Commandments on the tablets.

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary says about the Ten Commandments: “The Ten Commandments form the heart of the special covenant between God and His people. He told them, ‘Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people... And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ <Ex. 19:5>. These verses also emphasize that their obedience to the Commandments was to be the basis of Israel’s existence as the special people of God.”

Although this is true, it appears that several of the commandments that are found in the Decalogue were common knowledge long before the law was given on Mount Sinai. When the first missionaries entered the interior mountains of Dutch New Guinea, (nowadays Irian Jaya – a province of the Republic of Indonesia), they found Stone Age tribes which were familiar with the laws on the second Tablet: “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” These were all part of their moral code long before any contact with missionaries or with the Western world had been made. The only explanation I can think of is that these laws were common knowledge when the nations were dispersed over the globe after the flood and the construction of the tower of Babel. Noah must have been familiar with them. The fact, however, that parts of the Ten Commandments were not new, does in no way diminish the uniqueness of the Ten Commandments and of the role of the law in God’s covenant with Israel.

It is stated specifically that God Himself had engraved the Ten Commandments on the two tablets of stone. Vs. 16 tells us: “The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.” And earlier in the story we read: “When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.” After Moses broke the first two tablets, the Lord said to him: “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.” And at the end of that session Moses had with God we read: “Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant-- the Ten

⁷³⁸ Heb. 1:3 (RSV)

⁷³⁹ Heb. 6:18

⁷⁴⁰ *Night*, by Elly Wiesel

Commandments.”⁷⁴¹ From this last verse it is not clear who did the writing, but from the connection with the preceding verses we understand that God did it Himself the second time also.

For us who live in the twentieth century, it is hard to grasp the importance of the fact that God chiseled words on a stone tablet. We would refer statements like these to the realm of pagan myths or to an animistic world view. The Jewish rabbis in later centuries must have wrestled with this question also. Stephen quotes the Jewish authorities of his times when he says: “You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”⁷⁴² Evidently, it was hard for the scholars of later times to conceive that God would have done the writing Himself. There is, of course, a trace of anthropomorphism in the statement that “the tablets of stone [were] inscribed by the finger of God.” But the fact remains that Moses went down with two stone tablets in his hands that had writing on them, which he had not done himself. We can spiritualize the statement, or we can refer the concept to the religious fantasy of the people of Israel and thus undermine the doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures, but this does not alter the fact that there were two pieces of stone, that they had not written themselves. And it would be hard to believe that Moses would have carried the necessary tools with him to perform the job on top of the mountain. It is not harder to believe, however, that God would express Himself in writing in stone than that the Word would become flesh and live among us.

Joshua had accompanied Moses up the mountain. We read earlier in the story: “Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God.”⁷⁴³ We are not told, however, what Joshua did those forty days and nights that Moses was with God in the cloud on top of the mountain. It is unlikely that he did not eat and drink, as Moses did during this whole period. Yet, he is there when Moses appears again. He had, evidently, not descended the mountain and come back up again, or he would have known about the making of the Golden Calf. He had not been in the cloud with God either, or he would have heard that God told Moses about the apostasy. He had also not despaired of Moses’ reappearing, as the people at the foot of the mountain had, but he is there when Moses appears again. Faithfulness and spiritual hunger seem to have been the outstanding features of Joshua’s character. Later we read about him: “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.”⁷⁴⁴ He had seen in Moses the example of a man who knew God, and this kindled in him a strong desire to experience the same fellowship with God that Moses knew. This is a great tribute to both Moses and Joshua. People who are really hungry and thirsty for an intimate relationship with God are rare. Moses’ example would have had no effect if Joshua had not possessed a soft and sensitive heart. We see Moses in the Pentateuch as a towering character who rises head and shoulders above everyone else. In a way Joshua was even greater in his unwavering allegiance to God and in his victorious entry into Canaan. Nobody has ever come close to the miracle God performed as an answer to Joshua’s prayer when the sun stood still. We read: “On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: ‘O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.’ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!”⁷⁴⁵ It is amazing that two people can see the same thing and react so differently. Some hearts seem to be naturally open for the Word of God and others are not. The heart of Joshua was like the ground that was prepared to receive the seed that God sowed on it.⁷⁴⁶

When Moses came close enough to the camp to see what was going on, he exploded in anger. We read in vs. 19: “His anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.” He literally broke the law. We could ask the question how ethical it was for Moses to fling the two tablets to the ground and break them. Moses broke the law as the people had broken the law, be it in a different way; but he made himself guilty in a sense. We could say that Moses took the guilt of the people upon himself. We see this as a picture of Jesus, who took upon Himself the guilt of mankind and identified Himself with the sin of man, although He did not sin Himself. God never scolded Moses for

⁷⁴¹ Ex. 31:18; 34:1, 28

⁷⁴² Acts 7:53

⁷⁴³ Ex. 24:13

⁷⁴⁴ Ex. 33:11

⁷⁴⁵ Josh. 10:12-14

⁷⁴⁶ Matt. 13:23

this fit of rage. In ch. 34 God only tells Moses to cut two new tablets of stone and God writes on them the same law as on the first two tablets. Evidently, Moses' anger was the reaction of a righteous man to sin and in that respect it was akin to the wrath of God. Not all anger is sin.

The difference between Moses' reaction to Israel's sin and the attitude of Aaron is amazing. Aaron had complied with the wishes of the people because he feared for his life. Moses is fearless. He does not hesitate for one moment. What he did was very dangerous. We don't know how many people were involved in the feast for the calf; if it was not the whole nation, then at least several hundred thousand people. Moses destroys single handedly the object of their worship. If the crowd had turned against him, they could have killed him in a moment. There must have been such an aura of the presence of the Lord with Moses that the fear of the Lord fell upon those who had sinned, and, although in a vast majority, they were powerless against this single man. Jesus showed this same kind of supremacy when He cleaned the temple on two different occasions.⁷⁴⁷ One man on God's side can stand against hundreds of thousands of people. And the people knew this. We do not read that they made the slightest effort to oppose Moses. Their guilty consciences kept them from reacting. They even accepted their punishment without resistance. We read: "And he [Moses] took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it." The burning in the fire probably means that the statue was melted back into a block of gold and then it was crushed into fine powder which was sprinkled on the water. And the whole rebellious crowd stooped down and drank the object of their veneration. With this act of humiliation, Moses probably wanted to impress upon them the fact that they had been worshipping something that had no spiritual value. Moses knew how the people felt about the idols they had learned to worship in Egypt. He had seen Egyptian idol worship from close by during the forty years he lived in the country. What he made the people do in drinking the water on which the gold of the calf had been sprinkled he did the thing that was most devastating to their religious inclinations.

As we indicated before, Aaron's role in the construction of the Golden Calf and the following celebration was at least a dubious one. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says about this episode: "Aaron committed a serious sin in the wilderness surrounding Mount Sinai. While Moses was on the mountain praying to God and receiving His commandments, the people began to build a golden calf to worship. Aaron made no attempt to stop the people and even issued instructions on how to build the image <Ex. 32:1-10>. Aaron was saved from God's wrath only because Moses interceded on his behalf <Deut. 9:20>." We do not get the impression that Aaron intended to commit idolatry himself, but he yielded to the majority and even cooperated by gathering in the jewelry and making the idol. His attitude seems to have been ambiguous at the best, which means that he did not have the same single minded consecration to the Lord his brother had. When Moses questioned him, he gave some rather lame excuses, putting all the blame on the people.

We should remember that all the people had heard the Ten Commandments when God spoke to the nation from the top of the mountain, before Moses went up to receive the two Stone Tablets. Aaron knew, like everybody else that the Lord had said: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments."⁷⁴⁸ If he had quoted these words to the people who wanted to make the idol, God would have backed him up. More than any other episode in Aaron's life this incident illustrates the truth of what the writer to the Hebrews says: "The law appoints as high priests men who are weak."⁷⁴⁹ And this makes us realize how much a High Priest was needed who was perfect in every respect.

It is obvious that the conversation between the two brothers is only reported in part. There is a cryptic reference to the people of Israel becoming "a laughing stock to their enemies." Aaron must have mentioned this to Moses and that seems to have softened the judgment of the Lord over him. Who those enemies were, we are not told. We mentioned before that other than human agents may have been intended. Aaron must have found himself in a situation he felt he could not handle. He, obviously, did not call upon the Lord when he found himself at a point where his life was in danger and where he stood alone, facing the mob.

⁷⁴⁷ See John 2:13-21; Matt. 21:12,13

⁷⁴⁸ Ex.20:3-6

⁷⁴⁹ Heb. 7:28

The following episode also is only sketched with a few rough lines. We read that Moses places himself at the entrance to the camp. Whether this means that the feast of the calf was held outside the camp, we don't know. His call, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me," has become a famous phrase to invite people to make the choice of their lives. Other translations, such as the RSV and KJV render it with "Who is on the LORD's side?" It was a call for volunteers to identify themselves with the cause of the Lord. At this point the people who came did not know what they would be required to do. The fact that they took a stand for the Lord meant that they turned against evil. What happens next reminds us of Jesus' words: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."⁷⁵⁰ But in the situation Jesus refers to, the believer is the object of hostility, not the one who passes judgment. Here the faithful ones execute judgment.

We should try to imagine the scene. We read in vs. 25 that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control. We read in vs. 6 that the people "sat down to feast and drink at a wild party, followed by sexual immorality." (TLB). This was, probably, still going on when Moses took his stand at the entrance of the camp. It seems that the report of the events in this chapter is not given in a chronological order. At the point where Moses called for volunteers, the calf was, probably, still standing, and Moses had not yet melted it down and ground it up and forced the people to drink the water with the gold particles. If this supposition is correct, Moses' call is an effort to create order in the chaos and to make the bedlam stop.

Everybody had an opportunity to answer Moses' call. We read that only the Levites came forward. This does not, necessarily, mean that nobody of any of the other tribes responded. Vs. 26 only says: "And all the Levites rallied to him." We get the impression that the coming forward of the Levites was a question of clan allegiance. Their blood relationship to Moses may have played a role, but we are specifically told that their coming indicated that their first allegiance was to the Lord. The Levites were instructed to go through the camp and kill the people they knew personally, whom they saw participating in the orgy. If it is true that the people had not stopped their revelry yet at this point, it would not be hard to identify the guilty ones.

Moses introduced his instructions with the words: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says." We do not read that the Lord actually told him this, but there is no reason to believe that Moses issued the command on his own. When the Levites are done with their gruesome work, over 3000 people have been executed. When we read later in the book of Numbers that 603,550 men twenty and older were counted,⁷⁵¹ the number is relatively small. Whether this punishment was the plague with which the Lord struck the people, as we read in vs. 35, or whether an epidemic broke out among them, we are not told.

For us as New Testament Christians the report of this violent scene is difficult to digest and justify. Even if we do believe in the validity of capital punishment, we have a hard time with this kind of swift justice. It seems to be the complete opposite of what Jesus preached about "turning the other cheek" and being sent "as sheep among wolves."⁷⁵² We have to remember, though, that Jesus spoke His words in a different dispensation. Israel in the desert was God's chosen nation. Not only were believers in the majority, but they were subjects of a theocracy. God's purpose with Israel was two-fold: they were to be the receivers and channels of His revelation in this world, channels of salvation, and they were also the instruments of His judgment. As such they, legitimately, conquered Canaan and exterminated the nations living there. God sent His people to the promised land only when the sin of the Amorites had reached its full measure.⁷⁵³ Unless we see this report of the massacre as *an act of God* against the background of Israel being a theocracy, the Bible would contradict itself and not make much sense, and Moses' words to the Levites, who had become the executioners, would be inexplicable. We read in vs. 29, "Then Moses said, 'You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.'"

It doesn't seem to be an enviable way to receive God's blessing by having to kill one's relatives and friends. We consider it to be sign of genuine dedication if a man is willing to die for his faith. In the case of the Levites it was a matter of being willing to kill for their faith. This would not be a valid test of

⁷⁵⁰ Matt. 10:34-36

⁷⁵¹ Num. 2:32

⁷⁵² Matt. 5:39; 10:16

⁷⁵³ Gen. 15:16

dedication in our time. But it did not happen in our time, and the norms and judgments of that time are no longer accessible to us. This does not mean, however, that they were bad. We have to be careful not to judge the ages past according to the norms that are extant in our day. There are eternal norms which apply to every age in one form or another. What happened here was an expression of the wrath of God over sin, and that is still an existing norm. It expresses itself in a different form now, but the norm has not changed. The day will come when God's wrath will reveal itself again in a similar form as in the desert about four thousand years ago.

Jesus indicated this truth when He read the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth. The text in Isaiah reads: "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God."⁷⁵⁴ When Jesus came to the place that says: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," Luke says: "Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"⁷⁵⁵ In closing the book when He did, Jesus indicated that the year of the Lord's favor had come and that the day of vengeance would come later. If we cannot close our eyes for the day of vengeance to come, we cannot do so either for the day that lies in the past.

The day after the mass execution the situation seems to have calmed down and things are under control again. After reminding them of their sin, Moses tells the people that he will go up to the Lord to try to make atonement for their sin. From the following chapter we understand that "going up to the Lord" did not mean climbing up the mountain again. Moses does not go up the mountain until the following chapter, where he has the greatest experience any person in the Old Testament ever had: seeing the glory of the Lord. The following encounter with God, probably, took place in "the tent of meeting" which is mentioned in ch. 33: 7.

Moses shows the greatness of his character and his deep understanding of how atonement can be made, by offering himself instead of the people as the subject of God's wrath. He says to God: "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin-- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." Moses is not only ready to die for the people, but he is willing to be banished eternally from fellowship with the Lord. This is the kind of love our Lord Jesus Christ has manifested for us. Jesus did experience this banishment from God's presence. For three long hours, when He hung on the cross, His name was blotted out of God's book. We read in Matthew's account of the crucifixion: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'-- which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"⁷⁵⁶ Being forsaken by God is the ultimate punishment for sin. It is the essence of hell. Moses was willing to descend into hell. Paul indicates the same willingness to give himself for the salvation of the nation of Israel. He says: "I speak the truth in Christ-- I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit-- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."⁷⁵⁷ God only accepted this sacrifice from His Son.

Not only does Moses display a profound understanding of what is involved in atonement, he also seems to understand the essence of salvation; it means being written in God's book. Jesus mentions the book when He says to His disciples: "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."⁷⁵⁸ And John mentions "the book of life belonging to the Lamb" four times in Revelation, both to indicate salvation and perdition.⁷⁵⁹ We understand this to be an image of a practice on earth to register people's names in order to give certain transactions a permanent character. The omniscient God does not need paper and pen to write down people's name, lest He would forget them. But it does mean that God makes a contract with those who love and obey Him.

God rejects Moses' sacrifice of himself in behalf of the people, but his willingness to give his life and eternal salvation in order for others to be saved, was noted in the book of life, next to his name. It is

⁷⁵⁴ Isa. 61:1,2

⁷⁵⁵ Luke 4:19-21

⁷⁵⁶ Matt. 27:46

⁷⁵⁷ Rom. 9:1-4

⁷⁵⁸ Luke 10:20

⁷⁵⁹ Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27

noted for us, as an example of what kind of love we should have for others. Moses had the love of Christ in him.

God answers Moses that He will punish the people at a later time. This implies that the punishment that was meted out to them at that time was not the final settlement. Three thousand people had died and we read that “the LORD struck the people with a plague,” which is not further specified. But, evidently, that was not the punishment God meant. There is a final day of reckoning for all living beings. John describes this in Revelation, where he says: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”⁷⁶⁰ Jesus gives us some insight into this truth in His condemnation of the cities of His time. He says: “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”⁷⁶¹ We would be inclined to believe that, since Sodom and the other cities of the area had been wiped off the map, the day of judgment had passed for them. The same for Tyre and Sidon. Evidently, this is not so. Nothing we encounter in this life as trials and suffering atones for our sin. If there were no book of life, as John indicates, we would all be without hope in this world.

God’s answer to Moses: “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book,” sounds like the strongest threat that can be made. We should remember, however, that the plan for making provision for the sinner had already been made. The Lamb of God had been slain since the creation of the world.⁷⁶²

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The Tent of Meeting Exod. 33:1-23

Before the construction of the tabernacle there was a place where people could meet the Lord. We read in vs. 7, “Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the ‘tent of meeting.’ Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.” The NIV uses the term “tent of meeting” also where the tabernacle is meant, which is confusing. It is obvious that the tent that is mentioned in this verse is not the same as the tabernacle, since it was positioned outside the camp and the tabernacle occupied the central place in the camp. The reason for the placement outside the camp is not given. Moses may have felt that the quietness of the wilderness was more conducive to intimate fellowship with God than the hustle and noise of the camp.

There is, however, a hidden meaning in this placement. It was outside the camp that the carcasses of certain sacrificial animals were burned and the condition of the leper was examined. The writer of the Hebrew epistle makes a point of this place outside the camp, when he says: “The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.”⁷⁶³ Whether unwittingly or purposely, this is the place Moses designates for fellowship with God. It is the place where Christ suffered and paid for our sins.

If Moses had chosen the place to withdraw from the public eye, his purpose is defeated by the attitude of the people. They follow his every move and stand in awe for the fellowship this man knew with God, a fellowship, they felt, which lay beyond their own reach. But we read a very significant sentence about Joshua. When Moses returns to the camp, we read: “his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” Joshua had discovered the source of Moses’ greatness, and he decided that he would not leave

⁷⁶⁰ Rev. 20:11,12

⁷⁶¹ Matt. 11:21-24

⁷⁶² Rev. 13:8

⁷⁶³ Heb. 13:11-13

that place until he drank his fill. About such an attitude Jesus would say, what He said about Mary: "Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."⁷⁶⁴

It is at this place that the conversation between God and Moses, about who will lead the people from here on, takes place. When the Lord said to Moses: "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," He actually scraps the plans for the construction of the tabernacle, given to Moses on the mountain a few days earlier. As it worked out the Israelites would remain at the foot of Mount Sinai for the construction of the tabernacle. Without the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant, Israel would have nothing to distinguish itself from other nations on the earth. It would symbolize in a graphic way that the Lord Himself was not in their midst.

This conversation between God and Moses was a continuation of the one begun in the previous chapter. It appears, though, that not everything we read was said during one session; there must have been interruptions. Vs. 5 tells us, for instance, that the Lord had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.'" But in the previous verse we read: "When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments." And, again, in vs. 6 it says: "So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb." Moses must have gone back and forth between the Tent of Meeting and the camp to convey the message to the people and their reaction makes God decide to change His mind.

In the first three verses of this chapter there is a strange mixture of promise and punishment. God reminds Moses of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give the land of the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites to their descendants. An angel, one of God's created supernatural beings, would lead them to the land and help them conquer it, but the *Shekinah* would not go with them. It is these words that trigger the people's repentance. They go into mourning. Their attitude shows that they understand the magnitude of their sin. In making the Golden Calf they had withdrawn themselves from the protection of the blood of the lamb that had saved them from death in Egypt and brought them out of bondage. They had forfeited their lives. Mourning is connected with death, and sin and death are closely related.

Before the conversation continues in vs. 12, we are given a glimpse into Moses' intimate relationship with God. Vs. 11 tells us: "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend." Moses' personal fellowship with God is recognized by the people. God testifies to this Himself at a later time when He says about Moses: "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord."⁷⁶⁵ This fact is stated as an introduction to the following event, which is one of the highlights of the whole Old Testament. Moses asks God to show him His glory. The lowest point in Israel's history is transformed into a peak of spiritual experience.

God had told Moses that He would no longer be present among the people to lead them into the promised land. Moses tells the Lord flatly that this is unacceptable. Again, we are not given a detailed account of the conversation. What we read seems to be a rough outline of the discussion. We may paraphrase Moses' words as follows: "You tell me to lead this people, but I cannot do that. They are not my people, but Yours. If You love me, as You say You do, You cannot do this to me." This doesn't sound like the language of prayer. Yet, God is, apparently, soon swayed. He agrees immediately to change the verdict and to return to His place as the leader of the nation. One has to know God well in order to be able to say "No" to Him. Moses' insistence is, obviously, according to the will of God.

One of the great lessons of Moses' attitude at this point seems to be that there can be a wrongly resting in our circumstances. There may be times in our lives when God is pleased when we resist what overcomes us, even if our circumstances are ordained by Him. This may sound contradictory, but the key for knowing when to accept and when to resist lies in the understanding of the love of God. At times God's love and mercy may be severe and we need insight into the character of God to know the difference between bowing and standing up. Moses did the right thing when he refused God's proposal and God richly rewarded him for it.

Moses says some very deep things to God. It seems redundant to tell the omniscient God, "You know me by name," but it appears that there are with God different levels of knowing us. Jesus says to the

⁷⁶⁴ Luke 10:42

⁷⁶⁵ Num. 12:8

evildoers, “I never knew you. Away from me, you!”⁷⁶⁶ Evidently, knowing, in this context, stands for an intimate relationship. That is why Paul says: “The man who loves God is known by God.”⁷⁶⁷ So, Moses says to God: “I love You and You tell me that You love me.” And the statement: “you have found favor with Me,” could be interpreted as: “I have forgiven you your sins.” Now, Moses transfers this intimate relationship between God and himself to the whole nation. He wants to increase in his love for God by better understanding His character. “Teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you,” is the Old Testament equivalent of Paul’s deepest desires. The apostle wrote: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”⁷⁶⁸ The beauty of Moses’ entreating with God is that, not only he wants to increase in love and knowledge, but also that his motive for doing so is the salvation of the people of Israel. The words “Remember that this nation is your people,” are found in this context. David expresses the same desire when he says: “Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”⁷⁶⁹ And David also confirms later that God answered Moses’ prayer. He wrote: “He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.”⁷⁷⁰ It was never Moses’ intention that he would be the only one in the nation who would know God in such an intimate way. Moses’ relationship with God should have been the normal standard for all the Israelites. That is why, at a later date, he said: “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”⁷⁷¹

In all this, Moses is an image of our Lord Jesus Christ. The man Jesus had a relationship with God that has never been equaled by any other human being. While on earth, He set the example for us as to know how to pray, how to know Scripture, how to suffer and die, and how to live. As Peter says: “If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”⁷⁷² Jesus’ relationship with the Father was to our benefit. In Jesus’ own words: “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”⁷⁷³

God seems to be easily swayed by Moses’ words. Without offering any of the former objections that God’s presence would mean the annihilation of the people, God says: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” The words “I will give you rest,” stand for a whole concept of entering into a position of victory over evil and the powers of darkness and of proclaiming the majesty of God. God rested on the seventh day of the week of creation. The book of Genesis tells us: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”⁷⁷⁴ There is also a rest after the completion of the new creation in Jesus Christ. The author of the Hebrew epistle focuses upon this truth when he says: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”⁷⁷⁵ The Bible puts the entrance of Israel into Canaan in the perspective of the ultimate victory over evil which disrupted God’s creation. The rest God promises to Israel is an image of the real rest that is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”⁷⁷⁶

Moses formulates a timeless truth when he answers God: “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” The difference between those who are the children of God and those who aren’t is in the presence of God Himself. That is the only distinction that has value. No name or sticker or form of organization or lifestyle can substitute for the reality of Christ in us.

⁷⁶⁶ Matt. 7:23

⁷⁶⁷ I Cor. 8:3

⁷⁶⁸ Phil. 3:10,11

⁷⁶⁹ Ps. 25:4,5

⁷⁷⁰ Ps. 103:7

⁷⁷¹ Num. 11:29

⁷⁷² I Pet. 2:20,21

⁷⁷³ John 17:19

⁷⁷⁴ Gen. 2:2,3

⁷⁷⁵ Heb. 4:9,10

⁷⁷⁶ II Cor. 5:17

Moses puts the emphasis on the distinction outsiders will make: "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people?" In the previous chapter he had already used the argument "what will the Egyptians say?" in order to dissuade God from destroying the people. Here it is put in a positive way. The people had fallen into a very serious sin that could have meant their annihilation. Moses pleads with the Lord to have their testimony restored, so that the world may know that there is a God who reveals Himself to the world. The phrase, "you are pleased with me and with your people," is rendered by other translations as: "that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight." (KJV) or, as in the RSV "that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people." The word "favor" or "grace" in Hebrew is *cheen*, which, according to *Strongs Definitions* means, "graciousness," in the subjective sense, or, objectively, "beauty." That is a different connotation than "pleased."

God confirms Moses' words by answering: "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." TLB renders this with: "Yes, I will do what you have asked, for you have certainly found favor with me, and you are my friend." Having received this reassurance, Moses asks of God the greatest request anyone has ever asked: "Now show me your glory." It is wonderful to find grace with God and to be His friend is even more, but Moses understood that this was only the beginning of the realization of God's plan with man. The ultimate purpose is that we would not only see His glory, but share His glory. The Bible testifies to this from the Old Testament on to the end of the New Testament. The psalmist says: "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory."⁷⁷⁷ And Jesus, speaking about His disciples, says to the Father: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."⁷⁷⁸ Paul describes our present condition with the words: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."⁷⁷⁹ And, later, writing to the Colossians, he says: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."⁷⁸⁰ The writer of the Hebrews defines God's purpose with us, as Christ bringing us to glory. We read: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."⁷⁸¹ Peter tells the elders of the church that he is: "a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed."⁷⁸² And, finally, John, describing the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, says: "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."⁷⁸³ So, there is ample proof from the Bible as a whole that Moses' request was not outrageous. He did not exceed the limits of human potential. He understood something of God's purpose in creating man in His image.

God certainly does not refuse Moses' request, but He modifies it so that Moses would be able to see the glory and stay alive. If God would reveal His glory to us in all its fullness, our human frames would not be able to bear it. It would mean our physical death. Daniel fainted when he was approached by an angel. He described the experience as follows: "So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, 'Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.' And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling."⁷⁸⁴ And John, the beloved disciple, who knew Jesus more intimately than any of the others, when he saw Jesus in the glory of His resurrection, says: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."⁷⁸⁵ Our bodies are not built for this kind of revelation and, probably, our souls and spirits would not be able to absorb the intensity of it. Yet God is longing to reveal Himself to His beloved servant Moses and He takes all the precautions necessary to protect him from excessive radiation. The main part of the revelation will be in the Word of God. In our present dispensation the emphasis is upon hearing, not seeing. Paul emphasizes this when he says: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard

⁷⁷⁷ Ps. 73:24

⁷⁷⁸ John 17:22

⁷⁷⁹ II Cor. 3:18

⁷⁸⁰ Col. 1:27

⁷⁸¹ Heb. 2:10

⁷⁸² I Pet. 5:1

⁷⁸³ Rev. 21:11

⁷⁸⁴ Dan. 10:8-11

⁷⁸⁵ Rev. 1:17

through the word of Christ.” Or, as the KJV puts it: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”⁷⁸⁶ And Jesus indicates that God’s mode of revelation is by the Word, not through what we see. That is why He says to Thomas: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”⁷⁸⁷ As far as seeing the glory of the Father is concerned, Jesus says: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”⁷⁸⁸

We read in the verses 19-23, “And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’ Then the LORD said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.’”

Some of these words are hard to grasp. What does it mean that God makes His goodness pass by Moses and pronounces His Name in his presence? Jesus says to the rich young man: “No one is good—except God alone.”⁷⁸⁹ All goodness is derived from God. He is the ultimate good. It appears that God lets His goodness pass by Moses as an indication of the standard against which all goodness is to be measured. It is important to understand this in the context of the law that God had just given to Moses. The commandments were not just rules to determine the limits of human behavior, they were expressions of the character of God. That is why it can be said that the law is good. We tend to see laws as restrictions of human liberty. It is true that God’s goodness restricts evil, but it also means that God blesses us and fills our lives with His goodness. James puts it this way: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”⁷⁹⁰

Goodness is an absolute that can only be found in God, but at the same time it is a characteristic to which we can relate. We experience goodness as something that agrees with us, that fills and satisfies us. When we encounter goodness we realize that this is what we were made for; it is the reason for our existence. In God’s goodness we find all His perfections of love, kindness, gentleness and beauty wrapped together. And, although Moses was not able to experience God’s goodness in all its fullness, God allowed him to get a taste of it, to whet his appetite, so to speak, for things to come. Now, in Heaven, Moses drinks his fill of God’s goodness continuously. Then, he could only touch it and lick his finger.

Then God says: “I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence.” This phrase makes us realize how far we have strayed from our origin. For us, names are meaningless. They are a little better than numbers, but they do not differ in quality. Shakespeare asked the famous question, “What’s in a name?” And the meaning of it is, that names make no difference. They did make all the difference in the world when man was still in fellowship with God. Didn’t God say to Moses: “I know you by name?” This meant that God knew Moses intimately. David would say later: “O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in— behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.”⁷⁹¹ Now, God reverses the miracle and He says to Moses: “I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence,” or, “I will tell you Who I am.” This is an invitation to search and know God: to know Him intimately, as God knows us. In this too, Moses received only a foretaste of things to come. Paul opens the window on a wider perspective when he says: “It is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’— but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”⁷⁹² The half has not yet been told!

⁷⁸⁶ Rom. 10:17

⁷⁸⁷ John 20:29

⁷⁸⁸ John 14:9

⁷⁸⁹ Luke 18:19

⁷⁹⁰ James 1:17

⁷⁹¹ Ps. 139:1-5

⁷⁹² I Cor. 2:9-12

God describes His own character with the words *mercy* and *compassion*. Those words, obviously, have relevance in the relationship God has with man who is fallen. Man needs mercy because he is guilty and he needs compassion because he is lost. Jesus paints so beautifully the picture of the Father's attitude toward His wayward children in the parable of the prodigal son. We read: "But while he [the prodigal son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."⁷⁹³

Mercy is a word that fits in a legal context. It presupposes guilt and exchanges pardon for punishment. Compassion describes an emotional reaction to a condition in which one of God's creatures has fallen from the place God had intended him to occupy. It is love acting to save and heal. Both words are perfect descriptions of what God has done for man and for the whole of creation since Satan succeeded in separating man from God. Mercy is extended to the guilty because of the sacrifice God Himself would bring in His Son who died on the cross and compassion is demonstrated in the saving of man's soul through the Gospel. All this was only visible in outline form when God revealed Himself to Moses. It is abundantly clear to us now.

The apostle Paul quotes God's words to Moses in a different context of God's election. In Romans, speaking about Israel's role in the history of God's revelation of Himself in this world, he writes: "Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Unless we understand that Paul is speaking about God's choice of Israel as the wardens of His revelation in this world and not about man's personal salvation from sin, we have a hard time grasping the meaning of the apostle's words. Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that God would keep salvation from a man who is eager to be saved. God does not reject anyone who accepts Him. A man who rejects God cannot blame God for his decision.

When God says to Moses: "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live," He does not only indicate that man could not see God because the frailty of his physical body would not be able to bear the stress, but also that there is a moral restriction. We cannot see God face to face and continue living the life we are living now. In our present condition, we are all condemned to death. No one will escape death. Seeing God, the One who cannot die, who is the source of life, and then continuing to live a life of the dying would be impossible. That is why God says: "No one *may* see Me and live." It is a moral impossibility as well as a physical one.

The solution God offers to Moses is pregnant with spiritual significance: "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by." We can hardly read these words without thinking of Paul's explanation of the spiritual significance of the rock in Israel's crossing of the desert. He says: "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."⁷⁹⁴ In Christ we are all hidden in the cleft in the rock and covered with the hand of God. Fanny Crosby wrote a beautiful hymn that uses this theme: "A wonderful Savior is Jesus, my Lord. He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock and covers me there with His hand." In Christ, we may behold the glory of God and at the same time we are protected against the harmful rays of His radiance.

Moses' experience was, of course, a spiritual one, although there were physical signs that indicated the presence of a spiritual reality. But the picture that is drawn is anthropomorphic. When God says: "I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen," He speaks in terms that can be understood by man. God does not have a hand, a back and a face in the sense that we know it. What we know as hand, back, and face are images of God's reality. God is spirit and, in Jesus' words: "a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."⁷⁹⁵ What happens to Moses is translated in terms we can understand.

Yet, it is hard to understand what actually happened to Moses. Moses asked God to show him on earth what, actually, can only be seen in heaven. We have very little understanding what God did when He

⁷⁹³ Luke 15:20

⁷⁹⁴ I Cor 10:3,4

⁷⁹⁵ Luke 24:39 (KJV)

created heaven and earth and expressed Himself, as a Spirit, in material things. He, who had no image, created man in His image. We understand something of the principle when we look at a sculpture. Through the genius of the sculptor, a lump of clay or a form of bronze or of marble can convey emotions and values that may affect us deeply. An artist can give form to color on a canvas and express things that go far beyond the material he uses. And music is more than a series of vibrations of the air that fall upon our eardrum: it is beauty, emotion, value and truth. So, when God passed by Moses, the imprint of His feet conveyed things that went far beyond what can be put into words. It did not transform Moses into a heavenly being yet, but it kindled in him an unquenchable thirst for things to come. May Moses' experience do the same to us. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"⁷⁹⁶

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The Summit Meeting on Mount Sinai 34:1-35

As a preparation for this meeting, Moses is ordered to chisel out two tablets of stone and bring those with him when he meets the Lord. As far as we know Moses was never asked to bring the first two stone tablets; they were provided by the Lord Himself. The first time we read about such tablets is in ch. 24 where the Lord says to Moses: "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."⁷⁹⁷

The vs. 1-4 of this chapter describe Moses' preparation of the two stone tablets. The vs. 5-9 depict God's revelation of His glory to Moses. The vs. 10-28 deal with the terms of the covenant God made with Moses and the people of Israel. The remainder of the chapter show us Moses after the encounter with God, radiating with the glory that brushed by him.

When Moses comes into the presence of the Lord at the appointed time, he carries with him the two stone tablets that have no writing on them. So, when he has the ultimate experience of his life, at the moment that God's glory passes by him, he was clutching the two tablets. We should not miss the point that the Ten Commandments were given simultaneously with the revelation of God's glory.

When God orders Moses to cut two new stone tablets, it seems that God holds him responsible for the breaking of the first ones. Moses' reaction to seeing the Golden Calf was understandable, but God did not overlook it. Before God can reveal Himself to Moses, it had to be made up for; there had to be restitution. No detail is too small in our relationship with God. Even things that are forgiven have to be made right.

The mountain will be off limits for man and beast as long as the glory of God rests upon it. The same precautions had to be taken as they were the first time when God spoke to the whole nation. Every person or animal who touched the mountain had to be put to death.⁷⁹⁸ The revelation of God's glory was more dangerous than live wire or nuclear radiation.

The author of the Hebrew epistle puts things in the right perspective for us when he compares God's revelation on Mount Sinai with our approach to His glory. He says: "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."⁷⁹⁹ We have a tendency to overlook the glory of our present position, probably because it is not a glory that can be observed by the five senses; it is spiritual. We will see at various points in this experience that the invisible glory of the New Testament, that is ours, far surpasses the visible glory of the Old Testament that Moses experienced in this event.

We read in vs. 5, "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD." There is, obviously, a difference between God's presence on the basis of His character, (He the Omnipresent One) and His presence when He purposely reveals Himself to man,

⁷⁹⁶ Ps. 42:1,2

⁷⁹⁷ Ex. 24:12

⁷⁹⁸ Ex. 19:12,13

⁷⁹⁹ Heb. 12:22-24 (See also vs. 18-21)

such as was the case here. Whether there is a difference between God's presence and His omnipresence, I don't know, but there is, obviously, a difference in man's awareness. Some people are naturally tuned so finely that they are more often aware of God's presence. Jesus showed amazement when His disciples asked Him about the revelation of the Father. As a man, Jesus experienced the presence of the Father in such an overwhelming way, that He was astonished to find out that His friends could not see the Father in Him. That is why Jesus said to Philip: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Moses' awareness of God's presence is quite different from a general sensitivity to God's omnipresence. This is revelation at its peak. We may presume that, at this point, Moses is hiding in the cleft of the rock, covered by God's hand. We are not told this, specifically, at this time, but this can be deduced from what God said in the previous chapter, vs. 21,22.

God had revealed Himself before to Moses in the burning bush as YHWH, Jehovah, or the LORD. There God had said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"⁸⁰⁰ Now, Moses is given a deeper insight in the meaning of the Name. We read that God does not only tell Moses His Name, but He proclaims His Name: "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear (the guilty), visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation."⁸⁰¹ In the NIV we read: "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." The Hebrew for compassionate is *rachuwv* and for gracious *channuwv*. Slow to anger, or, as the KJV puts it, long-suffering, is the translation of *erek apayim*, which literally means, having a long nose. This is, of course an idiomatic expression, that would sound ridiculous if it were translated word for word. The KJV renders *cheved* or *hesed* with "goodness" (love in the NIV). This is the key word in the covenant that God made with the patriarchs and with Israel. The word "truth" is the translation of the Hebrew *emeth*, which means "stability, certainty, truth, trustworthiness."

There is a slight difference in wording between the way God announces what His revelation will be like in vs. 19 of the previous chapter and the way the revelation is actually given. We read above that God said: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Here, mercy and compassion are revealed more as a characteristic than as an act of the will. God has mercy and compassion because He is merciful and compassionate.

The last part of the verse seems to contradict the first. God says that He forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin, and in the same breath we read that "He does not leave the guilty unpunished." The only explanation for this paradox is in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. God forgives because He Himself paid for our sin by becoming man and taking upon Himself the sin of the world and carrying it away. God does not treat sin lightly, even when He forgives sin.

Also, the fact that "He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation," seems incompatible with the previous mention of His mercy and compassion. In order to understand what God says here, we have to go back to ch. 20 where the expression "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me," is first used. We said there that the context referred to idol worship, which opened up a world of demonic power. Once invited into a life, demons will never leave of their own free will. They will even remain in a family from one generation to another, unless the link with the preceding generation is cut off. It is the power of darkness that can oppress a family for generations, which is referred to in the sentence: "He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." It is not that God hates children because of the sins of their fathers, but demons will move from father to child and thus keep the family in their grip. A father who opens himself up for demonic powers destroys his own posterity. When God assumes responsibility for the punishment that is inflicted by demonic powers from one generation to another, He emphasizes the fact that individuals are held accountable for their spiritual relationships. God treats the whole of mankind as one body. We can only plead "not guilty" to the sins of our forebears if we consciously and purposely break from the relationship our ancestors had with the powers of darkness. We can, for instance, be absolved of the guilt of slavery that the white race inflicted upon the black race, only when we recognize the sin of our ancestors

⁸⁰⁰ Ex. 3:14

⁸⁰¹ Ex. 34:6,7 (ASV)

and the spirit which governed their behavior, and denounce all the powers that were behind it in order to side with the Lord and His Holy Spirit.

It should also be noticed that the demonstration of God's grace and mercy is poured out upon countless individuals, whereas, the influence of evil is limited to three or four generations.

We should try to see the pictures before us. Moses stands in the cleft of the rock with the hand of God covering the opening. It is the ultimate protection one can find; better than an underground concrete bomb shelter. Outside sounds the greatest voice that can be heard by human ears, speaking the most wonderful words. It is the purest music imaginable. It is the glory of God that passes by. Moses' ecstasy must have been indescribable. We read his reaction: "Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped." We don't know how long the experience lasted. It was a moment of eternity in time. Time must have stood still. Never before had he been so aware of the presence of the Lord. It is a blessing for us, just to read about it. And yet, we are closer to God's glory than Moses ever was. We will get back to this point when we ponder the mystery of Moses' veil.

What is worship other than being overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord? The best picture of worship is found in the book of Revelation, where the twenty-four elders "fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.'"⁸⁰² In real worship we lose ourselves and, at the same time, we find our own identity. Moses' personality may have been changed by the experience, the image of God in him was restored, but Moses did not lose his identity. It was the same Moses who came down the mountain as the one who went up.

In recording the story later, Moses doesn't linger too much on the emotional part of the experience. The emphasis is on the character of God. God's presence blesses us, but that is not the point. If we seek Him in order to experience an emotional or spiritual high, we do not understand what the relationship is all about. Spiritual blessing is a by-product of the fellowship. The main thing is the flow of love between personalities: His and ours.

Moses' words, spoken at this moment, are among the most amazing utterances in Scripture. He immediately applies the experience to the benefit of the people he represents. Having had this brush with the glory of God, he has no desire for any personal benefits. His thoughts are with the nation of Israel and the reaching of the goal God had set for them: the conquest of Canaan. *The Matthew Henry' Commentary* comments on this by saying: "Thus Moses, like a man of a truly public spirit, intercedes even for the children that should be born. But it is a strange plea he urges: For it is a stiff-necked people. God had given this as a reason why he would not go along with them, <Ex. 33:3>. "Yea," says Moses, "the rather go along with us; for the worse they are the more need they have of thy presence and grace to make them better." Moses sees them so stiff-necked that, for his part, he has neither patience nor power enough to deal with them. "Therefore, Lord, do thou go among us, else they will never be kept in awe. Thou wilt spare, and bear with them, for thou art God, and not man," <Hos. 11:9>." So he pins down God's promise, given in vs. 14 of the previous chapter, where the Lord had reassured him: "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

One of the most startling and audacious request is: "take us as your inheritance." This choice of words is so penetrating, it shows such deep understanding into the plan and character of God, that it can only be explained as a direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit. From a human viewpoint the idea that God would want to receive a heritage of a bunch of people, who, at best are only half-interested in what He is doing, is preposterous. If we have any vision of a human being standing before his Creator we would immediately dismiss this kind of petition. Then there is the condition of the people, which Moses describes as "a stiff-necked people." Added to this is the notion that an inheritance presumes a death in the family. It was impossible that Moses knew anything of God's plan of salvation and the death of His Son for the salvation of mankind, and yet, he uses the word heritage. The writer to the Hebrews touches upon this when he says: "In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood."⁸⁰³ He seems to indicate that Moses, more than anybody in his time, understood the purpose of the bloody sacrifices that were brought in the Old Testament.

⁸⁰² Rev. 4:10,11 (RSV)

⁸⁰³ Heb. 9:16-18

Numerous times Israel is called God's inheritance in the Old Testament. But God is also our inheritance. God said, for instance, to Aaron and to the Jewish priests and Levites as a whole: "You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites."⁸⁰⁴ So it goes both ways: We are His and He is ours! This principle is elaborated on in the New Testament, also as one that works in both directions. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."⁸⁰⁵ And Peter intones triumphantly: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you."⁸⁰⁶ So, Moses introduced a theme that, from thereon, runs through the whole Bible and is eventually fulfilled in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's reply to Moses' request is the drawing up of a covenant, the terms of which are described in the vs. 10-26. At first glance the terms of the covenant seem to be put down in a haphazard way, without any connection to the reality of the moment. But a deeper study reveals God's purpose with Israel in the occupation of the promised land. Twice the Lord tells Moses that He is the one who will do the actual fighting. In vs. 11 we read: "I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites." And vs. 24 adds an assurance of security with the words: "I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land." In the rest of the terms we feel how the forces of darkness are lurking in the background, trying to entice the Israelites away from a single-minded dedication to the Lord. The key words are: "Be careful not to make a treaty," "break down their altars," and "do not worship any other god." The enemy of man would try to lure the Israelites off the road by using humanitarian considerations. God knows Satan's ultimate purpose, which is to murder man, body and soul. He will use baits of kindness and humaneness in order to achieve his goal. The warnings are explicit: "they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices," and they will give "some of their daughters as wives for your sons." The nations of Canaan would impress themselves upon the Israelites as people who were no different from them. There would be invitations for dinner and proposals for weddings. Israel would become spiritually polluted through these means of human intercourse.

God uses the word "prostitution" for the religion of those nations. He says: "when they prostitute themselves to their gods..." The implication is that these people originally had a legal relationship to God also, but they broke their legal bond in order to enter into an illegal relationship with the powers of darkness through idol worship. Evidently, God had coveted their allegiance just as much as of any of His creatures, but they had refused Him. There is a whole untold drama behind these words. God had loved them as He loves all of mankind, but they had left Him for another lover, who was out to destroy them. The jealousy about which God speaks to Moses, indicates that these people had hurt God to the deepest of His feelings. Nothing is said here about the diabolic sacrifices that some of these heathen rituals demanded: the murder of infants and the performance of obscenity. To apply this to the 20th century, we can be sure that God wants His people to be "Pro Life," and this they can be only if they refuse to have anything to do with the enemy and his practices.

Another strange thing in this context seems to be the mention of four different feasts: The Feast of Unleavened Bread, (vs. 18), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), (vs. 22), the Feast of the First Fruits, (vs. 26). Also, there is a reminder of the Sabbath and the Passover Feast is mentioned in passing. Another close look reveals the purpose of these reminders. The only way to say "no" to the enemy is to say "yes" to God. This is done in observing these celebrations. We would have expected, though, that God would, first of all, remind the people of their deliverance from slavery. The only thing said about the Passover is: "Do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning" (vs. 25). Put in other words, God tells His people to keep the memory of their salvation fresh. Nothing is more stimulating in our fellowship with the Lord than the memory of what life used to be before salvation. Even if we cannot pinpoint exactly the time and place, we should be able to identify some turning point that allows us to compare the "after" with the "before." People who live as if they have been Christians all their lives get bogged down in some kind of stale piety that loses its flavor.

Without the reminder of the Passover, there could not be a week-long, or a life-long celebration of feeding on bread without yeast, or a life without the pollution of sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread does

⁸⁰⁴ Num. 18:20

⁸⁰⁵ Eph. 1:18

⁸⁰⁶ I Pet. 1:3,4

not tell us that we attain sinless perfection, but it shows us what to feed on in our fellowship with the Lord.

There is also a logical link between the Passover and the consecration of all the first born animals. God reminds Israel that they are His first born son of all the nations of the world. God says through Jeremiah: "I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son."⁸⁰⁷ The proof of their status in this world is the fact that they were redeemed by the blood of the lamb.

There is also a strong link between the Passover and Pentecost; the Passover was preceded by the celebration of the First Fruits. The last two feasts speak of a new creation, which began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. God looks forward to a harvest from every nation, tribe, people, and language, who will be standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, people who have gone through death and who are partakers of the resurrection of His Son. The celebration of these feasts of redemption and life will be the best protection against the imitations that the enemy offers in his celebrations of corruption and death. Celebrating God's feasts will make us immune to the propaganda of the devil.

The Lord instructs Moses, "Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel," but at this point it is not indicated when that would be. We know, however, that the three principal feasts were: Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, so that is probably the time for the gathering. The Feast of Tabernacles is not mentioned in this chapter. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says about this feast: "This festival was observed on the 15th day of the seventh month to commemorate the wandering of Israel in the wilderness. Features of the celebration included a holy convocation on the first and eighth days, and the offering of many animal sacrifices. The Israelites were also commanded to live in booths made of palm and willow trees during the festival to commemorate their period of wilderness wandering when they lived in temporary shelters. This feast is also known as the Feast of Booths." The purpose of this feast was a reminder of the pilgrimage of man on earth. God wants us to keep in mind that, as long as we are on earth, we have not arrived. The writer to the Hebrews translates this for us, when, speaking about the patriarchs, he says: "They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country-- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."⁸⁰⁸

When Jerusalem became the center of religious activity, many people would make a regular pilgrimage to the temple. But it is also possible that the cities that were assigned to the Levites, and which were scattered throughout the country, were designated as places where people could appear before the Lord. For many the trip to Jerusalem would be too long and too costly to make three times a year.

The last clause of the covenant, in vs. 25 and 26, contains four warnings: "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk." The prohibition to sacrifice anything containing yeast is a repetition of what was said in Ex. 23:18, "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and, later, when more specific instructions are given regarding the grain offerings, we read: "Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire."⁸⁰⁹ Yeast, being the symbol of corruption, was unacceptable to God as a sacrifice, with the exception of the sacrifice of two loaves of bread brought as a wave offering at the Feast of Pentecost.⁸¹⁰ When the Lord gave instructions for the celebration of the Passover Feast, He said to Moses, regarding the meat of the lamb, the blood of which had been applied to the door posts: "Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it."⁸¹¹ The warning in vs. 26, "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk," is a repetition of ch. 23:19. In both cases it is given in the context of the harvest. As suggested before, the cooking of a young goat in its mother's milk was probably a pagan sacrifice to the spirit of the land, performed at the time of harvest, and God wanted the Israelites to keep away from anything that would draw them into enemy territory.

⁸⁰⁷ Jer. 31:9

⁸⁰⁸ Heb. 11:13-16

⁸⁰⁹ Lev. 2:11

⁸¹⁰ See Lev. 23:17

⁸¹¹ Ex. 12:10

We could ask why these repetitions were given as part of the term of the covenant? The covenant God made with Israel was a covenant of restoration. The Israelites had sinned gravely in the making of the Golden Calf. Now, God has forgiven them and taken them back into fellowship with Him. He pledges His protection and His presence for the coming conquest of Canaan. God wants the people to understand that, first of all, He wants them to celebrate life with Him. Restoration of fellowship with God, as far as man is concerned, means going back to the principles he had left behind. There are no new elements introduced in this new treaty.

Moses is then instructed to write down the terms of the covenant God made with Israel. What Moses wrote was not the Ten Commandments; those were carved into stone by the finger of God Himself. The Ten Commandments formed the Constitution, the moral law which Israel had to observe. As we saw before, most of these commandments were, probably, already common knowledge among the nations. We concluded this from the fact that traces of the Ten Commandments have been found to be known among tribes who had lived in isolation from the rest of the world for centuries.⁸¹² The covenant was drawn up after the incident with the Golden Calf. The gist of the covenant was that idol worship would lead to death and loss of salvation and that only celebration of fellowship with God would protect the people from the snares of the enemy. Nehemiah would tell the people centuries later: “the joy of the LORD is your strength”⁸¹³. “Strength” here meaning “stronghold” or “protection.” The Hebrew word is *ma'owz*, which is, in *Strongs Definitions Definition*: “a fortified place,” “a defence.” *The Brown-Driver-Briggs' Definition* describes it as: “a place or means of safety, a protection, a refuge, a stronghold.” And Paul admonishes us: “Therefore let us keep the feast.”⁸¹⁴ Fellowship with God is a celebration.

We read in vs. 28, “Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments.” Whether this verse is a repetition of the first visit of Moses with God on top of Mount Sinai, or whether Moses went through two periods of a forty day fast, is not clear. In his review of the encounter with God, Moses says at the end of his life: “When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water.”⁸¹⁵ This seems to refer to a single incident. The presence of the Lord, the source of Life, would make the need for food redundant. It also seems that the phrase: “And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments,” refers to God’s writing, not Moses’. Some commentators see this as a possibility that Moses could have written the commandments on the second tablet. But that seems to be unnecessary speculation.

The last section of this chapter, vs. 29-35 describes the effect the encounter with God had upon Moses. We read: “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.” Moses did not see in himself what others saw in him. Oswald Chambers once wrote: “We want to be conscious saints and unconscious sinners; God makes us conscious sinners and unconscious saints.” It might have been better for Moses had he not become a conscious saint, because then he would not have felt the need to wear a veil.

Superficial reading of these verses would give the impression that Moses used the veil to protect the Israelites from the radiance of his face, but this is not the case, since the veil is put on after Moses spoke to them. Moses knew that the glory would wear off and he desperately tried to hang on to it. The veil served to protect Moses, not the people. The apostle Paul penetrates the core of the problem when he says: “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away.”⁸¹⁶ The veil hides the fact that Moses is vulnerable. When Moses wore the veil, people had the impression that the glory was always there, but it wasn’t! And Moses did not want them to know that. He wanted to project the image of the man of God, whose fellowship with God was not subject to ups and downs. He did not want them to see that the real Moses needed to be recharged from time to time.

We would miss the point, though, if we concentrate too much on the veil. We may find some consolation in discovering that Moses was just as human and vulnerable as we are, but we should realize

⁸¹² In our own experience, we found that the “Me” tribe of Irian Jaya, Indonesia, was acquainted with four of the five commandments of the Second Tablet.

⁸¹³ Neh. 8:10

⁸¹⁴ I Cor. 5:8 (KJV)

⁸¹⁵ Deut. 9:9

⁸¹⁶ II Cor. 3:13

that we all live in a world that is fallen and we are all subject to the pollution of sin. We may need a veil ourselves. There is just as much of God's grace in the veil to cover our spiritual nakedness as there was in the cover the Lord made for Adam and Eve for their physical and emotional nakedness. The point, however, is not the veil, but the glory it covered. The real testimony of Moses' being with God was not in what he said, but in the glory that shone from his face.

Most of the impact we will have upon our fellow men is by something that we are not conscious of, by something that we cannot fake or force, by something that isn't even ours. After all, the glory on Moses' face was God's glory, not his. When we become less and He becomes more, people will know it, and the less we are aware of it, the better. At the time of consummation, we will all be filled with the glory of God. In his great vision at the end of the book of Revelation, John describes the church, the bride of Christ, as follows: "And [he] showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God." Whether we know it or not, Paul says: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."⁸¹⁷ And, if from time to time we feel spiritually naked, we may put on a veil as Moses did.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

A call for volunteers 35:1-35

To us, as impatient modern people, the long inventory given in this appeal for volunteers, seems redundant. We would have condensed this chapter into a few lines only, especially the vs. 11-19. It is hard to say something new and fresh about the articles mentioned in this section. Even *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, which normally does not shy away from details, opens this chapter by saying: "The principal subjects in this chapter have been already largely considered in the notes on chapters xxv, xvi, xxvii, xxviii, xxix, xxx, and xxi, and to those the reader is particularly desired to refer, together with the parallel texts in the margin." But unless we learn to take time to look at what it takes to serve the Lord and to finger lovingly all that was consecrated to Him as a wave offering, we miss the blessing. All the items mentioned in this chapter are tokens of hearts that were moved and willing to give to the Lord.

The chapter sets out by reminding the people of the Sabbath's command. This, in itself, should strike us as unusual, since God, in the previous chapter, spoke to Moses about four other feasts besides the Sabbath. Obviously, Moses must have said more to the Israelites than is recorded here. It is true that the Sabbath is the original feast, the only one that existed before sin came into God's creation and spoiled it. All the other feasts celebrate redemption, resurrection, consummation, and pilgrimage, events that would not have occurred if sin had not come. The Sabbath supersedes it all. Those who celebrate the Sabbath enter into the rest of God and are in communion with Him. As God's creatures we are part of God's original Sabbath, and as His redeemed, we will enter into His final and ultimate Sabbath.

In the light of what is said, it seems strange that the breaking of the Sabbath would be a crime, deserving capital punishment. We read: "Whoever does any work on it must be put to death." Seen in the light of the meaning of the Sabbath, however, we understand that those that do not celebrate life are already dead. The punishment of death comes only to the dead.

The prohibition to light a fire on the Sabbath has been interpreted in various way by different Jews throughout the centuries. Most orthodox Jews will not cook any food on the Sabbath, but they will use lights.

The offering that is detailed in vs. 5-9 is preceded by the, seemingly contradictory, statement that it is a command of the Lord and at the same time it is a freewill offering. "Everyone who is willing and whose heart moved him" is a recurring thought in this chapter. When Israel left Egypt, the Egyptians paid them back for the four centuries of slave labor they had performed. The payment they received must have been substantial because it is described as plunder. We read that at the night of the Exodus: "The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians."⁸¹⁸ It is from this loot that the Lord expects the people to contribute for the

⁸¹⁷ II Cor. 3:18

⁸¹⁸ Ex. 12:35,36

building of the tabernacle. We read in the next chapter that the response was so overwhelming that the people were told to stop bringing their gifts.⁸¹⁹ This indicates that, in spite of their tendency toward idolatry, there must have been a deep hunger in the hearts of the people for genuine fellowship with God.

The verses 5-9 give a list of items that were needed for the building of the place of worship and for the service: precious metals, yarn, linen, goat hair and animal skins, wood, oil and spices, and precious stones. Vs. 10 indicates that the labor was performed by a whole army of volunteers, under the supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab. Moses had received the vision and Bezalel and Oholiab were officially appointed to do the work, but the task was carried out in such a way that, when the work was finished, the whole nation would have participated. It was their tabernacle; they made it.

It takes vision, skill, and labor to do the work of the Lord. When the tabernacle was finished, it was filled with the presence of the Lord, but it also contained the soul of the people. The tabernacle with its furniture was a copy of what Moses had seen on the mountain, but it was more than a copy of the original. The tabernacle in heaven is a spiritual reality; what the Israelites made was an expression in material things of this reality. The essence of art is the ability to transfer one reality into another. "Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stone . . ." as Shakespeare put it.⁸²⁰ In imitation of God's creative genius, man has the ability to express into inert material feelings, thoughts and beauty. The human body itself is the expression of man's soul and man can put pain on canvas or carve figures in stone and use vibrations of sound that convey the deepest abstract realities. The more we think of this, the deeper the mystery becomes. This tabernacle with its boards and hooks and covers was to be a picture of heaven on earth; it foreshadowed the fact that the Word would become flesh and would dwell among us.⁸²¹

All the items mentioned in these verses have been named before with the exception of the tent pegs and the ropes in vs. 18.

After receiving the instructions, we read in vs. 20: "Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence." This, seemingly redundant remark, suggests the intensity of feeling that accompanied the event. Moses had conveyed the vision to the people; not only in the words he spoke, but by the radiance of his face. They had been deeply moved by what they had heard and seen and, as they went home, they looked at both their possessions and their ornaments, and they were gripped by a spirit of generosity that have never before been evinced. Gifts started pouring in, and giving became an experience of hilarious joy.

Nothing is more enriching than giving. We only possess what we give away; what we hoard possesses us. Paul calls this: "the grace that God has given." In his second epistle to the Corinthians he says: "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."⁸²² What we give is, after all, only the symbol of the real thing. An engagement ring is a token of a promise of love and of affection, it is not love itself. I don't know what earrings represent, but they are certainly not the real thing. Most of the giving of the Israelites was not sacrificial. It was not, what Paul calls, "beyond their ability." It was also not general. We read: "All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD." "All who were willing" implies that some did not contribute. God's grace was available to all, but all did not avail themselves of it.

The substance of the items that were brought differed from person to person. Women cherish different things than men do. Some of the ornaments were typical adornments for ladies, others were worn by men and women alike. Apparently, the modern custom for men to wear earrings is the reoccurrence of and ancient fad. *The Pulpit Commentary* notes: "That among the Hebrews gold ornaments were worn by men, as well as by women, is indicated by ch. iii. 22, and ch. xxxii. 2. The Egyptian men at the time of the Exodus wore armlets, bracelets, and sometimes anklets, but not often earrings. Earrings, however, had been worn by the household of Jacob (Gen. xxxv. 2)."

⁸¹⁹ Ex. 36:3-7

⁸²⁰ As You Like It

⁸²¹ John 1:14

⁸²² II Cor. 8:1-5

Other items dedicated to the Lord were yarn, textiles, and even boards of acacia wood. The latter, probably, was locally available and the offering consisted in the fact that the men felled the trees and cut the wood into timber of useable size. This was more an offering of labor and man hours than of material.

A distinction is also made among classes of people. The leaders or rulers were in possession of the precious stones that were needed for the high priestly garments. The Hebrew word that is translated "leader" or "ruler" is *nasiy'* or *nasi'* which means "an exalted one," sometimes translated as captain, chief, governor, or prince." These must have been the heads of clans, which later took a leading part in the dedication of the tabernacle, as described in Numbers.⁸²³ The precious stones served as evidence of the authority these men exercised over the nation. In sacrificing these jewels, they put their offices before the Lord, which was a recognition of the source of their authority.

There was also the dedication of skills to the Lord. From the humble activity of spinning yarn and making cloth, to wood cutting and other forms of manual labor, all was put into the service of the Lord. The one the Lord had chosen to be in charge of the whole project was Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. He was a man gifted in various crafts. The Bible recognizes this as a spiritual gift, for we read that he was filled with the Spirit of God "to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship." He, and his assistant, Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan also had the ability to teach others. We find here the Old Testament equivalent of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, about which the apostle Paul writes extensively in his epistles.

Bezalel and Oholiab were also images of our Lord Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews calls Jesus: "the builder of a house" and he says: "We are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."⁸²⁴ Christ is the builder of the actual tabernacle and He bestows upon us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not "to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship," but to work with the real stuff of which gold, silver, bronze, precious stones and wood are only vague shadows. The real building, God's tabernacle, or the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place in which the Lord dwells, is the body of believers who have been redeemed and washed by the blood of the Lamb.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

The building of the tent 36:1-38

The separation into chapters of the material presented in ch. 35-40 is rather random and at some points incorrect. It seems, for instance, that vs. 35 of the previous chapter should not be separated from vs. 1 of this chapter. The only argument in favor of divisions is that it would make the reading seem tedious and more redundant, if no lines were drawn at all.

In ch. 35 the freewill offering was called for; the plan for the tent was laid out in detail, and the two main builders were appointed. In ch. 36 the offerings are transferred to the builders, and the erection of the tent is described in detail. Ch. 37 describes both the making of the furniture for the two inner chambers of the tent and also the anointing oil and the incense for the sacrifices. Ch. 38 deals with the making of everything that pertains to the outside of the tent: the pieces of furniture to be used there and the fence around the yard. It concludes with an inventory list of the metals used for the construction. Ch. 39 goes back inside for the making of the curtain that separates the two inner chambers, and it describes the way the garments are made. The conclusion presents the transfer of the finished product to Moses, who inspects it and declares it ready with a blessing that falls upon all the people. The final chapter of Exodus shows us how the building went up and how God took possession of it.

As we said before, all this moves too slowly for people of the twentieth century who are used to live in the fast lane of life. This may be exactly the lesson we will have to learn from these chapters. We are so used to rushing through time on earth that we cannot slow down when we are faced with eternity. People in the Middle Ages took two or more centuries to build their cathedrals to the Lord. It took Solomon seven years to build the temple in Jerusalem. It took Israel about one year in the desert to build the tabernacle. In our age of prefab and modular buildings and concrete structures that are poured in one day (and demolished

⁸²³ See Num. 7:12-84

⁸²⁴ Heb. 3:3,4

in one), we have totally lost the love of detail and affinity to what is beautiful and functional and lasting. It can be very relaxing to go through these chapters and see how every piece is brought and waved before the Lord and then laid out and used and prepared and put together. If we find ourselves unable to do this, we should start at the end and work backwards; at the tent filled with the Shekinah, and examine the details of the structure.

“Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out-- until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.”⁸²⁵

Vs. 1 teaches us that skill and knowledge are gifts of God. True humility will not dwell upon our inability to do certain things. To be aware of one's abilities is not a lack of humility. We are humble if we know that our abilities are a gift from the Lord. It is also a gift from God if we learn to obey. Vs. 1 states: “The LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary [and] to do the work just as the LORD has commanded.”

The vs. 3-7 paint us a picture that would be inconceivable in our present day: Too much came in for the project! I am trying to imagine a church or a mission society giving out the word to donors, please, not to send any more gifts, because the budget had been met! It is this kind of atmosphere that makes us understand why Moses goes over the details more than once. There was the vision of the reality God had shown him on top of the mountain, there was the blueprint and the spirit of freewill offering; there were the parts spread out on the desert floor, and there was the erection of those parts into the building of a dwelling place of the Lord. Then the Lord came in His glory and dwelt among them. No wonder, Moses could not leave the subject alone!

When more comes in than is needed, Moses does not look for another project, as we would have done. Moses knows only the project God has commanded him to work on.

The first things made are the ten curtains for the tabernacle, with their loops and golden clasps. All this corresponds exactly with the details given in ch. 26:1-6. The figures of the cherubim woven into the material or embroidered upon it, represented heaven. The second phase is the fabrication of the eleven goat hair curtains, which are fastened together with brass clasps. The description of those curtains is found in ch. 26:7-11. The outer covering of the tent with red dyed ram skins and “tachash” was described in ch. 26:14. The construction of the frame of the tent was laid out in detail in ch. 26:14-29. The curtain that separates the two inner chambers was described in ch. 26:33,34 and the curtain at the entrance with its supporting frame, in ch. 26:36,37. Now the tent is finished, but it is still empty. Thus ends this chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

The making of the inner sanctum furniture 37:1-29

This chapter deals entirely with the making of the furniture for the two rooms in the sanctuary. The articles described are: the ark (vs. 1-5); the atonement cover for the ark (vs. 6-9); the table with its plates and dishes and bowls and its pitchers (vs. 10-16); the lampstand (vs. 17-24); the altar for the burning of incense (vs. 25-28); and finally, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the gold altar. (vs. 29).

The vs. 1-9 are all in the third person singular, referring to Bezalel. From vs. 10 on every verse is in the third person plural. “They” must refer to the group of craftsmen that stood under the supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab. It is interesting to see that the making of the ark was entrusted to one person only: Bezalel. We read about him that God had “filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts-- to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship.”⁸²⁶ It must have been an awesome responsibility for one man to make that which was to represent the throne of God in heaven from which the whole universe is ruled. He was also to prepare the place of which God Himself had said: “There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with

⁸²⁵ Ex. 40:34-38

⁸²⁶ Ex. 35:31-33

you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”⁸²⁷ Bezalel must have been one of the most unusual artists who ever lived.

The vs. 1-5 follow to the letter the instructions God gave to Moses about the making of the ark in ch. 25:10-14. It was as if Bezalel had the blue print before him and he looked at it continuously as he was carrying out the instructions. We have seen before that TLB translates the measurements in units that we can understand, making the ark a chest 3 ¾feet long, 2 ¼feet wide, and 2 ¼feet high. In metric measures that would be approximately 115 x 70 x 70 cm, a rather moderate size. The impressive feature of the ark was not its size but the material used. The acacia wood was not a very valuable substance. It was one of the more ordinary kinds of wood for multiple purpose use. Since the ark was a symbol of the Incarnation, we may draw the line between this piece of furniture and the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can say that, from a human viewpoint, there was nothing unusual about Christ’s body. He must have been a man of average height, who distinguished Himself in nothing from the average Israelite of His day. What set Him apart was the glory of God. In working on the ark, Bezalel painted a portrait of the Word of God who became flesh. We can hardly presume that this man would have understood what he was actually doing, but his artistic intuition may have told him that the object he worked on was more than a wooden chest covered with gold; that it was something that went far beyond his human comprehension.

Vs. 6-9 describe the making of the atonement cover out of pure gold, with the image of two cherubim, or angels on either end of the cover. TLB uses the words “guardian angels” here. These verses, also, follow to the letter the instructions given to Moses in ch. 25:17-20. We are told that the cherubim were of one piece with the cover. The technique for the making of this cover is not revealed to us. The cherubim were of “hammered gold.” Whether this means that no mold was used in the making of the cover, we don’t know. It is unlikely that the figures were engraved upon the lid, as some commentators assume. The fact that they are looking toward each other and are facing the cover gives the impression that they were either standing up or kneeling down on top of the cover. In the unlikely event that the lost ark will ever be found, we will know what it looks like.

We know very little about the meaning of the name cherubim. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes about them: “winged angelic beings, often associated with worship and praise of God. The cherubim are first mentioned in the Bible in <Genesis 3:24>. When God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He placed cherubim at the east of the garden, ‘and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.’” ... And: “Symbolic representations of cherubim were used in the tabernacle in the wilderness. Two cherubim made of gold were stationed at the two ends of the Mercy Seat, above the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies <Ex. 25:17-22; 1 Chr. 28:18; Heb. 9:5>. Artistic designs of cherubim decorated the ten curtains <Ex. 26:1; 36:8> and the veil <Ex. 26:31; 2 Chr. 3:14> of the tabernacle.” It is obvious that there is a whole hierarchy of heavenly beings we know little about, except for, in some cases, the names.

In this instance, also, Bezalel made something that was far beyond his own comprehension. He was probably aware of God’s Word to Moses that the atonement cover was the dwelling place of the Shekinah glory and the very name “atonement cover” was to convey the thought that it was the place where God would deal with the sins of His people. Of the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, of whom this piece of art was a representation, he cannot have known anything. The Greek word the Septuagint uses for the atonement cover is *hilasterion*, which is the word Paul uses in Romans when he says that God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement.⁸²⁸ The KJV uses here the word “propitiation” as the translation for the Greek *hilasterion*. What Bezalel made in the form of a precious metal was the very essence of the Incarnation. In Jesus Christ God and man came together and this man made atonement for the sin of the world by pouring out His soul into death. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the atonement cover,⁸²⁹ in a symbolic gesture to point toward the time when God would deal with the sin of mankind in a complete and final way.

The teamwork begins with the making of the table. From here on the personal pronoun “they” is used instead of “he.” The NIV is the only translation, however, that makes this transition. The Hebrew does not specify anything, since the personal pronoun is implied in the verb. Now we move back into the first chamber of the tent, the place that is called the Holy Place. The account of the making of the table corresponds exactly with the instructions given in ch. 25:23-29. There is no indication as to how this table

⁸²⁷ Ex. 25:22

⁸²⁸ Rom. 3:25

⁸²⁹ Lev. 16:14,15

was used while Israel was in the desert. Grain for baking bread was not available until the people entered Canaan. We read nowhere that, during their forty years' journey in the desert, the manna was used to make the shew bread, but this was probably the case. The main purpose of the table was the exhibition of the shew bread. But the table was, obviously, used for other purposes also, since we are told that "they made from pure gold the articles for the table-- its plates and dishes and bowls and its pitchers for the pouring out of drink offerings." There is no further explanation about these utensils. From *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, we copy the following about the table and the bread: "The table of the bread of the Presence, or showbread (Heb. shulhan lehem panim, 'table of the face,' i.e., of Jehovah) was placed on the N, or right, side, facing the lampstand <Exo. 40:22>. It was made of acacia wood, two cubits long, one broad, and one and one-half high. This proportion between the length and the height is accurately maintained in the sculptural form on the Arch of Titus. The surface, or top of the table, rested on a frame a handbreadth deep; around it ran a rim with a border of gold projecting above the top to keep articles from slipping off the table. The legs were apparently mortised into the sides (as is usual today), with rings near each corner for the carrying staves <25:23-30; 37:10-16>. The bread placed upon the table (Heb. 'Bread of the Presence') was made of fine wheat flour (unleavened), baked in twelve loaves (cakes), each containing one-fifth of an ephah of flour. These, according to Jewish tradition, as well as the dimensions of the table, would seem to have been placed upon plates in two piles of six each. They were renewed every Sabbath, were to be eaten by the priests exclusively (and that in the sanctuary only), and were then replaced by fresh loaves <1 Sam. 21:6>, which had been prepared overnight by the Levites <1 Chr. 9:32>. To each pile of loaves incense was added, probably placed in bowls beside the bread, for "a memorial portion for the bread, even an offering made by fire to the Lord <Lev. 24:5-9>."

In the context of this chapter, the shew bread that was exhibited on the table from Sabbath to Sabbath is not mentioned. The bread was not part of the work project this team had to carry out. But it is difficult to mention the table without making some remarks about the bread. The shew bread seems to symbolize more than one divine truth. This bread was not meant for general consumption. It remained on the table for a whole week and was eaten only by the priests after it had been replaced with the new. The first lesson to be drawn from the symbolism of the shew bread seems to be, in Moses' words: "That man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."⁸³⁰ The Word of God was the instrument of creation. We owe our existence to God's speaking. We also owe our subsisting to the Word of God. The writer to the Hebrews says about Jesus that He is "sustaining all things by his powerful word."⁸³¹ But more than anything else, we owe our salvation to the Word. Jesus identifies Himself with the bread, when He says: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."⁸³² The main truth expressed by the bread seems to have been the Word of God as a vital ingredient on to fellowship with God. It is this Word, whether in spoken or written form, or as revealed in the Incarnation, that draws us into communion with God. Without the Word there is no fellowship.

The next item is the making of the lampstand or the menorah. There can be no confusion as to the purpose of this lampstand; it is to produce light, God's light. The lampstand itself is made in the form of a budding, blooming and fruit-bearing almond tree. There is a trunk with seven branches on the top of which are seven lamps. This project also, is made exactly according to the specifications given earlier in ch. 25:31-38. That the lampstand portrays the Person and work of the Holy Spirit is obvious from John's report about the vision he received of the throne of God. In Revelation we read: "Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God."⁸³³

The most amazing feature of the lampstand is its suggestion of life and growth. The menorah represents a living tree which bears the fruit of light. The fact that God's light is represented in the symbol of a growing tree suggests that it stands for the work of the Holy Spirit through man. Israel was the steward of God's revelation in this world. In that sense the lampstand symbolized Israel as a nation.

In Zechariah's beautiful vision of the lampstand, the angel explains the meaning of it as the work of the Holy Spirit as contrasted to the force of arms of the Persian empire. "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."⁸³⁴ But when Zechariah asks for the meaning of the details, he

⁸³⁰ Deut. 8:3

⁸³¹ Heb. 1:3

⁸³² John 6:35

⁸³³ Rev. 4:5

⁸³⁴ Zech. 4:6

is told that they represent “the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth,” meaning the High Priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel. We read: “Then I asked the angel, ‘What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?’ Again I asked him, ‘What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?’ He replied, ‘Do you not know what these are?’ ‘No, my lord,’ I said. So he said, ‘These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.’”⁸³⁵

The same double meaning is found in Jesus’ words to the New Testament believers. At one place He says: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”⁸³⁶ But He also says to the believers: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.”⁸³⁷ So, we may conclude that the lampstand represents the supernatural element in the testimony of the child of God on earth. John sees the risen Lord in heaven, standing among seven lampstands.⁸³⁸ But we also hear the Lord say to the church in Ephesus: “Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”⁸³⁹ We are to be God’s light in this world through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. But being a light is a growing process. It begins with a bud and opens into a bloom and finally it bears fruit. Paul expresses this truth when he says: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).”⁸⁴⁰

This lampstand was made of pure gold, weighing one talent, or, as the Good News Bible says: “He used seventy-five pounds of pure gold to make the lampstand and all its equipment.” TLB, however, gives a different value to the “talent of pure gold.” We read: “The entire lampstand weighed 107 pounds, all pure gold.” *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines the talent as: “The heaviest unit of weight in the Hebrew system. The talent was used to weigh gold <2 Sam. 12:30>, silver <1 Kin. 20:39>, iron <1 Chr. 29:7>, bronze <Ex. 38:29>, and many other commodities. The common talent weighed about 3000 shekels or the full weight that a man could carry. The shekel weighed about 11.4 grams, or less than an ounce.” This definition makes the talent 3000 x 11.4 grams = 34.2 kilograms or 75.24 lb.”

The last item mentioned in this chapter is the altar of incense, vs. 25-29, which corresponds again exactly with the command recorded in ch. 30:1-6. *The Pulpit Commentary* states that the mention of this altar is “in its right place, among the furniture of the outer chamber of the tabernacle-- not, as in ch. xxx. 1-6, out of place.” We commented already on the fact that there was a logical reason for postponing the mention of this altar until after the rules and regulations for the ordination of the priests were given, so it would add emphasis to the most important part of the priests’ ministry.

The Good News Bible gives the measurements of this altar as follows: “It was square, 18 inches long and 18 inches wide, and it was 36 inches high.” TLB concurs with these by saying: “It was 18 inches square and 3 feet high, with its corner-horns made as part of the altar so that it was all one piece.”

This altar symbolized in a unique way the worship of God by man in a way that was acceptable to God. The altar stands for prayer. It is a copy of the original John saw in Revelation, where we read: “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.”⁸⁴¹ The writer to the Hebrews connects this altar directly to the ark. We almost get the impression that he mistakenly puts the altar at the wrong place, behind the curtain instead of in front. We read: “Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant.”⁸⁴² The idea expressed, however, is that the altar and the ark belonged together and that the curtain that separated the two was temporary.

As we said before, the most essential part of the priests’ duty was to worship God; this worship was done in a symbolic way by burning incense on the golden altar. All the other pieces of furniture, especially those outside the tent, spoke of sin that had to be reconciled and of a condition that was a transient phase in the history of creation. Worship of God is eternal. We will spend eternity burning our incense before the Lord, our Creator and Redeemer. Prayer is the way our spirit interacts with the Spirit of

⁸³⁵ Zech. 4:11-14

⁸³⁶ John 8:12

⁸³⁷ Matt. 5:14

⁸³⁸ See Rev. 1:13, 20

⁸³⁹ Rev. 2:5

⁸⁴⁰ Eph. 5:8,9

⁸⁴¹ Rev. 8:3

⁸⁴² Heb. 9:3,4

God. There is a mistaken notion that prayer is somehow a way of communicating with God that is limited to our life on earth. The hymn writer was wrong when he saw himself taking his flight from Mount Pisgah to seize his everlasting prize, singing: "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"⁸⁴³ Our Lord Jesus Christ spent hours and whole nights in prayer on earth, but at present, in heaven, He still intercedes for us. How could the apostle Paul otherwise say: "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us?"⁸⁴⁴ And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews adds: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."⁸⁴⁵ And, finally, as we saw before, we do see the original altar of incense, of which this one was a copy, in heaven being used by saints and angels.

The incense represents more than human prayer. We read about the angel in Revelation: "he was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne." The incense is added to man's prayers as a divine element that transforms our imperfect and halting utterances before God into a sacrifice that is a delightful odor to Him. Paul refers to this divine addition when he says: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."⁸⁴⁶ Prayer is a complicated and profound activity, the depth and effect of which we will not be able to completely understand as long as we are on this earth. We will surely have a better understanding of what we do when we pray in heaven.

No explanation is given as to the purpose of the horns of this altar. We only read that Aaron has to apply some of the blood of the sacrifice that was brought on the Day of Atonement on these horns. "Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the LORD."⁸⁴⁷

In addition to this last piece of furniture for the inner sanctuary, the making of the anointing oil and the incense is mentioned. The list of ingredients is not given at this point. The recipe for the anointing oil is found in ch. 30:23-25. Also the ingredients for the incense to be burnt on the altar are not repeated here; the recipe for those is found in ch. 30:34,35.

The mention of the incense at this point, right after the making of the golden altar is mentioned, seems logical, but the mention of the anointing seems out of context. The place for the oil should have been in the context of ch. 39, where the making of the priestly garments is described. The fact that the oil and incense are found here together emphasizes the divine element in the service at the golden altar. It is the priest, who has been set apart by the anointing oil who serves at this altar and burns the incense, that gives the supernatural touch to the prayers of men. If the incense mixed with human prayers exemplifies the ministry of the Holy Spirit through us, the anointing shows us that only the saints of God, those who are under the unction of the Spirit can serve at this altar. The Spirit only intercedes with groans that words cannot express for those who are filled with the Spirit.⁸⁴⁸ How effective these prayers are and how influential in the balance of power in the heavenlies is clear when we turn again to Revelation. In the same part where the angel in heaven mixes the prayers of the saints with incense to make them rise before God, we see that those prayers have an immediate effect upon what happens on earth. "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." It is the prayer of God's people that make the peals of thunder roll on earth and cause the earthquakes that make the walls crumble. That is how the walls of Jericho and of Berlin came down.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

This chapter can be divided in three sections:

1. **The furniture in courtyard** vs. 1-8
2. **The court itself** vs. 9-20
3. **The inventory of material used** vs. 21-31

⁸⁴³ "Sweet Hour of Prayer" by William W. Walford

⁸⁴⁴ Rom. 8:34

⁸⁴⁵ Heb. 7:25

⁸⁴⁶ Rom. 8:26

⁸⁴⁷ Ex. 30:10. (See also Lev. 16:18)

⁸⁴⁸ See Rom. 8:26

The Pulpit Commentary notes here: “Vers. 1-7 correspond to vers. 1-8 of ch. xxvii; ver. 8 corresponds to ver. 18 of ch. xxx.; and vers. 9-20 correspond to vers. 9-19 of ch. xxvii.”

1. The furniture in courtyard vs. 1-8

The vs. 1-7 describe the making of the bronze burnt offering altar. This section corresponds word for word with the blueprint given in ch. 27:1-8, with the exception of the vs. 5 in both chapters. In ch. 38 the verse speaks about rings to be made and in ch. 27 about a ledge. The Hebrew words used are not identical (*tabba`ath* - for ring; and *karkob* for rim or margin), and we are obviously not dealing with the same detail here. The Good News Bible gives the measurements as “7 ½feet long and 7 ½feet wide, and it was 4 ½feet high.” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* asserts here: “The more important material used is bronze, and the whole construction was as unlike that of the ordinary lay altar as possible.” It seems that it is near to impossible to reconstruct this altar with the directions given in Scripture. Moses must have given oral information to the workers on the basis of what he saw on the top of Mount Sinai, which is not recorded for us.

The bronze washbasin, which is mention briefly in vs. 8 is described in ch. 30:18-21. No measurements are given here. It must have been a rather small basin, since water was a scarce commodity in the desert. Two interesting pieces of information given are that the basin was made from the mirrors of the women and that those were women who served at the entrance of the tent.

A lot can be said about human vanity. I don't think that women are necessarily more vain than men, but they pay generally more attention to their apparel. This, of course, is part of the way God made male and female, and as such it is not sinful for a woman to make herself attractive. Peter mentions the danger of covering an ugly soul with beautiful decorations. “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.”⁸⁴⁹ Some of this penetrating truth must lie at the basis of the sacrifice these women made here of their mirrors. We are not told what kind of service these women performed at the entrance of the tent. Their brief mention here indicates that the religious service of the Israelites was not a purely male function. Women played an important part in it. Their sacrifice of that which was part of their very nature made it possible for the priests to serve the Lord without endangering their lives. After all it was said: “Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die.”⁸⁵⁰

2. The court itself vs. 9-20

Vs. 9-20 describe the making of the courtyard. This section corresponds to the instructions given in ch. 27:9-19. Some details, that must have been implied in the original instructions, are added here, like the tops being overlaid with silver (vs.17 and 19). The Good News Bible gives the measurements of the courtyard as 50 x 25 yards and the curtain at the entrance 10 yards long, leaving 7 ½yards on either side of the entrance. TLB gives the same measurements in feet: 150 x 75 feet and 22 ½feet for the drapes on either side of the entrance. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* writes about the courtyard: “The attempt at reconstruction of the tabernacle begins naturally with the “court” (*chatser*) or outer enclosure in which the tabernacle stood ... The description is given in <Exo 27:9-18; 38:9-20>. The court is to be conceived of as an enclosed space of 100 cubits (150 ft.) in length, and 50 cubits (75 ft.) in breadth, its sides formed (with special arrangement for the entrance) by “hangings” or curtains (*qela'im*) of ‘fine twined linen,’ 5 cubits (7 ½ft.) in height, supported by pillars of brass (bronze) 5 cubits apart, to which the hangings were attached by “hooks” and “fillets” of silver. It thus consisted of two squares of 50 cubits each.”

The Matthew's Henry Commentary draws a good and interesting spiritual lesson from this courtyard. We quote: “This represented the state of the Old Testament church: it was a garden enclosed; the worshippers were then confined to a little compass. But the enclosure being of curtains only intimated that the confinement of the church in one particular nation was not to be perpetual. The dispensation itself was a tabernacle-dispensation, movable and mutable, and in due time to be taken down and folded up, when the

⁸⁴⁹ I Pet. 3:3,4

⁸⁵⁰ Ex. 30:20,21

place of the tent should be enlarged and its cords lengthened, to make room for the Gentile world, as is foretold, <Isa. 54:2-3>. The church here on earth is but the court of God's house, and happy they that tread these courts and flourish in them; but through these courts we are passing to the holy place above. Blessed are those that dwell in that house of God: they will be still praising him. The enclosing of a court before the tabernacle teaches us a gradual approach to God. The priests that ministered must pass through the holy court, before they entered the holy house. Thus before solemn ordinances there ought to be the separated and enclosed court of a solemn preparation, in which we must wash our hands, and so draw near with a true heart."

Seen from the outside, the courtyard with the fence of white linen which reflected the sunlight, exemplified purity. It was an image of the holiness of God. It was understood that nothing impure ought to penetrate such an enclosure. David captures the feeling of the pilgrim who approaches the tabernacle with the words: "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."⁸⁵¹ And John's reaction to the revelation of the New Jerusalem says the same: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."⁸⁵²

Yet, the entrance to the court consisted of an inviting colorful gate, made of "blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen-- the work of an embroiderer." Contrary to existing misconceptions, holiness is colorful. White may seem dull and uneventful from a distance, but when we come closer we understand that, what looks to us as white only, is, in reality a combination of all the colors of the rainbow.

The paradox of the construction of the tabernacle is that in order to enter one had to be covered by the blood of the sacrifice that was on the altar inside the courtyard. Actually, the Israelites had been drawn into the covenant with God by the death of the Passover lamb. The sacrifices that were brought inside the courtyard were not for salvation, but for those who had been saved already and were in need of cleaning of their sins, subsequent to salvation. The sacrifices brought in the tabernacle were an Old Testament illustration of the truth the apostle John explains when he says: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."⁸⁵³ We should not see in the way the tabernacle was constructed a justification for Calvin's theology, which states that the benefits of Christ's death on the cross are limited to the elect alone. The Israelites were not saved by the sacrifices that were brought on the bronze altar, but they were kept holy by them.

3. The inventory of material used vs. 21-31

In this concluding section we are, first of all, informed of who the supervisor of logistics was: Ithamar, son of Aaron, directed the Levites for the purpose of keeping a record of all the material used. Vs. 22,23 repeat the names of the two main figures who were involved in the making of the tabernacle. Bezalel was the head man and Oholiab is mentioned particularly in connection with all the embroidery done on the curtains of the tent. But, as we have seen before, they were assisted by a group of people who were gifted artistically and who worked on the different parts of the tabernacle simultaneously under supervision of Bezalel and Oholiab.

The total amount of gold used in the making of the tabernacle is given as "29 talents and 730 shekels." *The Adam Clarke Commentary* gives a very detailed account of the value of the gold and silver mentioned here, and he calculates the worth in terms of the English currency of his time, which is the early nineteenth century. His elaborate study would give us the impression that the value of gold had hardly changed over the last thirty centuries. In our world where the exchanges in Wall Street fluctuate from moment to moment, his calculations tend to produce a smile on our faces; or maybe we feel a sort of jealousy about the fact that the world economy used to be that stable. It is very difficult to determine what the material used in the making of the tabernacle would be worth on our modern money market. The Good

⁸⁵¹ Ps. 24:3,4

⁸⁵² Rev. 21:27; 22:14,15

⁸⁵³ I John 1:7-9

News Bible gives us an amount of gold of “2,195 pounds, weighed according to the official standard.” But TLB speaks of 3,140 pounds. All this was collected by way of free will offerings the people had brought in.

The total amount of silver used was “100 talents and 1,775 shekels,” which the Good News Bible converts into 7,550 pounds and TLB into 9,575 pounds. This silver is not part of the freewill offering by which the other building materials of the tabernacle were obtained; it was the amount of half a shekel per person, gathered as a result of the census, described in ch. 30:12-16. What happened to the silver gathered in during the freewill offering, we do not know. *The Pulpit Commentary* says here: “No estimate is made of the weight of the silver freewill offering (ch. xxxv. 24), nor is any account given of their application. It has been suggested that they were returned to the donors as superfluous, which is certainly possible.” At this point we learn that the nation of Israel consisted of 603,550 men twenty years old or older. Even if we allow for an equal number of women, which is probably too conservative an estimate and add the children, we come to a total population of over 2,000,000 people. The odds of such a mass of people surviving a desert crossing, and that for forty years, is a miracle of enormous proportions.

We could ask ourselves the question why the matter of the census comes up in the context of the building of the courtyard. We should remember that the silver here was a ransom for a person’s life. This means that a man forfeited his life and this silver allowed him to live. As we saw already, in connection with our study of the subject in ch. 30, the ransom payment was a symbolic one. One doesn’t pay for his soul with half a shekel. In Jesus’ words: “What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁸⁵⁴ But now the silver gathered as ransom money is used for the bases for the sanctuary and for the curtain and posts of the courtyard. The fence around the house of the Lord and the pillars of the sanctuary were a living testimony to the fact that the lives of the people of Israel had been paid for.

There is also a deep lesson in the fact that the payment made by the men, twenty years old and older, actually paid for the whole nation, young and old, male and female. The men who paid would be drafted into the army; they would defend and protect Israel against outside harm. Those whose lives were paid for also served in the army. There is no question of having a ransom paid for one’s soul and not serving. Every Christian is “a Soldier of the Cross.”

Finally, the bronze, which was part of the freewill offering, was used in the making of the furniture outside the tabernacle: the bases for the entrance, the altar, and its utensils. The washbasin, as we have seen was made of the mirrors of the women who served at the tabernacle. The weight of the bronze is given as 70 talents and 2,400 shekels. The Good News Bible converts this to 5,310 pounds. TLB gives the weight as 7,540 pounds. I don’t know the reason for the consistent discrepancy between the two versions as far as figures is concerned. The Good News Bible seems to be closer to the calculation most Encyclopedias give. Mr. Kenneth Taylor, the translator of the Living Bible seems to follow the trend of the modern evangelist in inflating his numbers.⁸⁵⁵

The weight of the ladies’ mirrors was probably not included in the weight mentioned here, since the washbasin is not mentioned either at this point.

The Pulpit Commentary gives as one of the homilies of this last section the following, practical analysis: “*The enumeration of the metals used.* This served a useful purpose - 1. As an account rendered to the people of what had been done with their gifts. 2. As gratifying a very laudable wish of the contributors to know how much the sum-total of their contributions amounted to. 3. As giving a just idea of the splendour and costliness of the building. 4. As a testimony to the liberality, willingness, and unstinting self-sacrifice of all classes in the congregation. 5. As specially indicating the destination of the atonement-money-- the making of the ‘sockets’ on which the tabernacle was reared (ver. 27). 6. As a lesson of exactitude in church finance. A church is not at liberty to deal in a slovenly manner with its receipts and disbursements. Careful accounts should be kept and published. This (1) gives confidence in the management; (2) is an encouragement to giving; (3) prevents charges of maladministration; (4) is a prevention against waste.” Considering the fact that this comment was written about one century ago, it sounds rather up to date.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

This chapter consists of two sections:

⁸⁵⁴ Mark 8:36, 37

⁸⁵⁵ I could not resist the joke!

1. **The making of the garments for the priests and the High Priest** vs. 1-31
2. **The parts of the tabernacle brought to Moses for inspection** vs. 32-43

Here again, there is a direct correlation with preceding instructions: vs. 1-7 corresponds to ch. 28:5-14; vs. 8-21 to vs. 15-38 of that same chapter; vs. 22-26 with vs. 31-34; vs. 27-29 with vs. 39,40 and vs. 30, 31 with vs. 36, 37. In the second part we find a recapitulation of the work done and how it was submitted to Moses and approved by him.

1. The making of the garments for the Priests and the High Priest vs. 1-31

The Matthew Henry's Commentary states here: "That all the six paragraphs here, which give a distinct account of the making of these holy garments, conclude with those words, as the Lord commanded Moses, v. 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31. The like is not in any of the foregoing accounts, as if in these, more than any other of the appurtenances of the tabernacle, they had a particular regard to the divine appointment, both for warrant and for direction."

The first three verses show us the preparation of the textile used in the making of the garments. The cloth is woven from blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and for the material used for the ephod, which would correspond to our concept of a vest, threads of pure gold were incorporated in the material. We are told that sheets of gold were flattened to the thinnest possible thickness and then cut into the size of a thread that would pass through a needle. This in itself required a considerable amount of skill. It made the High Priest the best dressed man in the world. It was, as God had told Moses: "Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor."⁸⁵⁶

Other verses in the Bible indicate that Aaron's clothing was more than just expensive pieces of covering for the body, but that they stood for a spiritual reality. In the psalm that celebrates the building and dedication of the new temple of Solomon, the psalmist says: "May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy."⁸⁵⁷ Isaiah pictures the Messiah as being clothed with righteousness. We read: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."⁸⁵⁸ And the apostle Paul speaks about the believers being clothed with the righteousness of Christ. He says: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."⁸⁵⁹ So, we can say that the clothes that are made here represent the righteousness and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ by which we are covered and through which we serve God.

The priestly clothing was God's gift to Aaron and his sons, but it was made from items received by the freewill offering the Israelites had brought together. God does not merely want to bestow His grace upon us, but He also wants us to be the vehicles through which grace is bestowed to others. Gold trinkets and pieces of yarn had been given, but the final product was what God had shown Moses on top of the mountain. We have little notion of the value of what we possess and even less of what God can do with it when we surrender it to Him.

The main part of Aaron's outfit was the ephod, which was the vest upon which the precious stones were mounted: one stone on each shoulder, each engraved with the names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve in the breastplate, in four rows of three, each engraved with one name. The precious stones engraved with the names of the tribes expressed, in a symbolic way, the mystery of intercession: One man brought the names of people before the Lord. We should understand that the purpose of this was to remind man, not the Lord, of their existence and of their needs. We should never interpret intercession as if we would bring our burdens before the Lord. The contrary is true: God lays the burden He carries for us upon our shoulders and upon our hearts. Intercession teaches us how God feels about us; not how, in our opinion, He ought to feel about us.

The breast piece was also fastened on the ephod. This was the piece upon which the twelve stones were mounted in rows of three. There is too much confusion among the scholars about the identity of each stone to try to establish, in modern terms, which jewel is meant.

⁸⁵⁶ Ex. 28:2

⁸⁵⁷ Ps. 132:9

⁸⁵⁸ Isa. 61:10

⁸⁵⁹ Gal. 3:27

Obviously, these stones, like all the other precious items used in the making of the tabernacle, were part of the loot the Israelites took from the Egyptians as they left Egypt. They were part of the wages of the centuries of slavery. Now they adorn the breast piece of the High Priest and become the symbol of communication between God and His people. God made these “wages of sin” into precious items that shone in the light of heaven.

We have noted already that Aaron carried the names of the tribes of Israel both on his shoulders and on his heart. The two are linked together, as if they form one operation. Carrying the names of people on one’s heart and carrying their burdens on one’s shoulder are one and the same. We cannot bring people before the Lord without loving them with all our heart, because that is how God loves them.

Vs. 22-26 describe the robe of the ephod. We understand this to mean the outer garment of the High Priest who wore the ephod. It was made of blue material and its most distinguishing feature was its hem, which was decorated with embroidered pomegranates and little gold bells. The reference to the bells is connected to the command the Lord had given Moses in ch. 28:33-35. We read there: “Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die.” Although this is not mentioned specifically, there may be a reference here to the death of Aaron’s sons, reported in Lev. 10. It is true that Aaron did not wear this garment during the ceremony on the Day of Atonement, when he was merely dressed in an undergarment, but the sound of the bells helped to remind him, and everybody else who heard it, that the God they were approaching was a consuming fire. The Israelites were not dealing with an idol which was the product of human industry and ingenuity, but with the Creator of heaven and earth by whose will we all have been created and have our being.⁸⁶⁰

The second item of decoration on the hem of Aaron’s robe is the pomegranate. This fruit, according to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, “is apple-shaped, yellow-brown with a blush of red, and is surmounted by a crown-like hard calyx; on breaking the hard rind, the white or pinkish, translucent fruits are seen tightly packed together inside.” About the pomegranate in art, the *Encyclopaedia* says: “A large number of references to the pomegranate are to the use of the form of the fruit in ornamentation, in which respect it appears among the Hebrews to have something of the position of the lotus bud as a decorative motive in Egypt.” If the sound of the bells was to remind Aaron and the people of the awesome character of the God they were serving, the pomegranates were certainly a symbol of the joy of service. It stood for beauty, fragrance and juicy tastiness. Where the bells spoke of death, the pomegranates exemplified life and the quality of it; life in all its abundance.

The verses 27-29 deal with the making of the tunics, the turban, the linen headbands, and the undergarments for Aaron and his sons as well as with the sash of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. In ch. 28 we read concerning the sash only that it was to be the work of an embroiderer.⁸⁶¹

The last item of the high priestly outfit was the golden head plate or sacred diadem. The KJV calls it “the holy crown of pure gold.” The Hebrew word is *nezer*, which can be a verb, as in “consecrate,” or a noun, as in “crown.” From this word the name Nazarite is derived. The inscription “HOLY TO THE LORD” accounts for the meaning of the diadem. This diadem was attached to Aaron’s turban with a blue cord. In the original instructions given to Moses in ch. 28, we read: “It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD.”⁸⁶² It seems strange that there would be a connection between the diadem and people’s guilt. For Aaron, this did not mean that he personally paid for the iniquity of the people. His wearing of this crown made him, in a new way, an image of our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom Peter says: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.”⁸⁶³ The amazing implication is, that by the death of Christ, not only have our sins been forgiven, but our gifts have been made acceptable to God.

2. The parts of the tabernacle are brought to Moses for inspection vs. 32-43

Although repetition of the inventory of all that was brought to Moses for inspection, after everything was finished, seems rather redundant; we understand, as above, why it was recorded this way. Not only were the Israelites dealing with holy things to which routine ought to be foreign, but the point of

⁸⁶⁰ See Rev. 4:11

⁸⁶¹ vs. 39

⁸⁶² Ex. 28:38

⁸⁶³ I Pet. 2:24

this section is the inspection by Moses. He was the only one who had seen the original and who could verify whether all the items were true copies of what he had seen on the mountain. As the tabernacle and all that belonged to it passed his inspection, we are given the assurance that everything was a real expression in material form of the spiritual reality in heaven. Three times we are told: "The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses" (Vs. 32,42,43).

Evidently, the order in which the parts are mentioned here is the order in which they were brought to Moses. We have wondered before about the possibility of production of olive oil in the desert and their ability to bake bread. Yet, the bread of the Presence and the oil, both for anointing and for the lamps, are specifically mentioned here. The bread may have been baked from manna, although we do not read this, and the Israelites must, somehow, have had access to olives. Olive oil would probably not have kept in the heat of the desert for more than a year.

After Moses inspects the work and declares it to be true copies, he pronounces a blessing upon the people who made it. The contents of the blessing are not repeated. Those who build the house of the Lord are blessed.

At this point we are reminded of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians. He compares this Old Testament project to the church of Jesus Christ by saying: "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."⁸⁶⁴ Although Paul's warning to the Corinthians is not applicable to the project of the building of the tabernacle, as far as the use of material is concerned, it gives us a clear spiritual application, which makes this whole section very relevant to our present position. God's real tabernacle is the church of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation makes it clear that the church on earth has to correspond to its spiritual anti-type in heaven. When the apostle John sees the risen Lord between the seven golden lampstands, he hears Him say: "the seven lampstands are the seven churches."⁸⁶⁵ Each church on earth, in the opening chapters of Revelation, is compared to its original in heaven; every conformity is praised and every deviation rebuked. We are, at the same time, part of the building and builders. The apostle Peter calls the believers "living stones." He says: "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."⁸⁶⁶ We are the material that is being used for the building of God's house. The quality of God's house depends on the quality of our lives. God wants us to be true copies of the heavenly reality, that is, He wants us to have the character of His Son Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER FORTY

This chapter can be divided into four parts:

1. **God's instructions concerning the setting up of the tabernacle** vs. 1-8
2. **Instructions concerning the consecration of the tabernacle and of the priests** vs. 9-15
3. **Moses' oversight of the assembling of the building** vs. 16-33
4. **The glory of the Lord fills the building and guides the people** vs. 34-38

1. **God's instructions concerning the setting up of the tabernacle** vs. 1-8

God instructs Moses to assemble the tabernacle on the first day of the first month. Vs. 17 tells us that this was "the first day of the first month in the second year." This meant that the erection of the sanctuary coincided with the second anniversary of the Exodus. *The Adam Clarke Commentary* comments on this: "It is generally supposed that the Israelites began the work of the tabernacle about the sixth month after they had left Egypt; and as the work was finished about the end of the first year of their exodus (for it

⁸⁶⁴ I Cor. 3:9-15

⁸⁶⁵ Rev. 1:20

⁸⁶⁶ I Pet. 2:5

was set up the first day of the second year) that therefore they had spent about six months in making it: so that the tabernacle was erected one year all but fifteen days after they had left Egypt. Such a building, with such a profusion of curious and costly workmanship, was never constructed in so short a time. But it was the work of the Lord, and the people did service as unto the Lord; 'for the people had a mind to work.' "

It is, of course, no coincidence that the tabernacle is put together in the same month that the Exodus was commemorated. It was for this very purpose that the Exodus took place. It was in order to celebrate "a festival in the desert"⁸⁶⁷ that the Israelites had left Egypt. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes here: "The new moon (which by their computation was the first day of every month) was observed by them with some solemnity; and therefore this first new moon of the year was thus made remarkable." The actual Passover festival, which marked the hour of the Exodus was not celebrated until two weeks into the month. But we should remember that the month of Abib was chosen as the beginning of the New Year, because of the events that would take place. It was the Exodus that marked the beginning of a new life.

The work is done systematically: first the tent is put up and then the furniture is placed at its proper place. As soon as the ark is brought into the Holy of Holies, the curtain is hung in front of it. The NIV translates the instructions here with: "shield the ark with the curtain", the KJV renders it with: "cover the ark with the veil." This could give the wrong impression, as if the curtain was put over the ark instead of hung in front. The Hebrew word used here is *cakak* or *sakak*, which, according to *Strong's Definitions Concordance* means: to entwine as a screen; by implication, to fence in, cover over." After the second chamber is thus sealed off, the first one is furnished with the table, the lampstand and the gold altar of incense, which is then also closed off with a curtain.

The courtyard is erected only after the bronze altar and the washbasin have been put in place, in front of the entrance to the tent. Then the opening in the front of the fence is closed off with a curtain. Thus the whole structure is assembled.

2. Instructions concerning the consecration of the tabernacle and of the priests vs. 9-15

When the instructions regarding the erection of the tabernacle are given, Moses is instructed to anoint the whole structure: first the tent and then the furniture inside the two rooms, then the altar and washbasin that were outside. After that Aaron and his sons were anointed as part of their consecration to the priesthood. The Lord had told Moses already in ch. 29 that this was to be done, once the tabernacle was completed.⁸⁶⁸ The oil, that had been prepared according to a special recipe,⁸⁶⁹ was a symbol of the Holy Spirit that would come upon the copies of the heavenly things and the people who served as priests. The inauguration of Aaron and his sons is described in greater detail in Lev. ch 8.

First the tent itself is anointed and then the furniture in the two rooms inside; after this the two pieces of furniture: the bronze altar and the washbasin in front of the entrance of the tent. After the material part has been consecrated to the Lord, the people who serve the Lord in the tabernacle are consecrated to Him. God had explained to Moses the purpose of this consecration previously, when He said: "So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."⁸⁷⁰ In the above statement, God differentiates between the tent, the altar, and the priests; all three categories will be consecrated in that the Holy Spirit takes possession of them, in order for God to reveal Himself among His people and to remind them of their salvation from Egyptian slavery.

It is interesting that the altar is mentioned separately, as if it is in a category of its own. The altar was, of course, an image of the cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ would give His life for us and take away the sin of the world. The altar is the place of man's greatest shame because it symbolizes death. The fact that the Holy Spirit takes possession of it, makes it a symbol of victory and glory. The apostle Paul indicates clearly the connection between Jesus' shameful death and the coming of the Holy Spirit, when he says: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come

⁸⁶⁷ See Ex. 5:1

⁸⁶⁸ Vs. 44

⁸⁶⁹ See Ex. 30:23-25

⁸⁷⁰ Ex. 29:44-46

to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”⁸⁷¹ Thus, the altar is anointed separately; the Holy Spirit takes possession of it, because it is His gate of entree into this world and into the hearts of men.

3. Moses’ oversight of the assembling of the building vs. 16-33

After receiving the detailed instructions as to how to assemble the tabernacle and prepare the priests for their service, another detailed account is given of the actual assembling. To our modern minds, this seems to be boringly redundant, unless we understand the importance of the project and experience some of the love and dedication that went into it. This is the fifth time we read about the components of the tabernacle and the details of the priesthood. First, Moses is shown the model on top of Mount Sinai, then the plan is related to those who carry out the work; the pieces are described as they are being made; they are shown and counted for Moses’ inspection and here they are put together. It sounds to us as an archaic style of reporting with endless repetition. We should conclude, however, that if God says something five times, it must be very important. If we miss this point, we miss that which gives content and meaning to life. God is showing us a picture of the Incarnation and He shows it to us over and over again, because He wants us to see what it says and to understand its meaning.

The first thing we are told in vs. 17 is that the erection of the tabernacle is the beginning of a new era in the history of the world. As the first day of the first month of the first year was marked by the deliverance of God’s people out of bondage, so the first day of the first month of the second year is marked by God’s coming into this world to live with His people. God had said to Moses that when the tabernacle was erected, He would come and live in Israel: “Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.”⁸⁷² The first day of the second year was Immanuel Day.

We can hardly suppose that Moses did the whole work of erecting the tabernacle all by himself. Some parts of the operation could hardly be done single-handedly. Obviously, Moses supervised the construction personally. The first part of the erection is the placing of the bases for the boards that form the sides of the two rooms of the sanctuary. We are reminded of Paul’s words: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”⁸⁷³ The whole tabernacle is a picture of Christ; and at the same time, many of the parts are like members of the body of Christ, which is the church. So the tabernacle reflects a complicated reality of Christ and the church, that is of Christ and people who are redeemed and who are “in Christ.” Again Paul reminds us: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”⁸⁷⁴

Vs. 20 says: “He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark, attached the poles to the ark and put the atonement cover over it.” This is in accordance with the instructions given in ch. 25, where God had said: “Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.”⁸⁷⁵ The two Stone Tablets, containing the Ten Commandments, form the core of the tabernacle. They represent the will of God and reflect His character. But they are covered with the atonement cover. The reality of our relationship with God could hardly have been expressed more clearly than with this picture. The Ten Commandments link our moral behavior to the character of God, and at the same time, to our sinful condition which condemns us. As Paul states in his epistle to the Romans: “Through the law we become conscious of sin.”⁸⁷⁶ But the Ten Commandments are covered with the atonement cover, the place where the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled, the place where our sins are taken care of, the place where God dwells to reveal Himself to us. If the law causes us to become conscious of our sins, the forgiveness of our sins makes us conscious of our salvation. Zechariah prophesied this at the birth of his son, John the Baptist: “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.”⁸⁷⁷ All this is expressed so beautifully in what Moses does here.

The picture also shows us the proper place for the law, that is, inside the ark. As the law, the expression of God’s character, was at the core of the tabernacle, so is God’s law in the heart of the believer.

⁸⁷¹ Gal. 3:13,14

⁸⁷² Ex. 29:45

⁸⁷³ I Cor. 3:11

⁸⁷⁴ I Cor. 3:16

⁸⁷⁵ Ex. 25:21

⁸⁷⁶ Rom. 3:20

⁸⁷⁷ Luke 1:76,77

Paul says this clearly in Romans: "... that the righteous requirements of the law [are] fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."⁸⁷⁸ The law of God is no longer outside us, making claims upon our will and behavior, but the indwelling Holy Spirit has placed the will of God at the center of our being and fused our will to God's will, so that our greatest joy in life is to obey God. Jesus shows this to us in His own life, when He says to His disciples: "My food ... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."⁸⁷⁹ And Jesus' attitude was prophetically foretold by David when he wrote: "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."⁸⁸⁰ When Jesus Christ is in our heart, God's law is within us and the Holy Spirit provides the desire and the power to fulfill the law.

Some duties that Moses is to perform while the tabernacle is put together, are probably given in a condensed manner. Vs. 23 tells us that he put the bread on the table; vs. 27 that he burned incense on the golden altar; and vs. 29 that he offered burnt offerings and grain offerings on the bronze altar. It is doubtful that he did these things as the tabernacle was being erected. It is more likely that these things were done when the work was complete. The last act was the putting up of the fence, marking the courtyard.

4. The glory of the Lord fills the building and guides the people vs. 34-38

Then the Shekinah glory fills the tabernacle. We read: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." We find the same thing happening at the dedication of the temple by Solomon. "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple."⁸⁸¹ This coming of the cloud to cover the tabernacle must have been different from other occasions when the cloud came down. Before, when Moses entered the presence of God, he was able to enter into the other tent without hindrance. We read: "As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses,"⁸⁸² but here, even Moses is unable to stand before the Lord.

This covering of the Tent of Meeting with the cloud of God's glory was a spiritual breakthrough. It was similar to the coming of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came like a violent wind and fell upon the disciples, baptizing and filling them. We have very little understanding about the balance of power in the heavenly places but, apparently, there are moments when the power of God breaks through all the layers of demonic resistance in such a powerful way that the results are unmistakable on earth. Such a moment was this. What we read here may be the same event as the one described in Leviticus. "Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown."⁸⁸³

The verses 36-38 go beyond the moment of inauguration of the tabernacle; they speak about the guidance the presence of the Lord provided in the journey through the desert. In Numbers we read a more detailed description of the guidance provided by the presence of the Lord.⁸⁸⁴ We are told again, as in ch. 13:21,22, which describes the beginning of the Exodus, that the presence of the Lord appeared in the form of a cloud during the day and a column of fire during the night.

This guidance was, of course, only effective in as much as it was obeyed by the people. In our New Testament dispensation we are given the same kind of guidance by the Holy Spirit, who leads us in the footsteps of our Lord. Paul says: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."⁸⁸⁵ And John says about those he sees in glory: "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes."⁸⁸⁶

This human factor cannot be left out of the picture. Obedience turns out to be a double featured reality. The law demanded obedience, an obedience it was never given. For this reason, it was placed inside the ark and covered with the atonement cover. The cloud demanded obedience, which it received in most instances. Both the Stone Tablets and the cloud were demonstrations of the glorious character of God. But

⁸⁷⁸ Rom. 8:4

⁸⁷⁹ John 4:34

⁸⁸⁰ Ps. 40:8

⁸⁸¹ I Kings 8:10,11

⁸⁸² Ex. 33:9

⁸⁸³ Lev. 9:24

⁸⁸⁴ See Num. 9:15-23

⁸⁸⁵ Rom. 8:14

⁸⁸⁶ Rev. 14:4

the one seems to express this glory on a deeper level than the other. The cloud may have been more demonstrative as an expression of God's presence, but the Law penetrated to the core of glory. The law was also the more dangerous one, because man forfeited his life by even approaching it.

The amazing feature of the guidance provided by the cloud was that it even led the people through the forty year period of disobedience.

The giving of the law was also accompanied by a demonstration of God's glory. When God first revealed Himself, we read: "The LORD said to Moses, 'I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.' On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him."⁸⁸⁷ There, too, the revelation had a bearing upon man's moral behavior. "Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.'⁸⁸⁸ The two Stone Tablets were, in a sense, a commemoration of this revelation, like a statue that is erected at the place of an important historical event. But, at the same time, they spelled out the will of God in the form of Ten Commandments.

Both the Stone Tablets and the cloud spoke of the glory of God and both were meant to guide us to God's glory; the Ten commandments in transforming us so that our character would resemble the glory of God in Jesus Christ and the cloud in a practical, day by day fashion, showing us what path to follow and where to place our foot.

So the Exodus is not only an account of a nation leaving the land of slavery, it is also an arrow pointing to the land of promise. And, on the way, is the celebration of the Festival to the Lord, the manifestation of God's glory in the desert.

Cameron Highlands, Malaysia. January 10, 1997.

⁸⁸⁷ Ex. 19:9,16-19

⁸⁸⁸ Ex. 20:20